

“FRENCH FOR FUN:” AN IDEA TO PROMOTE THE STUDY OF FRENCH IN OUR TOWN

In our town children begin their study of a foreign language—at present French, Spanish or Latin—when they enter seventh grade. Believing that it is essential to expose children to another language earlier than middle school, for ten years now the Department of Foreign Languages has been proposing to our school committee a program for the elementary schools. On each occasion our proposal has been rejected with committee members citing financial restraints or, more recently, lack of sufficient time in the elementary schedule.

Four years ago when we noticed a decline in the number of registrations for French in the middle school, we decided to present a new idea, and so, French for Fun was born. Exactly what is it? It is a course designed for fifth and sixth graders and team-taught by a high school teacher and volunteer French students from fourth and fifth year levels. The course, which is open to all children in our town meets at one elementary school every Thursday for one hour from the beginning of November until the end of April. Emphasis is placed on the acquisition of every-day vocabulary allowing students to describe their environment, personalities, families, and activities. Using a game-oriented approach, the high school students teach children's songs which offer practice in intonation and pronunciation in a natural setting. The students use various games such as *loto*, the game of seven families, Pictionary, telephone, around the world, *boules*, and films which offer simple scenes and dialogues useful for asking, describing, and seeking information. Most of our materials are created by the high school interns.

This year marks the third time that we have offered our French for Fun class, and we are able to cite numerous benefits to both the children and their student teachers. The children are introduced to a second language at a younger age without tests, without grades, just for the fun of the experience. They have the chance each Thursday to play in French while forgetting that they are actually learning. The student teachers also reap multiple benefits. They develop activities centered around communication. They use French in a real situation outside the classroom, they gain confidence in French, and they have the opportunity to reflect on their teaching. In addition, the repercussions of the program on French enrollment in the middle school has been remarkable. In three years we have seen an increase of 33%.

At present, neither the high school students nor the teacher are remunerated, but the students receive community service

hours. The program has been well received by parents and much appreciated by the elementary students. We hope that our efforts will encourage our school committee to adopt a permanent model of our program within the elementary school day.

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