

AIM Language Learning

Press Kit



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THE TORONTO STAR

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Fluent French is program's AIM

Students learning Accelerative Integrated Method speak the language with immersion-like rapidity

TANYA TALAGA
STAFF REPORTER

An innovative way of teaching children French is gaining popularity across Canada, including in the Toronto area.

Vancouver educator Wendy Maxwell created the Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM)

to teach French because she did not believe her students responded to how French is traditionally taught, with students sitting in the class trying to memorize verb conjugation.

AIM teaches the language with gestures, literature, music and dance. Children learn how to speak and communicate first, then reading and writing follows. "With gestures there is an immediate transfer. Every single word has to be understood," Maxwell says.

Ontario public and private teachers attended a workshop last weekend in Toronto to learn more about the program, and some teachers say the results are astounding.

"Once they learn how to speak, the written words come naturally. This imitates the natural way language is learned," says Sylvia Duckworth, who has used this method for eight years in her grades 3, 4, and 5 classes at Toronto's private all-boys Crescent School.

At the workshop, Duckworth demonstrated AIM with her class of Grade 4 boys to



RICK EGLINGTON/TORONTO STAR
Teacher Sylvia Duckworth uses the Accelerative Integrated Method to instruct her French students.

an audience of teachers. Many were amazed by the immersion-like fluency of her students, even though they're taught only 40 minutes of French a day.

Duckworth's hand gestures eliminate the need to use English in class. When the teacher gestures, the students speak in choral unison while interpreting the gestures. The gestures and words are strung together into sentences, she says.

"What's amazing is these kids are achieving levels of fluency comparable to French immersion kids and this is core French," Duckworth says. "They can manage an everyday conversation in French."

Many Ontario boards have signed on to the program, including those north of Toronto, in Niagara and the Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board, says Maxwell, who started teaching in Toronto's public board before moving to a private school, where she developed AIM.

"Many school boards have adopted it board-wide or are piloting the method," Duckworth says. But for others, "I think it is just too revolutionary. Some language consultants can't get their heads around it."

Ministry of education guidelines are geared to accept only traditional programs, Duckworth says. "Some teachers are teaching it anyway, buying the kits with their own money and it's \$1,000 a kit, or they get their principal's approval."

AIM first teaches children the 700 most frequently used words in the French language, says Duckworth. This includes irregular verbs, not usually taught until much later.

What's amazing is AIM captures the attention and imagination of students, says Crescent School parent Andrea Wolff. "They don't have the chance to let their minds wander or look out the window," she says. "I am pretty impressed."

Edite Sammons, of King City's Country Day School, says she was the first teacher to pilot Maxwell's program in 1999. "I have learning-disabled kids, some with behavioural issues, and they are connected and learning. I just love it."

THE EDMONTON JOURNAL

Learning French hands-on

Method of teaching through gestures gaining momentum, popularity with students



French teacher Danielle Arrand uses hand gestures to communicate to students at Ecole Meridian Heights School in Stony Plain. Similar to sign language, the method also incorporates storytelling, plays, singing and dancing.

Photograph by: Photographs by Ed Kaiser, the Journal, The Edmonton Journal

By Sarah O'Donnell,
The Edmonton Journal

From the moment Danielle Arrand's Grade 4 class of beginner French students walked into the classroom, her hands moved almost as much as her mouth.

Instead of just asking the students in French, "How are you today?" Arrand used a series of hand gestures, each accompanying a specific word.

Students in the Thursday morning class answered in a similarly animated fashion.

"It's going well," replied one girl in French, as she clapped the back of her right hand into her left palm, then jabbed an index finger to the side and finished with two thumbs up.

Arrand, a teacher at Ecole Meridian Heights in Stony Plain, has made a conscious effort for the past two years to use her hands to communicate French vocabulary.

She is one of a growing number of teachers in the Edmonton area bringing a formal system of signs and gestures into French-as-a-second-language elementary classes and some early years of French immersion.

With reports from teachers such as Arrand citing dramatically improved student understanding and speaking ability, a group of about a dozen French language teachers from Parkland public schools recently completed a series of training sessions on the gesturing method formally known as the Accelerate Integrative Method. The method, developed by a Canadian teacher, looks similar to sign language. But it also emphasizes learning through activities such as storytelling, staged plays, singing and dancing.

Laurie Faber, a consultant who instructs Alberta teachers on the AIM method and

teaches French at Edmonton public's Holyrood School, said she became an advocate of the program after she saw how it transformed her classes of elementary students who take French to supplement their English education.

Faber, and other teachers now using gestures, said they have been frustrated that many of those French-as-a-second language students fail to develop fluency despite years of effort.

"I can now spend my entire class speaking only in French and the kids understand me," Faber said. "It used to be all translation."

Cindy Hopley, the head of French immersion programming at Meridian Heights, said the visual cues and movement seem to help language click with students learning the language.

"Lots of the movements are very intuitive to French teachers," Hopley said. "But by having the system, if we're all speaking the same language, we can build on what they know."

Jacqueline Victoor, who teaches a Grade 3 French immersion class, said she likes how the gesturing allows students to see the correct grammar. There are signs that

THE EDMONTON JOURNAL

indicate whether a word is masculine or feminine. Another gesture, for example, shows that the speaker is using an infinitive verb.

"You can correct students without saying anything," Victoor said. "It's very visual and low-key."

The combination of speaking and moving also fits with the growing understanding that people learn in different ways. Some people learn best through listening, others through reading and others through movement. Boys in particular seem to be doing

better with the gesturing system.

"Often my boys are among my strongest students now. It connects somehow," Faber said. "They're allowed to move and fidget and boogie in the classroom."

In Arrand's class on Thursday, the group of 26 students started off at their desks, answering their teacher's conversational questions with their words and their hands. After a few minutes, they all moved to the floor, where they reviewed a series of words and sentences, parroting back Arrand's words and exaggerated movements in a sing-song fashion.

Later, a group of five took a turn performing a play the class is learning based on the story of the Three Little Pigs.

From time to time, a student asked to go to the washroom, get a drink of water or borrow a pencil, always using French words and gestures.

"I love it. It's so fun," nine-year-old Gabriel Sommer said of French class after playing the role of the wolf. "It is way easier to learn than just learning the words because you memorize the gestures."

Desirae Marshall said the gesturing has helped the French words stick in her head. The nine-year-old said she took French at a previous school, but understands more this year thanks to the gestures.

"It helps get it in our head," Marshall said.

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To watch Danielle Arrand teach French with the gesture method, go to edmonton-journal.com/videos.

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Fluency in French starts with the hands

BY SARAH ELIZABETH BROWN
THE CHRONICLE-JOURNAL

A student called teacher Rob Van Wyck a big meanie — and the French instructor was thrilled.

The student had just teased him — in French.

Van Wyck teaches core French at Ecole Gron Morgan, one of a half-dozen Lakehead Public Schools trying a new way to teach the language.

AIM, the Accelerated Integrated Method, uses gestures akin to sign language to help youngsters remember words.

In an AIM class, kids are constantly talking, but only in French. If they're not reciting a story or song along with Van Wyck — madly signing the gestures along with the teacher — they're answering his questions or asking their own.

In a ritual to start each 40-minute class, a laminated yellow piece of paper with the words "la ligne magic" is placed on the threshold. Step over that magic line and it's French only from that point.

Research shows gestures help students remember the material.

They're also entertaining.

Leading the students through a raucous rendition of "The Three Little Pigs", the gesture for pig involves pushing up the end of his nose. To sign for "mean" in French, Van Wyck raises his arms, creating menacing claws with his fingers, and screws up his face into an angry scowl.

Instead of memorizing long lists of words through writing or flash cards, students are guided to speak French in complete sentences through stories and plays, explained Van Wyck.

The Canadian teacher who created the teaching system noticed the same things Van Wyck has in 10 years of teaching French. Schools create adequate readers and writers, but they don't guarantee students can speak and understand, he said.

Six weeks into the school year, Van Wyck's students are only starting to write this week.



The idea is to give students a base in the language through oral learning.

"We learned to speak from our mama," noted Van Wyck. "She didn't teach us to read and write — initially."

In a traditional French class, Van Wyck would speak for about 75 per cent of the time. Now, students are trying out French for 90 per cent of the

class block.

"They are talking and they are talking real French, real expressions," said Van Wyck.

"They're starting to tease me, to joke with me and I'm able to joke with them," he said.

"I encourage those liberties," he said. "I encourage a kind of loose lead in the class. You've got to give them a chance to express themselves, change

the subject, communicate."

While Van Wyck explains the program, a listening student gestures circles beside her head and says, "Fou, fou, fou," to describe her teacher.

The phrase, meaning crazy, is plucked from the Little Pigs fable Van Wyck's students are learning.

