

# **Collaborative Inquiry: Developing French Language in the LLC**

by Andrea Hunter-Mogg & Kristine Canas

“[T]he purpose of the British Columbia school system is to enable learners to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy society and prosperous and sustainable economy” (Province of British Columbia, 2022).

Schooling through a pandemic has left an unquantifiable sense of loss. The loss of physical and mental health is evident, the extent of student learning loss can be debated, but what was not anticipated was the profound loss of professional identity. Working under the model of school library learning commons (SLLC) meant inquiry-based learning, flexible environments and hands on tools was the norm - all of that halted with the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic in March of 2020.

Across Canada school libraries went through various forms of closure to accommodate health and safety protocols. Some were closed completely with the teacher-librarian (TL) being redeployed as a classroom teacher (CT), some accommodating cohorts of select students and others engaged in mobile traveling collections (Freibauer, 2020). Regardless of how school districts decided to deploy TLs in schools, what was evident was with every new COVID-19 surge TLs were being pulled farther back along the continuum of our pedagogical and professional autonomy. Most prominently the importance of TLs in the physical SLLC and our standards of practice as outlined by Canadian School Libraries (Canadian School Libraries (CSL), 2020). This paper will explore the collaborative experience between TL, CT, Principal/Vice Principal (PVP), and school community over the 2021/2022 school year, with the aim to lead learning forward while reinforcing the necessity of the TL's role in future ready schools.

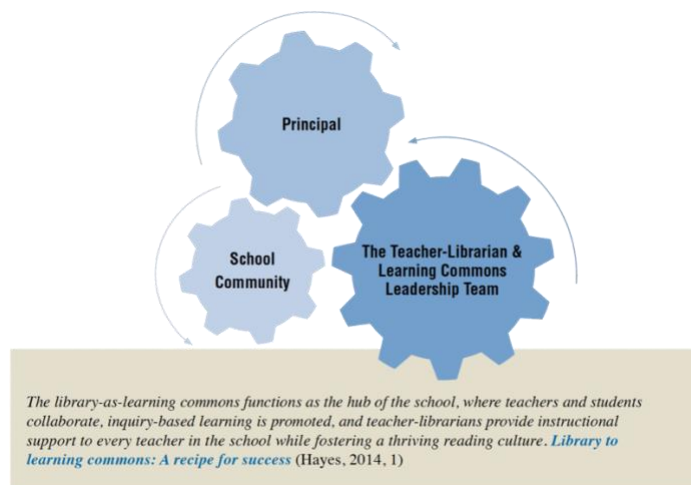
## **School Story**

Each year in British Columbia, schools and districts are required to report their progress towards the Ministry of Education's Framework for Enhancing Student Learning. This framework is not simply a mechanism for instructional and fiscal accountability, but also the ministry's vision of student success: “to develop in students a sense of self-worth and personal initiative; to develop an appreciation of the fine arts and an understanding of cultural heritage; to develop an understanding of the importance of physical health and well-being; to develop a sense of social responsibility, acceptance and respect for the ideas and beliefs of others” (Province of British Columbia, 2022).

Within this reporting cycle each school undergoes a deep dive inquiry to assess what is going on for our learner using the “Spirals of Inquiry” (Kaser & Halbert, 2017). Inquiry teams are interested in four foundational questions:

1. Can you name two people in this setting who believe you will be a success?
2. What are you learning and why is it important?
3. How is it going with your learning?
4. What are your next steps?

In the article “Library Learning Commons: Recipe for Success” (Hayes, 2014), the author describes how TLs can no longer afford to maintain the status quo, we need to make ourselves indispensable. By nature, TLs have their fingers on the pulse of the school and are generally in communications with all stakeholders in the school community, positioning ourselves as partners in leading with our administrations that can create foundational change in policy and practice. Coming back to in-person learning taking on a role in our “School Story Team” (TL, CT, PVPs) felt more important than ever. A full scan and capture of the voices of our students hadn’t been undertaken and we needed a data set to ensure we were meeting them where they were most needed.



