

HOW TO RECRUIT STUDENTS AND SUPPORT TEACHERS

Support students and they will be motivated to learn; support teachers and they will be empowered to teach. Such is the assumption that underlies the suggestions made here. One cannot deny the relationship between teachers' morale and energy and the enthusiasm and performance of students. The need to recruit students and support teachers is not a novel realization, yet attempts to address these issues have often yielded insufficient results. The two issues of student recruitment and teacher support still remain issues of paramount importance. We still need to ask: how do we ensure that teachers receive the appreciation and support they need and how do we guarantee that students gravitate to French classes in spite of scheduling constraints, competition from other languages, and Francophobia?

Although French and France have experienced challenges over the past few years, our students are steadfast in their loyalty. They share our love for French culture and language, and their parents appreciate our efforts on behalf of their children. It then follows that engaging students and parents in a partnership to further the cause of the promotion of French is a natural process. Harnessing this positive energy by installing a "Friends of French" Club in every school, will take the classroom into the community and bring the community into the classroom, thus developing grass roots support for French.

The proposed "Friends of French" Club will not overburden an already overworked teacher. It may simply consist in revamping a French Club already in existence by inviting non-traditional individuals to become active members. In addition to the teacher-advisor and students who usually make up French Clubs, the "Friends of French" Club will comprise friendly parent representatives, a guidance counselor, a school administrator, teachers and students from other disciplines, and retired teachers. The Club as a whole will meet twice a year. The first meeting will serve as the forum for familiarizing everyone with the goals of learning French and assigning various roles and responsibilities to each member. The second gathering will enable the group to review the year's activities and plan for the future.

Naturally, roles will be assigned according to each member's talents, resources, and inclinations. For example, counselors, better informed about the relevance of French because of their participation in the Club, will be more effective recruiters of students of French. Members of the community will serve as resources for soliciting funding and support for field trips and other

cultural activities. As for parents, their role will be of the utmost importance since they will handle all publicity. They are our biggest allies because they have a vested interest in our efforts. They want to ensure the success of their children and feel tremendous pride in seeing their children's names in print. Furthermore, as taxpayers, they have a voice in decision-making, both in the school community and the community at large. Not only can they help the teacher in extending the classroom activities into the community, but they can also ensure that these activities are always in the public eye.

The following are suggestions to help teachers in their recruitment initiatives:

- 1. Go public!**
Let parents, administrators, and the community know what you are doing in your French classes. We know you are doing great work. Let the community see it.
- 2. Bring a Buddy!**
Have students invite non-French students to a French activity. The word will get out that French is so much fun. They will sign up.
- 3. Tell a Story!**
Have older students read fairy tales in French at the local library during story hour. Kids love looking at the pictures, hearing French, and they understand most of it. It does work!
- 4. Publish a Newspaper!**
Use the newspaper format to address diversity in your classroom and teach the curriculum. Subsequently, distribute copies to parents, administrators, school board members.
- 5. Dance at the Mall!**
Your students' ballet teacher will be delighted to advertise her business by having her students perform at the mall. Have a student explain the French words to the audience.
- 6. Bike to the Park!**
A favorite club activity can be a *Tour du Parc* where students and their families play *boules* and enjoy a *déjeuner sur l'herbe*.
- 7. Deck the Museums!**
Display student work in the town museum, local shop windows, banks.
- 8. Feature the Student of the Month!**
Display the photo of a student and his accomplishments on the Hall of Fame Wall in your school. Have an article published in the newspaper and send a congratulatory letter to the parents.
- 9. Celebrate Success!**
Hold an awards ceremony for the winners of the *Grand Concours*. Invite your Mayor, Representative, and Senator.

10. Name an Advocate!

Honor a member of the community by naming him or her a friend of French.

We cannot hope to recruit students and achieve instructional goals if we fail to support teachers. The following are examples of what the Cultural Service of the French Embassy, the AATF, the *Alliance française*, and others can do in support of teachers:

1. Provide Materials!

Make available for teachers recent popular song CD's, films, posters. They are desperate for such materials.

2. Sponsor a Major Event!

Teachers need support in organizing a cultural event such as a concert, film, *guignol*. It will help them generate enthusiasm among their students.

3. Reward Effort and Excellence!

Sponsor a teacher to attend a conference. Provide free association membership to teachers whose students perform exceptionally well on the *Grand Concours*.

4. Hold Immersion Weekends!

Most teachers of French feel isolated, they need to polish their French, but do not have the resources to go to a Francophone venue. Provide immersion weekends.

5. Provide Scholarships!

Provide scholarships for study in Canada and the Caribbean. Travel expenses are often less costly than going to France. Additionally, what is learned in this part of the hemisphere may be useful in attracting a different type of student.

6. Help Teach the Curriculum!

Teachers would like workshops that target what they have to teach. They would like to take back with them tips on how to teach Advanced Placement courses, how to connect textbooks to Standards, and so on.

The above suggestions are not exhaustive, just as the creation of a "Friends of French" Club is not a panacea for the challenges teachers face. It does, however, encourage teachers to adopt a proactive stance and tap the many local resources at hand. The creation of a "Friend of French" Club is a winning proposition. It may not turn the tide of discouragement around, but it will certainly stop it from engulfing us. *En avant, chers collègues! L'avenir est à nous!* (The author has taught high school French for 18 years and university French for 13 years. She is also a teacher trainer.)

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