In the hallways, students and teachers alike speak French with him, a new phenomenon this year, he said.

He sets aside about 10 minutes per class to talk about off-topic things. The students think if they ask a lot of questions and talk in French, they can chew up class time, said Van Wyck.

But actually, they're doing exactly what he wants them to.

"Oh I got 'em," he said, grinning broadly.

Van Wyck attended a workshop last spring on the French teaching method, and volunteered to try it out in his classes.

Over the summer, he learned the gestures through instructional DVDs.

Other teachers in the public system had heard about AIM as well and wanted to try it, said Charlene Dulacka, principal of programming for Lakehead Public Schools.

At the same time, federal money to refresh French in schools came available through Ontario's Education Ministry.

The Lakehead board received a \$66,000 grant for six pilot project schools, and is waiting to hear about another two years' funding, she said.

It's part of a renewed focus on French language teaching after years of cuts, said Dulacka.

Van Wyck said his students have made far more progress this year than in previous years over the same period.

And last week, a third grader spontaneously said "Good-bye big mean teacher" in French to him, using words from the fairy tale they're learning.

"I said, 'Ooooh, it works,'" said Van Wyck. "There is something magical happening."

THE BRAMPTON GUARDIAN

Program gives French teachers helping hand

By *ROGER BELGRAVE*,
The Brampton Guardian

BRAMPTON - In Mademoiselle Andrea Schrauwers's French class, it is quite acceptable for students to talk with their hands.

In the St. Joachim Elementary Catholic School classroom students are learning through an innovative program called Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM), which uses hand gestures, drama, music, songs and storytelling to teach French. The program material in this Grade 4 class is created by French Second Language (FSL) educators Matt and Wendy Maxwell and has garnered rave reviews within educational circles in Canada and the United States.

"It has a place for all types of learners," said Schrauwers. "This gets them engaged."

Songs might appeal to the lyrically-minded or those with short attention spans. Hand signs are helpful to students who learn better through visual cues. The relative physicality of lessons might engage the



more restless pupils who become a bit fidgety when bored. The program works as an individual and group teaching approach, according to Schrauwers.

The stories told as part of the lesson plans are used to capture the students' interest and help give the words they learn context. Storytelling in this manner is designed to give words clearer meaning and students better understanding of the language. Traditional instruction is more theme-based, Schrauwers noted. Students learn noun and verb combinations like they memorize the periodical table science. They are rarely given the opportunity to freely use the language in a conversational setting.

"Here the children are expected to speak (French) 90 per cent of the time, if not 100 per cent," said Schrauwers. "There's no translating and it really forces them to speak only in French."

Students are routinely left to carry on group discussions about whatever they desire, as long as they converse

in French. This type of spontaneous interaction creates a more indelible understanding of the language. The hand signs, partly based on American Sign Language, gives students another way to understand and communicate the language. Students can see as well as hear the language.

"It's easier to understand the language because of the actions," said 10-year-old Nissi Gonzalaz-Wilson. "Just in case you don't understand it in French you can do the action."

The Grade 4 student believes it has helped in grasping the language on a conversational level much faster than expected. Classmate Akil Hamilton's French was limited to the universally familiar words for hello and

goodbye when classes began in the fall. "Now we can talk back and forth," the 10-year-old said.

Initial focus is on verbal skills because it is considered the foundation for fully understanding a new language.

"You don't start writing words that have zero meaning to you," Schrauwers explained. "I'm basically teaching them how to speak correctly. That's what allows for the fluency."

Students begin reading and writing exercises after about two months. Schrauwers expects most students to be fluent by the time they reach Grade 8.

Presently the board only has the program in Grade 4 classes. A pilot project was conducted in three schools during the 2007/2008 school year with positive results. Other teachers are being taught to use AIM in their classrooms and the program is slowly being expanded to the other elementary grades.

"You have to support your teachers (with training) as you move along because you are asking them to change," said Associate Director Ralph Borrelli.

LE SOLEIL

L'anglais par les gestes

Daphnée Dion-Viens

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«Hello! How are you today?» En s'adressant à ses élèves, Ann Chiasson ne fait pas que leur parler. L'enseignante accompagne chacun de ses mots par un geste, un peu à l'image du langage des sourds et muets. Sauf que les gestes servent cette fois-ci à apprendre l'anglais.

Il s'agit d'une nouvelle méthode d'enseignement d'une langue seconde, développée il y a quelques années par une enseignante de Vancouver. À chaque mot correspond un geste. Ses adeptes sont de plus en plus nombreux, puisque 3500 écoles à travers le Canada ont maintenant adopté la «méthode accélérée intégrée», dont une centaine au Québec.

Dans la capitale, une trentaine d'enseignantes étaient réunies en fin de semaine pour apprendre comment enseigner par les gestes.

«C'est une méthode beaucoup plus active, explique la formatrice Ann Chiasson. On utilise le geste, mais aussi le théâtre, les chansons et la danse pour faire parler les élèves. Et ça marche!»

À voir le plaisir qu'avaient les enseignantes lors de la formation, on peut comprendre que l'enthousiasme se transmette aux élèves.

La méthode fait table rase de l'enseignement traditionnel. Plutôt que de mémoriser une liste de mots de vocabulaire, l'apprentissage est centré sur les verbes et les gestes qui aident à mémoriser les mots. Il s'agit ensuite de répéter les phrases en chœur.

Et la méthode n'est pas réservée qu'aux plus petits. Catherine Olivier, une enseignante de première secondaire, l'a essayée dans sa classe l'an passé. «Ç'a beaucoup aidé, dit-elle. Au début, ils se sont moqués un peu, mais ça n'a pas duré longtemps. Avec les gestes, ils ont enfin l'impression d'apprendre l'anglais.»

Renée Roy, qui enseigne dans une école de raccrocheurs, veut même adapter la méthode pour ses adolescents. «On ne se le cachera pas, les élèves n'ont pas les acquis en anglais, particulièrement à Québec. La méthode va les aider à passer les examens du ministère», espère-t-elle.

Ce programme d'enseignement est aussi utilisé aux États-Unis, en Europe et en Australie.



SPECIAL SERIES: CLASSROOM CONFIDENTIAL

Award winning teacher Wendy Maxwell has found that simple gestures help students learn a second language

Speak French with your bare hands



Wendy Maxwell gestures to her students. The kids giggle as they mime and say the words, but Maxwell says her technique has them speaking at French immersion levels.

The Classroom Confidential series finishes tomorrow.

BY SUSANNE HILLER

A group of elementary school boys sit cross-legged on the floor at Crescent School in Toronto and answer questions in French with what appears to be a bizarre form of sign language. They gesture energetically with their hands as they say each word aloud – physically acting out their sentences. It's part of a workshop to demonstrate a new method of teaching core French being piloted at schools across the country. Teachers who have already implemented the Accelerated Integrated Method (AIM) have had such success they say it will revolutionize the way core French is taught in the classroom.

Wendy Maxwell, who currently teaches at York House in Vancouver and formerly taught at Bishop Strachan in Toronto for 10 years, developed the program after becoming frustrated with the current core French programs. She found students rarely achieved fluency even after years of instruction.

"The other teachers I spoke with were struggling with their students," she said. "There was a lack of motivation, minimal fluency and increasing frustration on the part of their students. As well, the parents of the children I taught during the 1990s in Toronto were not happy with their children's progress."

So Maxwell set about creating a more effective curriculum. After much research on language acquisition techniques, she determined that children remember words more easily through hand gestures and can better contextualize new words by acting them out in plays, songs and dances.

Maxwell has had remarkable success with her own core French students in the last few years, claiming they achieve fluency on par with French immersion students.

During the workshop, Maxwell demonstrates for about 60 Toronto teachers how hand gestures can help comprehension of a second language. She calls this the gesture approach, and the rest of her AIM program is built around it.

Basically, Maxwell has created a defined set of gestures for a comprehensive list of words that kids use the most to interact. Maxwell makes various signs as she talks in French to the students, who are in Grades 4, 5 and 6 at Crescent School. Their teacher, Sylvia Duckworth, implemented the program last September. They have no problem understanding Maxwell, and immediately follow along happily with the hand signs.

The gestures themselves are pretty simple. The verb *manger* (to eat), for example, is the motion of bringing food to one's mouth; opening and closing your hand quickly means *dire* (to say). The kids giggle as they mime and say the words.

Maxwell, who won the 1999 Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence, calls the introductory vocabulary Pared Down Language, and emphasizes verbs. In core French programs, the verb *vouloir*, which means "to want," is not usually introduced until the third year.

"The word 'want' is the first word a baby says," says Maxwell, who developed her word list after carefully listening to children chatter. "We are simulating how a baby learns. We are all programmed to learn a language – even those who are weak academically learn a language. This program is not about being the brightest in the class."