Hayes (2014)

Navigating this leadership role can be tricky; developing a trusting relationship with the teaching staff would be integral to teasing out the evidence required to move student and professional learning forward. Inevitably exposing evidence in relation to student attitudes and abilities will no doubt make CTs vulnerable, and interpretations of that evidence will have implications of practice (Timperley, 2010). As insecure as we may be about the learning loss of our students or social-emotional connections that have been broken, we wouldn’t understand fully what is happening with our learners without a mindset shift towards having evidence-informed conversations. What trends are we perpetuating in student outcomes by asking the same questions the same way each year? “Effectiveness is dependent on context; these students, these teachers, this school” (Timperley, 2010).

## Context and Process

### School:

James Gilmore Elementary is a mid-size, dual-track, K-7 elementary school in SD38 Richmond, British Columbia.

### Survey:

- Using the survey App Socrative students will be asked five questions
- Students will be invited to the LLC to complete survey as it is a neutral space
- CTs will not participate in administration of survey to eliminate possible bias towards pleasing teacher or encouraging more desirable answers
- Survey is designed to allow for primary (k-3) and intermediate (4-7) participation
- Survey conducted by division using the anonymous login feature to comply with BC FOIPA regulations

### Questionnaire:

- Three true/false
  - I feel cared about by other kids at school?
  - I feel cared about by adults at school?
  - People are kind to me at school?
- One multiple choice
  - What are you most interested in (students could choose multiple types of subjects they may be interested in (i.e. Soccer, Outdoor play, crafts, games, etc.))
- One short answer
  - What are you learning how to do? (for primary short answers were scribed)

### Results:

Three themes emerged from our scan that shaped our school inquiry focus for this year: How does a focus on connections and the core competencies help us communicate our thinking and understanding ourselves as learners?

## **BELONGING:**

### **DO YOU FEEL THAT STUDENTS AND ADULTS CARE ABOUT YOU AT SCHOOL?**



We have noticed significant increase in the number of students who feel they are cared for at school since an initial scan in 2019/2020. We recognize there are still students who don't feel this way, and so, we will continue to build relationships through:  
- 1:1 check-ins, using students' names when greeting them, creating opportunities to connect in class and through clubs

## PERSONAL IDENTITY & PASSIONS:

### WHAT ARE YOU MOST INTERESTED IN?



In addition to digital gaming, a large majority of students are interested in:

- arts and crafts
- animals
- sports
- drawing
- reading

This data provides a starting point for us to reflect on how we can integrate student interests in their learning experiences. How might weaving in student interests impact their sense of belonging and confidence in developing capacities and skills?

## DEVELOPING CAPACITIES & SKILLS:

### WHAT ARE YOU LEARNING TO DO?

"I'm learning to think deeper and try new things. I am also trying to be confident because when the teacher asks me questions they usually don't hear me."

"We are learning how to be creative in writing, beams and that everyone is different."

"sharing with friends."


"We are learning how to find core competencies behaviours in our everyday lives."

"setting SMART goals and how to use base ten blocks."

### Innovation Grant

"The Innovation Grants have opened up new opportunities for schools to rethink and reshape their SLLCs. They have increased educator involvement, collaboration, and professional dialogue; they have empowered teacher-librarians to initiate change and take risks; they have redefined the dialogue about libraries and learning in our schools" (Rubio, 2020, p.12). Innovation Inquiry Grants (IIG), (School District 38 Richmond, (2022), are small funding allocations, roughly \$2,000, with the central purpose of enhancing student learning by supporting, collaborative teams, professional inquiry, pedagogical practice, and integration of digital tools.

Our team thought applying for an IIG under the context of Library Learning Commons would give us opportunity to take advantage of two bilingual teaching leads (TL and CT), technology and multimodal learning materials, and flexible learning environments. Although the creation of dynamic physical space is very important this inquiry project was more focused on how the space facilitates an increase in student core and curricular competencies rather than space design in and of itself. These funds allowed our team to purchase maker materials and supplies, professional learning materials, and release time to collaborate and develop learning plans.