After students have learned the Pared Down Language, they can start adding more complicated words and expressions. The idea is to learn to communicate at a basic level. Their grammar skills (such as learning the past tense) will be refined as they get more proficient. Kids are not allowed to resort to English during French class.

"In this program, they start by learning the words they need to know to communicate and that have relevance," says Duckworth, who says she hears the boys talking in French in the halls after just one year. "In some regular programs, they start by learning the names of different insects. I don't even know those words."

Studies have proven that the use of gesture helps students remember the subject matter. It also makes the teacher appear more approachable, interested, caring and warm. Maxwell says there is a sense of ease associated with gesturing. She points out that children of deaf parents sign words before children of hearing parents begin to talk.

"Everyone uses gestures to help them get a point across, but by using a defined set of gestures, the use of gesture is taken to a whole new level," says Maxwell. "For me, this opened up doors to communication with my students that I would not have thought possible."

Unlike most contemporary programs, AIM is based on familiar stories and fairy tales rather than themes (like food, sports, hobbies etc). The extensive use of drama and acting is not only fun for the kids but allows for lots of "pleasant repetition" of the same words.

At each grade level, kids work with a fairy tale or play over an extended period of time. After they memorize it, they do various activities associated with the play to reinforce the words they have learned. They might, for example, be asked to paraphrase the story, tell the story from the point of view of a different character or write a journal about it. In this way, the words are reviewed constantly and eventually added to. Many of the plays written for the program are based on songs from CDs recorded by Maxwell's husband, Matt Maxwell, a musician who specializes in French recordings and performances for children.

"All the class activities are based on the play and because they know it so well, they are confident about the activities," says Maxwell. "They learn because they are enjoying themselves."

Edite Sammons, a French teacher at Havergal College in Toronto, says she was on her way to "teacher burn-out" before she observed one of

'Even my weakest student is able to communicate'

Maxwell's Grade 2 classes four years ago. She describes the experience as a "renaissance."

"The kids were speaking in full sentences, not only with Wendy but with each other. I had never seen or heard such well developed oral fluency in a core French classroom," she says. "I could not believe it."

She spent a summer practising the gestures in front of a small mirror, and piloted the technique with her Grade 1 class in 1999. She said these kids are now more advanced in French than their older siblings in senior levels, and they are able to read and write stories independently, as well as communicate spontaneously.

"My pilot classes are now in Grade 3 and converse with me and each other exclusively in French during French class," she says. "I do not need to gesture nearly as often to ensure comprehension. It is undoubtedly the most innovative, exciting and successful method of teaching core French that I have encountered in 21 years as an elementary school teacher. I would say every child in the class is successful, every child understands what I'm saying. Even my weakest student who would have been lost in a traditional program is speaking and is able to communicate ideas to me."

Likewise, Duckworth says she was "blown away" when she sat in on one of Maxwell's classes. She admits, however, she was a little hesitant at first to try the program herself.

"Her program seemed so radical that I was afraid I was not going to pull it off," she says. "And I was not sure the boys could handle it. It is a very loud, dynamic way to teach French. I had reservations about whether I could keep them focused and under control."

Instead, Duckworth says she has found her students to be more focused, and their French skills have improved dramatically. She says, after 16 years of teaching core French, she feels revitalized. "As a teacher, nothing could be more exciting. There were almost immediate results with the gestures. It is very heartening."

■ More information, call 1-800-668-6288 or e-mail matt@aimlanguagelearning.com



THE OTTAWA CITIZEN



SIMON HAYTER, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Wendy Maxwell demonstrates the Accelerative Integrated Method language learning to first and second grade students yesterday.

'The answer to every French teacher's dream'

Many call the Accelerative Integrated Method a godsend when it comes to teaching students a second language. Yesterday, about 100 teachers got a convincing demonstration, writes **JAMES GORDON**.

Lynn Plexman said she's cried with joy a couple of times since stumbling upon what she called "the answer to every French teacher's dream."

She watched with pride yesterday morning as her Grade 1 and 2 students from St. Gregory Catholic School in Carleton Place sat on stage at the Embassy West Hotel, ringing off sentences in proper French for a hundred or so teachers from across Canada and the United States.

As the kids spoke the words aloud, they acted along with a set of small hand gestures resembling sign-language. Leading them through the actions was Wendy Maxwell, the winner of the 1999 Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence and creator of the Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM) language learning.

Combining gestures, drama, music and dance to act out and thus contextualize words for young students, the method has been successful in rapidly accelerating second-language skills.

"Never in a million years would I dream the kids could do what they're doing today," said Ms. Plexman, who introduced AIM to her students at the English school about a year ago.

Despite having only 32 minutes a day of core French there, her students are now at the same skill level as their French immersion counterparts, who use the language all day long.

"Before, they could answer questions with maybe two words ... now they can do it in long, full sentences, and understand what they mean," she said.

The AIM program is a result of the frustration Mrs. Maxwell felt after she switched from teaching French immersion to core French in the early 1990s. While the immersion kids were speaking fluently shortly after beginning in kindergarten or Grade 1, the core ones couldn't even communicate in French by Grade 5.

"The program I was using wasn't giving vocabulary that the kids would use outside the context of the unit we were

working on," explained Mrs. Maxwell, who is now based in Vancouver.

"So I threw that program out and started writing stories and plays that included high frequency vocabulary they could use."

She continued until 1999, when she decided to add gestures to every word she taught. For example to demonstrate "regarder," the French word for to look, the kids made imaginary binoculars with their hands. For "marcher," the word for to walk, they walked their fingers across their hands.

'Before, they could answer questions with maybe two words ... now they can do it in long, full sentences, and understand what they mean.'

LYNN PLEXMAN

St. Gregory Catholic School teacher

While many of the ideas Mrs. Maxwell uses — the gestures, the stories, the music, the plays — aren't new by themselves, the level of integration hasn't been achieved before.

"All the activities I do are really motivating, so it hooks the kids and gets them excited," she said. "There's a high level of focus because of the participation, and it meets the needs of both the visual and kines-

thetic learners."

Ask the children, and they say it's just plain fun.

"We get to do fun stuff and it's really easy," Mary Monk, 7, said following her presentation.

"Yeah, it's not hard at all to memorize all the words," added Zachary Mills, also 7.

Among other lessons this year, he and his classmates have been able to learn a theatre version of the *Three Little Pigs*, and about 100 questions and answers associated with it.

What seemed to impress the teachers attending the workshop and demonstration was how well-behaved the kids were. Many of the educators in the crowd followed along with the actions, hoping to introduce them in their own classes.

Christina Organista-Martin, a Grade 7 and 8 teacher at Greenbank Middle School, said it would be especially useful to her. "In some of my classes, there are as many as 10 different cultures," she explained. "For those kids, French is a third or fourth language, so often they aren't even interested. I think some of these ideas would help."

While she said she didn't expect junior high students would be big on doing all the small gestures, she added the program would be a good foundation for her to develop something more age-appropriate.

NORTH SHORE NEWS

West Van's French revolution



LOOKING from the front of the classroom at bored stares while listening to children recite the same rudimentary French vocabulary, the teacher realized something needed to change.

Wendy Maxwell had been a French immersion teacher at an inner-city school in Ontario, but it wasn't until she began teaching French at a private school in Toronto that she realized the ineffectiveness of the standard lesson plan.

"I was shocked at the lack of language development," she said. "It was pitiful, the hours they were spending and not learning."

From that point in the early '90s, Maxwell began developing a teaching program she called Accelerated Integrative Methodology.

The first step in the program is talking with your hands.

"I attached a gesture to every single word," Maxwell said.

Some gestures are simple, such as putting your hand to your ear to signal listening, while others might rely on the spelling of the word, but Maxwell said there are now 2,000 gestures used in A.I.M.

The idea is that instead of simply repeating a new vocabulary word, the students respond physically by copying the gesture, and the vocabulary becomes part of their muscle memory.

Besides incorporating gestures, Maxwell examined which words would be most useful for students.

"The students didn't have the vocabulary they needed to communicate," she said.

Instead of avoiding verbs that were difficult to conjugate, Maxwell said she began looking for highfrequency language.

As the students learned the more practical vocabulary, Maxwell decided there should be drama.

"I started to write plays," she said.

At the end of each unit of French, the students would perform a play, and along with the plays came songs and student-penned French hip hop.

Maxwell's theatrical approach began to gain recognition, and it wasn't long before other teachers followed suit.

Monique Terrillon teaches grades three to seven at West Bay elementary in West Vancouver, and she's familiar with the traditional method of teaching French.

"It's like flogging a dead horse," she said.

After about 18 months of studying Maxwell's system, Terrillon said she became proficient in A.I.M. and the difference in her students was startling.

"Night and day," she said, describing the change. "The kids could speak French and it wasn't forced, it was spontaneous."

Terrillon said she's using the same system to teach English to English as a second language students.

"This program is unique in that students are genuinely engaged in story," said Ellen Keiser, a French teacher at Collingwood private school for the past nine years.

Besides teaching in West Vancouver, Keiser also traveled to Melbourne, Australia to help teachers incorporate the approach in their schools.

Students might sing a French song about the trials and tribulations of the Three Little Pigs, but the emphasis is on immersing the students in French opposed to focusing on translating English.

"As soon as the students see the teachers they immediately switch gears and start speaking French," she said.

OACS NEWS SERVICE

Program succeeds in AIM to engage students in learning French

Kim Schelhaas is seeing incredible results in students' enthusiasm and skills in the French classroom since employing the Accelerated Integrated Method (AIM) French curriculum.

The French teacher at Stratford & District Christian School says she first heard about the program a few years ago from teachers during an Ontario Christian Schools Teachers Association convention. Learning about the program from other schools as well as her sister-in-law motivated Schelhaas to get started.

Having taught French for 25 years, Schelhaas says she always stressed to students to speak French as much as possible in the classroom, which ended up making them too quiet.

"I noticed (my colleagues using AIM) were excited about the program and they were also so over the top about the fact that the children were speaking," she recalls.

In the traditional core French class the whole language approach cannot be used because students do not have the tools as a base to work from, says Schelhaas.

AIM has teachers gesture the words as they say them, and use high-frequency words and expressions used in the French language. The teacher begins by gesturing and the students are all required to participate orally.

The program has an arts and literacy approach using drama, music and dance.

"It's a noisy classroom but it's a good noise — they are all speaking," says Schelhaas.

"So the fluency is there, the motivation is there, the engagement is there, and it also meets multiple needs, not just the average student who is strong academically," she says, noting the method covers multiple intelligences.

Every lesson is divided into 10 minute or less packages, ensuring there is continuous movement in the classroom and students do not get bored.

"It moves along so quickly that you don't lose the students' focus," she says.

The students are put into groups of four to five, mixing up students with different strengths and weaknesses.

Schelhaas says she has seen a "real Christian rapport" among group members, as they try to work together and help the weaker students.

"Nobody is left behind, ever. Nobody turns the page until every one in that group has moved on. And it's taking responsibility as a Christian for everybody's needs, not just me myself and I, and I think maybe as a Christian school teacher I've taken that on as being a big part of it," she notes.

This year the school has expanded the AIM program into more grades. Schelhaas is teaching the program to Grades 3-8, and the Grade 1 and 2 teacher is piloting the new AIM program for those grades.

Schelhaas says she was hesitant when introducing the AIM program to the Grade 7 and 8 students last fall, wondering how they would respond.

"They are the most energetic, and receptive of all my classes. It just blew me away," she says.

"It was like they couldn't wait to get out of that old mode of boring, boring, boring, and they are so excited (and) they participate."

She says she has noticed an incredible difference in their abilities since using the program. The class is going on a trip to Quebec in May and are looking forward to being able to use their French.

The enthusiasm is spreading beyond the classroom, with Schelhaas hearing feed-

back from parents that the class is part of discussions at the dinner table. It is also spilling onto the playground, as students will ask her something in French. Some parents are starting to use their French when talking with Schelhaas.

"It's definitely the best program I have ever, ever used," she says.

"It's definitely a worthwhile program and I don't think I'd go back to any of the others after this, seeing the happiness, the joy on their faces, their excitement for the language and the fluency," says Schelhaas.

The AIM program is currently used in 4,000 schools across Canada and is expanding worldwide.

For other schools interested to start the program Schelhaas recommends attending the AIM National Summer Institute, which will be held in Barrie, Ontario, July 4-7, 2011.

TOWN CRIER

It's all French to me

Schools find different ways to help their students learn our other official language



FRANCIS CRESCIA/TOWN CRIER

ACTING OUT: The Accelerative Integrated Method for teaching French uses songs, artwork and gestures to connect the students to the language. Above, Patrizia Rizzo and her pupils at Sterling Hall School use puppets to tell a basic story.

Parlez-vous français?

In light of French immersion being rolled out at an applied level at public schools as of September 2013, what are private and independent schools doing to make learning the language more accessible to students?

Mirna Hafez, principal of La p'tite école at TFS says they now offer French for those as young as 18 months.

The Jardin d'éveil program, which launched in 2010 and is geared at two year olds, was designed to stimulate social, emotional, physical, linguistic and cognitive development through play and exploration activities.

"At this age they just want to know the why and to touch," Hafez says. "They are exposed to many things in the French context to really learn and address the five senses."

TFS also runs an Intro to French Program, which students can join up to grade 7 without any prior exposure or knowledge of French. Its goal is to transition students to the same level of French as their peer group in the school's regular bilingual academic stream. Although students have separate classes to start, they are slowly integrated in courses like art or phys-ed, which are less speaking based.

Hafez says they also encourage learning through music, drama, technology, games and treasure hunts and focus on ways to make students want to speak fluently.

Many schools have also adopted the Accelerative Integrated Method to teach

French. Patrizia Rizzo, a French coordinator at The Sterling Hall School, says she uses gesture instruction with other vocabulary acquisition tools in order to bring variety and fun to the classroom.

"I introduce basic vocabulary and language through games, songs, artwork, role-playing and gestures," she says. "The use of stories and songs in second language instruction allows students to connect and become engaged with the content of the program."

Rizzo says their French curriculum is designed to prepare students for success in corresponding programs at the secondary level. Along with grammar conventions, she also teaches students about French culture so they can make connections between what they are learning and the real world.

This year she also started inviting French-Canadian singer/songwriters to come to the school and perform songs the students sing in class. The school also has a pen pal program in place that pairs grade 7 students with children in France.

Haverger College also uses Accelerative Integrated Method to teach French as a second language starting in senior kindergarten.

"This is especially helpful to students who have little or no exposure to French, as the majority of the gestures reflect the meaning of the vocabulary," says Jennifer Peirce, who teaches French in grades 5 and 6. "They are able to enter a French classroom where only French is spoken and yet understand and be

TOWN CRIER

supported in their learning of the language.”

She says the school also offers extra help in French and also runs clubs like a French Lunch Club. Her colleague France Gareau has been teaching Accelerative Integrated Method to students in grades 2 to 4 since 1999, when the method was first introduced.

“New students to Havergal, who often enter in grade 4 or grade 7, tend to adapt easily to the program,” says Gareau, who has been teaching French for 20 years.

Gareau’s colleague Louise Cholette-Rees says through the method the language is contextualized with stories and short plays about children and young adolescents to help the students learn.

“Stories, theatre and songs are a way to scaffold language production and ease students into a new language without anxiety,” she says. “When students gain new vocabulary using gestures and much practice, students start speaking naturally without the teacher always using gestures.”

Country Day School’s junior school head of French Lori Pella says the methods used to teach French with Accelerative Integrated Method resembles the way students acquired their first language. After teaching French for 24 years, she says she would never go back to the traditional approach because it doesn’t compare.

“We know students have to be engaged, they have to be involved, that’s how they retain the material and that happens in an (Accelerative Integrated Method) classroom,”

she says. “The language becomes part of the children.”

At Holy Name of Mary College School, Meaghan DeCourcy says they integrate visual art, music and technology into the French program to foster a higher level of student engagement and enthusiasm.

“There is no shortage of creativity in the French room, where students speak, sing, draw and dance their way through the adventure of second-language learning,” she says. “Activating the auditory and kinesthetic areas of the brain allows for the formation of new pathways in the mind, while also creating a fun and engaging atmosphere.”

She says they enhance vocabulary and language development through a variety of visual aids and oral practice. Throughout the first months of school they introduce students to common words that exist between languages in French, Spanish, Italian and English.

“By making connections and seeing similarities between other languages, students build their confidence with the French language,” she says.

Branksome Hall’s Sarah Craig, the head of the junior school, says while French is mandatory from junior kindergarten to grade 6, the school also has an extended French stream for those who want to pursue the language further.

The Extended Middle School program allows students to take 25 percent of their course load in French, including social sciences like history

and geography.

In addition to using Accelerative Integrated Method to teach French in the junior school, the French program includes fieldtrips where students can gain real-life experiences in French. The school also has an International Languages Program, which was originally for students in grades 7 to 12, but as of this year expanded to grades 1 through 12. It allows students whose first language isn’t English to maintain their mother tongue with courses taught in 14 languages including Swedish, Italian, Mandarin and Urdu.

For those students set to join Branksome Hall’s Junior School with little or no background in French, Craig says they provide the family with Accelerative Integrated Method- based DVDs so they can begin learning the gestures and vocabulary before the school year begins.