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|                                                                              | <b>Scanning; Focusing; Developing a Hunch; Professional Learning; Taking Action; Checking</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Inquiry Scanning and Focus</b>                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| What we learned from listening to our students when scanning:                                                                                                 | <p>Limited opportunities to engage with ADST content, language and tools restricts student confidence when asked to explore and express learning in creative ways. Through informal observations, conversations and reviewing student reflections, our team recognized that students lacked vocabulary and descriptive language to effectively articulate their thinking. What's more, when given the opportunity to use more creative methods to communicate their learning (podcasts, poetry, minitures...) students struggled to express themselves in non-conventional ways.</p> <p>Anecdotes collected in the LLC 2020/2021:<br/>         "I didn't even know [spheres] could do that, or existed"<br/>         "You'll let us do that on purpose?"<br/>         "I'm no good at this type of stuff"<br/>         "Epic fail and I haven't even started"<br/>         "How is this learning?"</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Our focus is (inquiry question):                                                                                                                              | Will co-teaching opportunities in the Library Learning Commons increase student collaboration and confidence to express their learning in innovative ways?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Inquiry Learning, Actions and Checking</b>                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Describe which area of the Leading Learning Standards this grant will address</b>                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| What intended actions will you take to enhance student learning and professional learning?                                                                    | <p>Designing Learning Environments to Support Participatory Learning<br/>         Creativity and Innovation: Learning experiences are developed to engage learners in creative expression and communication. Focusing our learning on this leading learning standard will also allow us to incorporate SD38 Strategic Plan Priority 1 Inspired Learners. Our project aims to put into action the following goals and objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Learners have increased capacity to adapt and thrive in an ever-changing world (provide tools, technologies and practices to increase learner engagement and agency and support and increase the use of inquiry-based activities and processes to enhance and personalize learning).</li> <li>-Indigenous Peoples' history, perspectives, and learning approaches are embedded within district planning and practices (deepen understanding of and embed the First Peoples' Principles of Learning, increase access to authentic learning opportunities and resources to enhance understanding of Indigenous Peoples culture and history).</li> </ul> <p>Based on scanning Kristine Canas' class, we identified that students express difficulty communicating their thoughts. The inability to provide a full explanation to deep thinking questions was the catalyst to our project. Through ADST hands-on learning, accompanied by contextual French vocabulary and expressions, our project will concentrate on improving spoken and written output through collaboration, innovation and creativity. The use of the LLC will allow students to understand how skills are transferable from one space to another and allow them to engage in the designing process to advocate their needs to better participate in their learning.</p> <p>Using Culturally Responsive Pedagogy we will focus on three Maker activities that will be taught over the period of this grant:<br/>         Textiles, Mixed Media and 3D design/printing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Direct instruction: of content vocabulary/expressions (The importance of the student-teacher relationship)</li> <li>-Guided Inquiry: Collaborative work-creation (learning circles)</li> <li>-Gallery exposition (Peer mentoring provided socio-emotional and academic support through shared narrative)</li> <li>-Formative assessment posts and Core Competency Reflection</li> </ul> |
| How will you know if you are making a difference for student learning?<br>How will you collect that evidence?<br>Post on this Padlet as you collect evidence. | <p><b>ePortfolio</b><br/>         Student formative assessment posts will show an increase in variety of creative expression both in product, process, reflection and modes of communication.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Which Core Competencies will be addressed in the learning and actions of this innovation grant?                                                               | <p><b>Communication:</b><br/> <u>Communicating:</u> acquiring and presenting information<br/> <u>Collaborating:</u> working collectively</p> <p><b>Thinking:</b><br/> <u>Creative Thinking:</u> creating and innovating<br/> <u>Critical and Reflective Thinking:</u> Designing and developing</p> <p><b>Personal and Social:</b><br/> <u>Personal Awareness and Responsibility:</u> Self-advocating<br/> <u>Positive Personal and Cultural Identity:</u> identifying personal strengths and abilities<br/> <u>Social Awareness and Responsibility:</u> Building relationships</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| How does this grant connect to FPPL and OECD principles of learning?                                                                                          | <p>Grounding our learning in culturally responsive pedagogy (FPPL: learning involves patience and time and learning requires exploration of one's identity) we aim to assess project success by tallying student engagement and observe an increase creative expression (OECD-PL: learner at the Centre: The learning environment recognizes the learners as its core participants, encourages their active engagement and develops in them an understanding of their own activity as learners).<br/>         Collaborative Co-teaching in cross-curricular partnership (OECD-PL: Building Horizontal Connections: the learning environment strongly promotes horizontal connectedness across areas of knowledge and subjects as well as to the community and the wider world) will develop a stronger connection between school population and the LLC and between TL as teaching partner and school staff.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