“Once they start the year, the teachers provide weekly individual or small group sessions to help them catch up either before or after school,” she says. “Sometimes students opt to get a Senior School student tutor to encourage conversation and help them to enhance their comfort in the language.”

THE TYEE

Why We're Failing at French

And how to actually teach a language.

By Shannon Bourbonnais, 5 Sep 2007,
TheTyee.ca

“Je t’aime.” That was about the extent of my husband’s French skills when he taught core French in his teaching practicum. He’s not alone. But even though I am a francophone and have a degree in French, when I taught high school French for four years, fresh out of university, I watched with frustration as students passed the provincial French exams with high marks, then walked out the door, still unable to communicate their basic needs in French. Despite being a trained French teacher, I lacked the tools and enough hours of class time to impart authentic language skills to my students.

There are serious limitations to the way French is mainly now taught in schools. Students start French classes too late, spend too few hours in the classroom, and are often taught by teachers who often lack French fluency themselves and can’t even use French as the language of instruction within the classroom. The Ministry of Education only requires schools to offer a second language from Grades 5 to 8, and while in an ideal

world they spend half an hour a day on French, in many schools, it’s often only an hour a week. And well-meaning, hard working, but under-prepared teachers, like my husband, have ineffective methods of teaching a language.

But while doing a Master’s of Education, focusing on language, I came to the conclusion that none of those things is the real problem. The real problem is that we’re teaching students complex grammar and vocabulary, but not teaching them how to communicate. And we don’t teach language in the way that students actually learn it organically.

No ‘authentic communication’

Students learn lists of nouns, such as “sports” or “clothes,” and then they learn rules like when to use the past perfect versus imperfect. But that’s not the way we speak. People communicate in sentences, and verbs are central to language. People communicate with

statements like “I want,” “I can” or “I have to.” But because “want,” “can” and “must” are irregular verbs in French, they are usually not taught in the first few years of standard French programs. Instead, in my high school French classes, I shamefully admit that I used English to explain advanced grammar to a group of students who could hardly speak enough French to ask me to repeat the question.

The provincial exams, which loom for Grade 12 students and their teachers, don’t provide any incentive to become fluent either. Although there are some plans to change this in the future, the current exam is entirely written and based on grammar, vocabulary and reading. There is no spoken or listening component. So, students can graduate with As and Bs, without ever having engaged in a real French conversation, which is ironic given that the curriculum constantly mentions the notion of “authentic communication.”

There are certainly many things that could be done to improve French skills upon graduation. We could take a lesson from the Europeans who begin second language lessons earlier and build exchange trips to other countries into their curriculum, for example. However, while these types of experiences are essential for kids to learn a second language, exchanges are expensive and time consuming in North America. And while we certainly need more teachers who are fluent in French, there are few opportunities for teachers to develop these skills.

Foraging for French

Six years ago I walked into a classroom at a Vancouver elementary school and heard the Grade 2 students speaking French at a level my Grade 12 students weren’t even close to achieving. Everything was in French -- kids were fighting in French, tattling on each other in French, even in the corner, out of earshot, they were all speaking French. I was convinced that it must be an immersion class, but these students were only getting 30 minutes of French instruction a day. I was so amazed that I went right back to my school in West Vancouver and told the principal, “We have to try this.”

The classroom belonged to Wendy Maxwell, a French teacher who conducted 10 years of action research in her own classes while doing a Master’s degree in Education, then gathered the best ways of teaching a language under one umbrella -- which she calls the Accelerated Integrative Method (AIM). There’s nothing new about what Maxwell does: she teaches a second language the way we usually teach a first language. I studied her method in my own graduate work and, rather than teach grammar out of context, I now teach language and grammar through story, in the same way parents teach their children by reading to them.

Of course, it’s more than just hearing a story that helps children learn a language; it’s all the interaction that occurs between the parent and the child around the story. In my class,

THE TYEE

I might read the story of Les Trois Petits Cochons (The Three Little Pigs) out loud, but then the students often retell the story in their own words, act it out, or continue the story from their own imagination. And they use gestures with almost every word.

Maxwell's program, which is taught in 3,000 schools across Canada, includes a pared-down vocabulary of about 900 words that are necessary for basic fluency. Students work through the list in a systematic fashion, but not by memorization. The gestures that go along with every word, somewhat like sign language, allow students to use both the left and right brain. Also, students gesture and say each word as the teacher says it out loud, to maximize language use time. This makes learning more active (and fun), as do songs, and dance routines.

Fifty percent fluent?

In my classes I ask two questions: "Are the kids enjoying the language?" and "Do they have a functional level of fluency?" When Jean Chretien was prime minister, he announced a goal of having 50 per cent of Canadians graduate with working fluency in French by 2012. But only about one to two per cent of students will become fluent using traditional French teaching methods -- Maxwell is actually one of them -- but she realized that it doesn't work for most students.

While some of my students excel more than others and not all have achieved a high level of fluency by Grade 6, all have the basic fluency to tell me their needs in class, and in all cases, their base level of French speaking and comprehension is much higher than the students I was teaching through traditional French classes. I no longer have to use even a word of English in my classes, and I've had parents tell me that when their family visited France or Quebec their child did all the ordering.

Of course, just because teachers use this method, it doesn't necessarily mean they will get the same results. No matter what method a teacher uses, he or she needs to be engaging and interesting and able to connect with students. A French teacher who doesn't have perfect grammar, but has enthusiasm and classroom presence, might be better than a francophone who assumes that kids know more than they do.

The teaching methodologies that I now employ in my classes transcend linguistic boundaries. Educators in Europe and Asia are interested in Maxwell's approach and the curriculum is being modified for use in Spanish classes, English as a second language programs and First Nations language programs. New curriculum is also being developed for adults and high school students who wouldn't find The Three Little Pigs as relevant to their lives.

Language acquisition takes commitment and consistency on the part of students and teachers. But French class should be engaging and creative, not the daily dose of misery and memorization.

LANGUAGE MAGAZINE

Language Magazine - Aim to Please! November edition

Tania Ruiz overcomes the fear of change to adopt a new teaching methodology

Accelerative Integrated Methodology (AIM) is an intensive second-language-learning system designed to accelerate the development of language proficiency and fluency at the beginning stages of learning. This “post-method methodology” devised by Canadian teacher and author Wendy Maxwell is enabling teachers to consistently and coherently put into practice a combination of often discussed but scarcely implemented language-acquisition techniques fused with original elements in AIM.

Based on a holistic approach, AIM contains explicit strategies to help students experience a rich, supportive, safe, and positive learning environment so that they become confident and competent communicators of information, concepts, and ideas. It involves a highly active, participatory experience where students speak throughout the class and have ample opportunities to be involved socially through flexible grouping with a high emphasis on cooperative learning. Probably the most original element of AIM is its “gesture approach,” a form of nonverbal communication that promotes memory retention and receptivity to the subject matter involving multisensory input and a variety of symbol systems that facilitate language

acquisition. The key among these new aspects is the use of gestures along with the cautiously scaffolded presentation of vocabulary, familiarity, and production, with writing following on the heels of speaking.

Although spontaneity of self-expression is encouraged, there is little left to chance in the introduction and use of vocabulary. Indeed, AIM has pioneered the concept of “pared down language” (PDL), which avoids the confusion of introducing new language items from a purely grammatical rationale and instead presents grammaticalized vocabulary to mirror the pattern of native-speaker language acquisition.

All the vocabulary presented in AIM is selected according to frequency and function in the natural process of language acquisition. PDL places a high emphasis on verbs but also includes other vocabulary and structures important for beginning fluency development. Defying the trend of quick succession from one theme to another, AIM delves deeply in a meaningful learning context. Each 50-hour kit is based around a single story — folk stories for the younger learners and social issues for the older.

In addition, teaching the target vocabulary kinesthetically, visually, and in an auditory manner enables teachers to meet a variety



of learning styles. Instruction is conducted entirely in the target language. The “target-language only” rule is in place from the first day of instruction. Words are presented through gesture and contextualized through story and drama. Lexical items are reinforced with a hand signaled gesture which students learn to associate with the word or phrase being taught, even at the grammatical level. These visual and kinesthetic props allow the vocabulary and associated grammar to pass directly to meaning, neatly sidestepping the tendency to mentally translate each word back into the first language. This undermining of the tendency for mental translation rapidly accelerates students’ direct connection to the target language. All the new vocabulary that is learned is associated with an emotional hook that ensures that vocabulary is deeply embedded. In this way, students learn to see and feel the language, preparing them to deal with real-life tasks in the target language.

Even though the ingenious and innovative use of vocabulary gesturing is a central feature of the methodology, it is merely one element in a range of techniques. In many ways, AIM is an adaptation of the “communicative approach.” It revisits certain techniques previously dismissed as “too behavioral,” reframing, for example, teacher-led drilling into “pleasant repetition,” and carefully considers initial rote learning.

At the same time, there is a rich cognitive foundation. AIM draws heavily on brain-based research and deeply on multiple intelligences theory. Where conventional courses are often slanted to overtly logic-based tasks, AIM places great emphasis on music, dance, and drama to engage the full spectrum of student intelligence type and learner style. Also, its extensive and creative use of story, music, and drama provides several opportunities

LANGUAGE MAGAZINE

to motivate and engage students while stimulating their imagination and creativity, serving as a model for their own creative use of the language. Using the play as a starting point, and carefully scaffolding through both whole-class and partner/group activities, students engage in the authentic tasks found in every kit in each of the five language areas: listening, reading, spoken production, spoken interaction, and writing.

Initially, when I began researching AIM and reading about the methodologies, I thought it was very radical and I was slightly skeptical about its success in the classroom. From the theoretical point of view, it sounded fascinating, but when I thought about putting it into practice, I wasn't convinced that it was going to work well. I was afraid my students were going to find the gestures somewhat annoying and ridiculous. As a teacher, you have to feel very confident and secure to try something unusual, especially if you want to engage your students, but I did not feel like that at all. I was also concerned that I would have to invest a lot of time ahead of implementation to learn the gestures in order to be able to do them fluently, and that extra time was out of the equation. However, maybe out of curiosity, something inside of me wanted to give it a try.

When I received the first AIM Spanish kit, ¡Jóvenes en Acción!, Marco el Mago, I really liked it. The play, the activities, and all the songs and raps were extraordinary, fun, and engaging. But I still had my doubts regarding its use. Later on, I had the opportunity

to attend the AIM Summer Institute on Vancouver Island, and it was a wonderful, educational, and enlightening experience. From the natural warmth of the Canadian people to the scintillating content of the program, the Institute was a success — all the sessions were very enriching as they were designed to resolve any doubts regarding the use of gestures, lesson planning, assessment, classroom management, the target-language only rule, and more. I had the opportunity to see a vast repertoire of different strategies from each of the presenters, and they answered all my questions by demonstrating step by step how to implement the program in a classroom. The keynote session by John De Mado was also very helpful in helping me realize how AIM blends language-acquisition theory with interactive and engaging practice, and the reasons why it works.

This knowledge gave me comfort. I realized that you don't need to learn all the gestures before you start teaching. You only need to know the gestures for two or three lessons ahead, so I knew time was not going to be an issue. The only thing missing was using the program in my classroom. My first class using AIM worked well. Novelty can always be an advantage. My students were experiencing something completely new, and they were very engaged in the activities. Of course, some of them were a little bit reluctant to do the gestures and say the words, but they followed the class. The teacher's attitude towards the development of all the activities is very important in engaging students. Also, consistency is the key to success.

A few classes later, it was amazing to see how easily and quickly students learn the vocabulary when you introduce it using gestures. Now, students who were reluctant at first found the activities interesting. They saw that the new activities worked. Everything made sense to them and they were able to understand all my instructions in the target language (Spanish). It was amazing to see how they could master some communicative functions in just two or three classes instead of the couple of months it would take using a traditional methodology.

When they start achieving these little pieces of communication, they get more motivated to keep learning, and they enjoy the learning process more. They don't need to translate every single word, because they learn the language in a meaningful way that makes sense to them. So far, my students and I are very happy using AIM, and I think effective communication and a degree of fluency can be achieved in a relatively short time.

I'm not alone in my positive experience — other AIM teachers are achieving immersion-like results rapidly within contexts in which students have only a handful of language lessons per week.

Founded by Wendy Maxwell and her husband Matt Maxwell (PhD) AIM's home base is situated on Bowen Island off the British Columbia coast in Canada. While the AIM office is the hub of a wider network of writers, editors, artists, musicians, sound engineers, film crew members, presenters,

and practitioners, it is a small operation for an influential educational publisher. Even so, it has become a key player in Canadian French-language education and a major competitor in the field of language education.

AIM is currently used in many Canadian schools and several different countries, and has become something of an international phenomenon. This rapid growth is largely the result of word-of-mouth recommendations by teachers who attend the annual workshops in Canada and beyond and the trainings hosted by school boards and independent schools.

Increasingly, schools with established AIM programs seek to recruit teachers experienced in the methodology. Accordingly, a more sophisticated system of AIM assessment and certification is currently in development, in sequence with a significant online-learning complement to the existing workshops and institutes. The language base is also expanding. There are now complete suites of materials for French for K-12 and beyond and several levels of English, and two kits available for Spanish and Mandarin.

Testimonials from professors, consultants, and teachers suggest that AIM represents a breakthrough in foreign-language instruction. From my limited experience, I can vouch that it is an engaging, exciting, fun, and highly effective way to teach all aspects of language acquisition.

THE PLAIN DEALER



CHRIS STEPHENS / THE PLAIN DEALER

Portraying the three little pigs are, from left, second-graders Brendan Paul, Kevin Moreno and Ryan Mitchell. They use gestures along with French words, a method developed in Canada to help children remember more of the language. Lake Ridge Academy in North Ridgeville is one of only a few U.S. schools using it.

Lake Ridge kids 'hand'-taught to speak French

ELLEN JAN KLEINERMAN
Plain Dealer Reporter

Zoe Belardo pressed her finger to her nose as she ended a series of deliberate gestures while saying: "Les Trois Petits Cochons."

The pushed-in nose signified *cochons*, meaning "pigs," in French.

Zoe, 8, was the narrator of "The Three Little Pigs," the second-grade musical at Lake Ridge Academy in North Ridgeville. The presentation culminated a year of innovative French instruction in which students learned hand gestures to help them master core expressions and sentences

essential to speaking the language.

Songs, dances and familiar stories played an important role by putting the language in context and providing necessary, but fun, repetition.

French teacher Maryse West said she found traditional approaches frustrating because even after years of instruction, many students were unable to engage in a simple conversation. "Students had no way to put all that they learned to a practical use."

Then she heard about an approach called the Accelerative Integrated Method, which was developed by Canadian teacher Wendy Maxwell in 1992.

SEE FRENCH | B5



CHRIS STEPHENS / THE PLAIN DEALER

Madelyn Cromling, left, and Zoe Belardo use gestures to match French words as they tell the story of "Les Trois Petits Cochons." (The Three Little Pigs) during a presentation at Lake Ridge Academy, a private school in North Ridgeville. The technique of putting a gesture to every word helps promote fluency.

FRENCH

FROM B1

Kids 'hand'-taught to speak French

West, who learned more at a seminar last summer, said her students in kindergarten to fifth grade all have advanced amazingly well. The first three weeks were the hardest since she was still learning the gestures herself.

Zoe found the method "kind of odd" in the beginning as well, but then she found a link: "I'm a dancer. If I dance it, I think it

and then I know it."

Maxwell, speaking from her office in Vancouver, said: "There's difficulty in getting students to be fluent in French. It doesn't just happen."

The integrated approach is different because it appeals to a host of senses — seeing the motions, doing the motions and hearing the teacher speak.

With this method, "the children get a feel for how the language works, which is so important to fluency," Maxwell said.

Brendan Paul, 8, also in second grade, is starting to catch on to the differences between English and French grammar.

"French is kind of tricky that way," he said referring to the masculine and feminine words.

But a finger placed under the nose, like a mustache, to signify "male" and a sweep of the hand over your hair to signify "female" help convey the concepts.

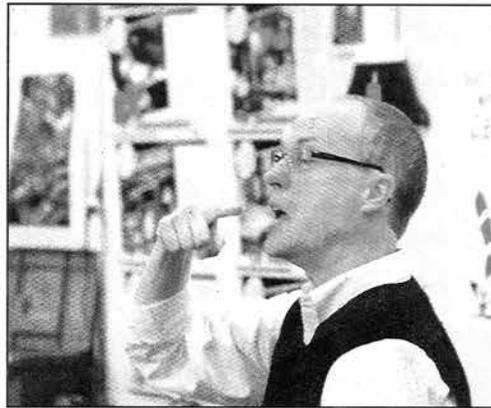
Although 3,000 schools in Canada are successfully using the method, Maxwell said only a few in the United States have tried it out.

A Spanish program should be available in the fall, she added.

To reach this Plain Dealer reporter: ekleiner@plaind.com, 800-628-6689

SKAGIT VALLEY HERALD

WHOLE-BODY LANGUAGE



Scott Terrell / Skagit Valley Herald

Innovative teaching method leaves textbooks behind

By AARON BURKHALTER
Staff Writer

SEDRO-WOOLLEY — Sedro-Woolley High School French teacher Robert Slabodnik keeps a wooden blue, white and red Eiffel Tower hanging in front of his white board. A strip of sleigh bells dangles from the bottom.