## Scanning

Why did we do this scanning? What did we learn about our learners?

While our students' interest was a major factor in our scanning process, learning about their French-language level was of equal importance. This additional component allowed us to better assess our learners, especially those who were slowly transitioning from virtual learning, where exposure to the French language may have been limited.

To further our scanning, we used the DART, "A performance-based reading assessment, designed in British Columbia, by cohorts of British Columbia educators, in response to teachers' questions about how best to use assessment information to guide their reading instruction" (Brownlie, 2022).

In the past, a different version of the French DART was created however, in the spring of 2020, while working closely with a previous administrator and the District French Consultant, a pilot project was created that included a resource that would be accessible to different interests and needs of all students. This tool focuses on reading comprehension, including pre-reading inferences and post-reading reflections, followed by a short oral assessment.

After assessing our data, we concluded that many students struggled to orally communicate their thinking. Those who demonstrated exceptional knowledge and understanding of the text also lacked the necessary vocabulary and language structures to describe their opinions. Despite different "academic" abilities in our intermediate class, low communication skills were a common denominator. Compiling this information allowed us to focus on a common goal towards increasing oral communication and interactions.

## Focusing & Hunch

Will co-teaching opportunities in the LLC increase participatory learning, student collaboration and confidence to express learning in innovative ways?



Canadian School Libraries (CSL), 2020

We purposed that widening student’s depth of learning environments to include the SLLC space during TL collaborative time and flex hours will break the barrier of student perception that language learning only occurs in the classroom. Having access to an immersive physical and virtual environment of the SLLC (material resources as well as a fully bilingual TL) were resources that could only enhance our proposition.

An inquiry-based approach to learning a second language has allowed students to “construct context, develop positive attitudes toward learning, and engage in authentic conversation with peers” (Towns & Sweetland, 2008). When students are given the opportunity to be immersed in activities that relieve the pressure to perform, and conversely the reliance on ‘showing off’ the use of vocabulary out of context, students can actively engage and experiment with language. Students who were consistently reluctant to show their learning can find success and engagement when working in collaborative peer groups. Not only do students build confidence with newly acquired academic language, they are developing and co-creating personally relevant connections between academic content and how it can authentical apply to their day-to-day interactions with peers. This personal relevance, in an L2 immersion environment, is a huge hurdle in inspiring learners to intrinsically shift their mindset in nonformal communication.

How does an inclusive Makerspace environment help develop transferable language acquisition skills?

The English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum (Province of British Columbia, 2019b), provides more opportunities to engage in meaningful conversations where students can develop their identity and point of views. In contrast, the French Immersion curriculum focuses mainly on knowledge of the language and literary structures that do not mirror the oral communication opportunities in ELA.

#### English Language Arts K-9 – Big Ideas

| Grade |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 4-5   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Language and text can be a source of creativity and joy. (Grades 4-9)</li> <li>Using language in creative and playful ways helps us understand how language works. (Grades 3-5)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exploring stories and other texts helps us understand ourselves and make connections to others and to the world. (Grades 4-9)</li> <li>Texts can be understood from different perspectives.</li> </ul>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Questioning what we hear, read, and view contributes to our ability to be educated and engaged citizens. (Grades 4-9)</li> </ul> |
| 6-7   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Language and text can be a source of creativity and joy. (Grades 4-9)</li> <li>Developing our understanding of how language works allows us to use it purposefully.</li> </ul>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exploring stories and other texts helps us understand ourselves and make connections to others and to the world. (Grades 4-9)</li> <li>Exploring and sharing multiple perspectives extends our thinking.</li> </ul> |                                                                                                                                                                         |

Province of British Columbia, 2019b

In efforts to enhance engagement amongst students and the development of different communication skills, the curricular goals of ELA allow students to deepen their reasoning and oral expression if we apply the French language to this context.