As he flips it over to reveal the word “Français” on the other side, the jangle of the bells marks the moment when students in the classroom stop speaking English.

The students sit in a semicircle, the front row in chairs and another row on table tops in back. They look like a choir in rehearsal; they chant sentences in French while Slabodnik frantically gestures with his entire body.

The teacher flaps his hands by his cheeks, pushes his hands down like he’s pounding on a piano, grabs and shakes his shirt and sticks his forefinger underneath his nose like a mustache — without saying a

word. Then they speak French back to him.

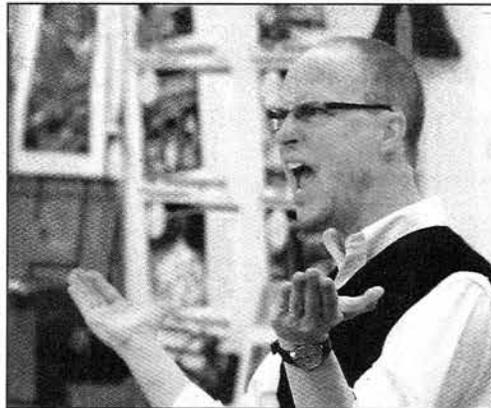
He’s using a language curriculum called Accelerative Integrated Methodology (AIM) that emphasizes the use of common words everyone needs to communicate. AIM was developed in British Columbia to teach French, and the company is producing Spanish curriculum soon.

Slabodnik is leading a workshop at Seattle University this weekend on the method, which he hopes will be used more widely in the United States as the Spanish curriculum becomes available.

The method pulls the students out of their textbooks — students have none in this class — and gets them talking.

“My job is to use these gestures to prompt them to speak,” Slabodnik said.

The idea is to target the part of the brain that can assimilate and retain foreign language most easily. Students learn



Photos by Scott Terrell / Skagit Valley Herald

Robert Slabodnik incorporates gestures and facial expressions during class Tuesday as part of his method for teaching French at Sedro-Woolley High School.

based on gestures rather than English so they can think and communicate without translating in their heads.

Wendy Maxwell, AIM’s creator, said she started developing the curriculum in the mid-1990s when she moved from a low-income language immersion program, where students spoke French all day, to a wealthy school, where students took French for an hour

a day and worked with tutors.

She said the low-income students had a better grasp of the language. The other students were not making progress year over year.

Maxwell said students working out of textbooks gain their vocabulary in order of complexity, not common use. Easy verbs and nouns that have

French

Continued from Page A1

little application are learned before difficult verbs and nouns that are used more frequently.

“Verbs that are hard to conjugate are often the most important words you need to know, like ‘can’ and ‘want’ and ‘go,’” she said.

The students in Sedro-Woolley like it better too, not just because there are no worksheets or essays to write at home.

“It helps us use a lot of different parts of our brains,” said Mimi Curtin,

17. “Once you start practicing it in class, you start thinking in French.”

Shawn Naylor, 17, said he took Latin at Mount Vernon High School from a textbook before he started French.

“It was so much harder,” Naylor said.

Slabodnik said the method encourages students to speak fluidly and builds vocabulary they can use throughout each unit. The program is supposed to help students find a way to speak and express themselves within the limited vocabulary they have.

“They end up with spontaneous speech, which

is what you want as a language teacher,” Slabodnik said.

Maxwell said learning is happening the same way young children adopt their native language. Kids learn to express a variety of ideas and meanings through a limited vocabulary and build off gestures and repetition.

“We didn’t learn our first language by taking it apart and putting it together,” Maxwell said.

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BERKELEY TIMES

Inside the Classroom

BY R. TODD KERR

Accelerated learning of a second language at King Middle School



It was 1:23 p.m. on a recent Thursday at King Middle School – time for students in the classroom of French I teacher Lisa Shurtz to begin their lesson. As soon as the bell rang, the students – already in their seats – began a chant (in French) accompanied by a series of well-practiced gestures.

As soon as the chant was over, Shurtz glided over to portable media player, clicked a button and then burst into song: “Lundi, Mardi, Mercredi (Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday)...” gesturing as she went. Nearby, a table of boys and girls became exaggerated in their song and gestures inspiring a quick case of the giggles. But this little outburst was nothing that would disturb this energetic classroom.

An instant later, still not five minutes into the lesson, Shurtz transitioned again.

Now she began conversing with her students – in French, of course, by asking them about their plans for the upcoming weekend. Each of her words was punctuated with a gesture – some of which resembled the type one sees while playing the game of Charades.

“Je vais regarder le film *Papillon* avec ma famille, (I’m going to watch the movie *Papillon* with my family),” said one of the students gesticulating as she went.

“Très, très bien (very, very good),” uttered Shurtz as she handed a bonus buck to the student as a reward for her participation in class.

So it goes in the language arts classrooms at King Middle School, where Shurtz and her colleague

Brooks Geiken have implemented a new teaching method imported from Canada: AIM, short for Accelerative Integrated Method.

According to AIM-founder Wendy Maxwell, a French teacher from Ontario, Canada, and her teacher disciples – more than 80 in Canada and now a handful in Berkeley, an AIM classroom should be a noisy and active place.

Maxwell’s unique teaching method is not theme based. Rather it’s a literacy-based program that engages students in a wide range of artistic expression and performance, including gestures, storytelling, drama, song and dance – anything that emotionally engages students as they learn. The idea is to immerse students in the target language, to make it experiential, and to accelerate the development of vocabulary by encouraging usage of high-frequency words and expressions.

All this is reinforced by a variety of physical activities or movements starting with gestures. Each word in the target language is associated with a unique gesture, not unlike sign language, which is shown whenever a word is expressed. There are also gestures relating grammar and syntax, though students are not aware of these – at least, not at the outset. The gestures are essential to the AIM approach, and many students find them useful as a means for remembering words.

By design, AIM classrooms involve lots of drama, the creation and performance of plays so

to get students exploring a range of (emotional) expression while using a foreign language. AIM classrooms also feature group-work and partner activities, where students collaborate on a variety of brief activities.

For example, during my visit to Shurtz’s classroom, students were tasked with creating menus for an imaginary restaurant – one that served le petit déjeuner, déjeuner, diner, and dessert (breakfast, lunch, dinner and dessert). During these work sessions, students were allowed to chat in the target language, and that’s exactly what they did with surprising levels of sophistication and candor.

For example, when Reid, a tall and handsome teen, returned to Shurtz’s classroom, he found himself standing high above a table of girls who were busy making their French menus.

“Bonjour, Reid. J’adore,” said one of the girls, “Ca va?” (“Hello, Reid. I adore you. How goes it?”)

“Ca va,” he replied dryly as he veered to his own worktable.

In another classroom, Spanish I teacher Brook Geiken was deploying the AIM technique in a slightly different context. In pairs and with his guidance, students stood in front of the class and recited familiar poems and nursery rhymes – all while gesticulating in the rhythm inspired by the tune or the language. Some of these rhymes were very familiar, and therefore quite simple to follow along – even for non-Spanish speakers.

“La arana pequeñita, subió,



Using the AIM method of instruction, King Middle School French I teacher Lisa Shurtz addresses her class with words and gestures.



In a nearby classroom, King Middle School Spanish I teacher Brooks Geiken leads students in a series of animated performances.

subió, subió... (The itty bitsy spider climbed up the water spout...)

According to Geiken, who traveled to Canada last summer to become trained in the method, AIM has rapidly accelerated the competency of his first year students. By all measures, students are now participating more in class, and spending more time in the target language. Since imple-

menting AIM, he says that it is rare that hears English spoken in his classroom.

According to Shurtz, who piloted the first Spanish AIM classroom ever – that was last year, the method seems to be catching on across the District. Apparently, several Berkeley High School teachers will be traveling to Canada this summer to become certified in the AIM method.

Staff photos

THE CHICHESTER OBSERVER

Cumbre del la classe - that's starlet Jossie

By JANE HUNT
news@chiobserver.co.uk

Jossie Kyte is leading the way on the ladder to language skills. The 16-year-old from Grafton has won a top national award for Spanish and attended a ceremony at the Imperial War Museum in London.

Jossie, a student at Seaford College, Duncton, was among the stars from all age groups at the 2008 Languages Ladder Asset Languages Awards after achieving the best performance in Spanish at intermediate level.

Schools minister Jim Knight presented the awards to candidates ranging in age from eight to 90, learning a range of diverse languages. The awards celebrate the achievements of people from around the country who took the Languages Ladder Asset Languages exams last year.

Jossie's performance was achieved in conjunction with GCSE Spanish, which she took a year early. She aims to go on to study French and Spanish at A-level.