According to the French curriculum (Province of British Columbia, 2019c), the big idea focused on fluency, “Fluency in a language facilitates our interactions with others” ceases in grade 2. Afterwards, a majority of the curriculum is based on the form of the

language and text and set of “rules” that distinguish one language from another. What we should note is that fluency and acquisition of language should not be placed secondary to content, but indeed should go hand in hand. If we now focus heavily on acquiring knowledge, it will explain why students comprehend more than they can communicate in French. Therefore, continuing to focus on oral production is essential to developing skills in areas of reading and writing.

## **New Learning**

The Neurolinguistic Approach to learning a second language was developed by Claude Germain and Joan Netten, who both had a goal to improve the Core French (CF) and Late French Immersion (LFI) Programs in Central and Eastern Canada (Germain & Netten, 2012). Much of their research and progress has been based on Michel Paradis’ Neurolinguistic Theory of Bilingualism (Paradis, 2004). Throughout our research, we pondered why this approach was not also applied to a French Immersion context. After further reading, the idea of attaining fluency was based on the number of hours learning in the French language. Since both CF and LFI programs tend to have less hours of instruction in French, this theory would certainly change the dynamics and culture to learning the language. In contrast, Early French Immersion programs require more hours of instruction in French. If this is the case, why do many students continue to apply incorrect language structures and lack the confidence to speak French amongst their peers, especially in a non-academic setting?

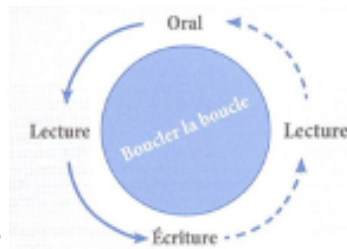
Traditionally, French has been taught as a subject where students acquire knowledge about the language instead of learning how to apply the language to different contextual settings. In other words, the presence of authentic engagement and communication in the classroom setting has either been absent or minimal. If students are not able to unconsciously develop their “internal grammar”, learning about the language will not help students become “functionally bilingual” or fluent. Such acquisition is attained through, “re-use of limited number of structures in authentic communication with sufficient frequency that the brain is able to detect underlying regularities and develop neuronal connections, or pathways, which are recorded by the students’ procedural memory and thus permit the students to engage in spontaneous communication” (Paradis, 2004; Ellis, 2011).

This is the main reason why the Neurolinguistic Approach is applicable in a makerspace environment. When students are given the proper language and sentence structures that they can repeatedly apply to context, they are developing skills that are not necessarily constricted to the four walls of a classroom. In fact, such language applications allow students to engage in different ways and communicate with each other, thus engaging in real life situations that are authentic to each student. It is accessible to all, and thinking is visible all throughout the process. According to Michel Paradis, “Cognitive neuroscience has shown the complexity of the involvement of different centers in the brain, such as those related to motivation, when authentic communication takes place. For effective language acquisition, the implication of these centers is required” (Paradis, 2004). When students are engaged, they are more



inclined and motivated to learn. If educators provided more opportunities where students felt a connection to their interests and strengths, we would see more engagement in our classrooms.

To achieve oral communication in all aspects of learning, Germain and Netten (2012) demonstrate success using the following literary cycle:



Germain & Netten, 2012

As seen in this image, oral communication starts and concludes the literary cycle. At each stage of the process, five basic principles also need to be considered:

1. Creating of implicit competence- acquisition of an internal grammar;
2. Primacy of oral development – use of literacy-based pedagogy;
3. Focus on meaning rather than form – use of a project-based pedagogy;
4. Social interactions;
5. Pedagogy that is project-based

(Germain & Netten, 2012)