Shelagh Weekes, who is responsible for administering the scheme at Seaford College, said the Languages Ladder was developed in 2005 to provide an opportunity for learners to have their language skills recognised in small steps, like music grades.

"Learners can progress up the Ladder in one or more of the four language skills - speaking, listening, reading and writing - in one or more languages. There are several opportunities a year to take Asset Languages tests, the qualifications based on the Languages Ladder, so learners can progress at a speed that is right for them.

"So far, more than 100,000 qualifications have been awarded to learners in primary, secondary, higher and adult education since the scheme was launched. Asset Languages qualifications also con-



Top of the ladder: Jossie Kyte (16) with tutor Shelagh Weekes

PICTURE BY BILL SHIMMIN C081072-1

tribute towards the achievement and attainment tables for schools," Mrs Weekes added.

With Seaford's Year 6 students she is trialling the Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM) which was developed in Canada to further encourage the learning of languages.

It is a holistic approach to lan-

guage instruction which uses gestures to initially teach and practice vocabulary and then moves on through the extensive use of songs, plays, dances and creative storytelling activities.

"This basically means I have taught Year 6 using the story of The Three Little Pigs and sign language and gestures," Mrs Weekes said.

"They are about to put on a mini-performance of the play. The structures they have learnt through learning the play gives them the language they need for other things and we are able to conduct their lessons in French even though they have been learning this way only since November.

"We are holding a workshop in July to introduce the method to interested teachers."

***THE SPANISH TRANSLATION FOR 'TOP OF THE CLASS'**

Nous parlons français (we speak French)

By Adam Joyce

Students crossing the threshold into “Madame Carlaw’s” classroom gesture as if taking the English out of their head ... because within the four walls of Jenny Carlaw’s Reynella Primary School classroom they only speak French.

Like their peers at eight other public schools in South Australia, the Reynella students have started learning French through a program based on gestures and speaking only in the target language.

The program is called the Accelerative Integrated Method, or AIM, and originated in Canada about 10 years ago.

Words are presented non-verbally through gestures and movement (kinesthetically), which students learn as they say the corresponding word aloud.

Reynella PS teacher Jenny Carlaw said there were hand and body gestures for about 700 commonly used words.

Once students have mastered sufficient vocabulary they then move onto learning and re-telling stories and plays in French using gesture, movement and language. The idea is to associate words with an “emotional hook”.

Jenny said she began using the method at the start of term 2 and her students had progressed at a “phenomenal rate”.

“It works because they’re talking in French all the time and the gestures kinesthetically help them to remember the words,” she said.

The DECS schools using the Accelerative Integrated Method of teaching French:

Cummins Area School
Edwardstown PS
Kadina PS
Linden Park Junior Primary and Primary
Morphett Vale East PS

Mundulla PS
Mount Barker PS
Paringa Park PS
Reynella PS

‘ It works because they’re talking in French all the time and the gestures kinesthetically help them to remember the words ,

“For example, the year 3s have learnt 120 gestures and words in seven weeks ... whereas using the traditional method they would normally learn 20 words a term.”

A group of DECS language teachers was introduced to the Accelerative Integrated Method in a workshop earlier this year, run by a teacher from Melbourne.

“I was fortunate enough to visit Canada in April and visited two schools where I saw the program in action,” Jenny said.

“I went into the classrooms and the children were spontaneously asking me questions in French.”

Jenny said gestures were no longer needed once students grasped the language.

There is also a DVD containing support material which helps students learn and revise the words and gestures.

“By talking to a class using the gesture method they (the students) are able to carry on a conversation, they can communicate with each other in French using complete sentences and verbs, whereas previously they were learning individual words,” Jenny said.

Students learn useful sentences in French, such as asking to go to the toilet.

The method focuses equally on reading, writing, listening and speaking.

“You use mime to get the meaning of words across and these gestures help embed the words,” Jenny said.

Jenny has added a couple of extra features to AIM, including a “magic line” at the entry to her classroom. Once the line is crossed, students are touched with a magic wand and may only speak in French. There is also a “magic hat” (pictured) which allows the wearer to speak English in emergencies.

Year 3 student Natasha said it was easier to remember French using the new method because they spoke it all the time in class.

“You know words more because you’re focusing on French, not English,” Natasha said.

“And the gestures make it a lot easier to remember.

“It’s fun speaking French when you do the gestures – some of them are funny.”

AIM is currently available only for French, however resources are being developed for Spanish and English as a second language.

Teachers should note that the Accelerative Integrated Method fits best within the “communication” strand of the SACSA Framework. However it does not explicitly cover the “understanding culture” and “understanding language” strands.

Jenny said progress achieved with AIM meant there was plenty of time in the school year to cover the additional strands of the SACSA Framework.

“Further down the track, according to video footage from Canada, students will be able to discuss how the French language works, in French,” she said.



Year 3 students (front) Natasha, Krystal and Odin in Jenny Carlaw’s French class show the gesture for the word *mettre*, which means put or put on.

THE HEIDELBERG LEADER

French revolution hits Ivanhoe



Teachers Jenny McKinney and Catherine Davenport get the lowdown on the new way to teach French from Accelerative Integrated Method presenter Richard Smith, from Canada. JANINE EASTGATE N13HB703

IVANHOE educator Jenny McKinney has introduced an innovative way of teaching students French.

It's called the Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM), which teaches foreign language through gestures, drama, music and dance.

Not a word of English is spoken once children cross the "magic line" and enter a world of French, or, as the older students do, gesture as if emptying English out of their head.

The method was developed in Canada more than 10 years ago, and is run here by Hearsay Learning Language Down-under. Words are presented non-verbally through gestures and movement, which students learn as they say the corresponding word aloud.

Ms McKinney, who is the director of Hearsay Learning, and the former head of language at Ivanhoe Girls' Grammar, said the method enabled children to quickly build up a vocabulary of about 700 of the most commonly used words in French.

"The gestures are used to convey meaning and enhance memory retention," she said.

About 600 schools are already using the program to teach their students French, and last month hundreds of primary and secondary teachers gathered at Ivanhoe Girls' Grammar School to learn more about the method.

Ms McKinney said a Mandarin program would be developed next year.

THE AGE

SIGN OF THE TIMES: SCHOOL FINDS SUCCESS WITH NEW WAY OF TEACHING LANGUAGES

Jewel Topsfield
August 23, 2011



Hands on approach: Carey Baptist Grammar School teacher Jenny McKinney instructs a French class with a breakthrough method that uses gestures as well as language. Photo: John Woudstra

IF THE year 6 students at Carey Baptist Grammar School were not babbling in French, you would swear they were learning sign language.

‘Est-ce que je peux manger de la pizza?’ one child asks, miming the act of eating a pizza. ‘Oui, tu peux manger de la pizza!’ the class chants in return, also gesturing wildly. Halfway through the lesson, the stereo is cranked up and the class raps to a song about lions, which they have written themselves and set to Taio Cruz’s chart-topping single Dynamite. The year

six students speak (or sing, or rap) in non-stop French for the entire 40-minute lesson. Every verb, noun, adjective and conjunction has a matching gesture. When they say riche (rich), the students rub their fingers together. For pauvre (poor), they empty out their pockets.

Ellie Colquhoun, 12, says the gestures help her remember the meaning of words. Despite studying Italian at her former school for four years, Ellie says she is already more fluent in French after learning it for just over a year. ‘The gestures and songs make it more fun. We didn’t do anything like that at my old school, it [Italian] was just like work.’

Teacher Jenny McKinney is the first to admit her French classes were not always so much fun. For the first 12 years of her teaching career she taught second languages by the textbook. ‘I found students weren’t developing their fluency, they were dropping out, and I felt like my efforts were futile,’ Ms McKinney says.

‘Parents were complaining, they would say: ‘We went to France and my kids couldn’t say anything.’ They were probably right to be honest.’

In 2004, Ms McKinney was questioning whether teaching was for her, when she attended a workshop

run by Wendy Maxwell. A Canadian immersion teacher, Ms Maxwell was responsible for a major breakthrough in second language instruction in thousands of schools in the Netherlands, US, Canada and Singapore.

Her technique, which is known as the Accelerative Integrated Methodology (AIM), uses gestures, music, dance and theatre to teach second languages so students rapidly develop fluency. ‘For me it was, right, that’s it, I now realise I’ve been teaching languages in the wrong way,’ Ms McKinney says.

She threw away her textbooks, lists of nouns and verb conjugations and became not just one of the first teachers to introduce AIM to Australia but an advocate for the method across New Zealand and Asia.

‘I want to spread the word that developing language fluency in our learners is a possibility,’ Ms McKinney says.

Now used in hundreds of schools across the nation, Carey Baptist Grammar School claims the methodology has ‘changed the paradigm completely about how we approach languages’.