Developing an internal grammar is dependent on how frequently a language is applied. As the process of acquiring a language involves making mistakes and learning how to apply proper sentence structures, explicit correction is necessary. One example is the incorrect use of the verb *aller* and *avoir* in the past tense (*passé composé*). Although students are aware, they continue to say “j’ai allé.e” instead of “je suis allé.é” or “j’ai a” instead of “j’ai eu...”. Over time, improper use of the language becomes fossilized and difficult to reverse. If appropriate feedback and correction is not given, it is certain little progress is made towards language acquisition and fluency. According to Roy Lyster, correcting shouldn’t be a question, but rather how we correct mistakes (Lyster 2016). Therefore, the Neurolinguistic Approach supports explicit correction because it allows learners to contextualize meaning, which in essence is the basis for oral development. (Germain & Netten 2012).

### **Taking Action & Checking**

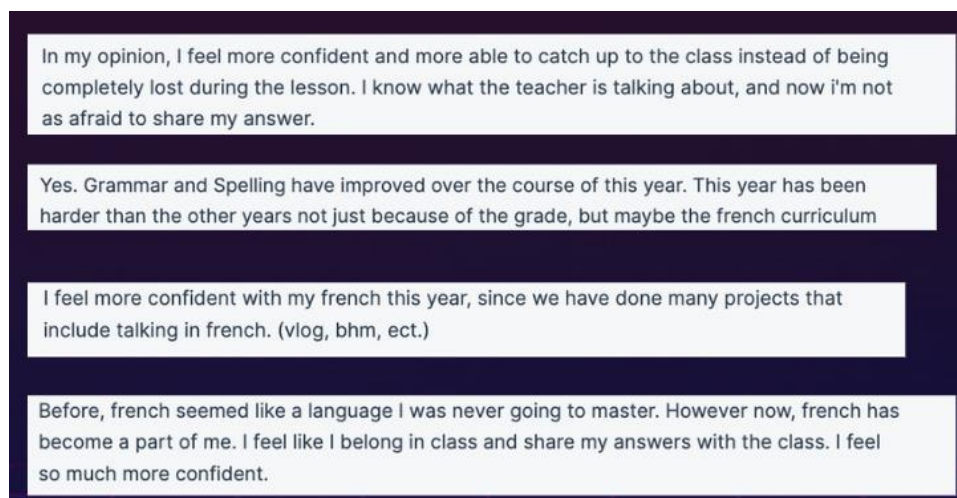
The integration of technological applications and tools has been essential to the development of our students’ oral and written communication skills. As demonstrated by a grade five student during the 2021-2022 academic year, we have witnessed mastery of different technological tools, and improvement in her French oral language output. Contextualizing specific language structures and utilizing various technologies has given all students the ability to be autonomous and creative agents in the learning

process. Our students demonstrated a greater desire to communicate in French because of the positive environments established to create different projects. The opportunity to collaborate in the SLLC provided students with a non-traditional setting to take more risks and enjoy language learning. As referenced in the Neurolinguistic Approach, “When it comes to real and authentic message, the limbic system is activated, thereby increasing the motivation to communicate” (Germain & Massé, 2018).

Initially, the process to motivate students to speak French was not as fast coming. There is always a fear of not being able to speak well or not developing a “French accent”. However, once students were given the opportunity to make mistakes and receive feedback in a judgement-free environment, we witnessed many students leave their comfort zone and put more effort to apply new and different language structures in their everyday conversations. The more we delved into different concepts, the more students realized that language learning is in fact complex, especially in French.

The following image displays student responses gathered from our end of the year survey regarding different projects and activities completed over the academic year. As stated, many students improved their self-confidence and their French-speaking abilities. These sample responses validate the importance of choice, engagement and collaboration. Hands-on and practical learning would not be easily integrated into an institutional setting without the space of the SLLC.

Therefore, the combination of a non-conventional classroom, coupled with collaborative blocks in the SLLC were both essential in achieving French oral communication amongst students and teachers. When we broke down those walls that have been hindering optimal student learning, we are able to witness the growth of different learners who demonstrated their strengths in various ways that would not have been possible otherwise in a traditional classroom setting. Confidence is achieved when educators give opportunities for students to build, play, and display their achievements.



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