

David Thompson Secondary - Technology in the FSL Classroom

Teaching French as a second language at the eighth level requires that one is always looking for new ways to engage students. Games, grammar exercises, authentic documents, art projects ... we try all the tricks to introduce students to the language in an interesting way so that they want to learn and they want to try to speak it. Communication is the goal ... but how to find a way to model the language to the students that fascinates them and leads them to write and speak it too?

Hazel Lising, a French as a Second Language teacher at David Thompson Secondary School in Vancouver, decided this school year to introduce technology to her eighth grade classes to see what she could add to language teaching and learning. Hazel applied for a "Classroom-Based Solution" from SET-BC and, after discussion with a SET-BC consultant, chose to use iPads to add to the variety of activities that she could offer her students. Having already witnessed the effect of technology as a tool in the resource room, she believed that they could also benefit students learning language.

Hazel had not used the iPad much before this project. With the SET-BC consultant, she chose Pictello to start her endeavor because of the authentic French voices that are available within this particular application. (Pictello offers many authentic voices including Arabic, Greek, Dutch, Italian, Finnish among many others.). First, Hazel had to become competent with the app and think of a project where her students could try it without the risk of too many technical complications. Fortunately, Pictello also offers two modes for book creation: Wizard and Expert. At the beginning of the project, after having taught adjectives and descriptions of people to her students, Hazel asked them to create a first book that would describe a friend: What is his name? What color are his eyes? His hair? What his personality like? With Pictello, students could choose if they wanted to listen to a French voice read their descriptive efforts or if they wanted to record their own voices making an attempt with a new language.

Teaching a language and the new application at the same time were not an easy task ... but one the students quickly overcame. Having succeeded with the first effort, Hazel attempted a more complicated project: Describe a French speaking country and explain how to make a national dish. Geography, food vocabulary in the same book. The iPads served as a research tool and dictionary and, as with the last project, they used Pictello to produce their books. Once again, success! Do they want to use iPads for other projects, the teacher asked? "Of course!" is the only answer.

Here are some of Hazel's comments on the project:

"As teachers, we are often introduced to new ideas and technologies, but without the basic skills and devices, they usually remain unexplored. For this very reason, I am so grateful to Charlotte Friend and SET-BC for the opportunity to bring iPads into my French 8 classroom.

Charlotte's guidance and mentorship have helped bring my technological knowledge into the 21st century and given me the confidence to try out my newfound skills in the classroom. Together, we created French-language storybooks (Pictello) exploring the world of "la francophonie" and food preparation. The students loved being able to learn hands-on, using technology and showcasing their projects. A good percentage of our students do not own personal devices and this in-school experience gave them the opportunity to use technology that they might not have otherwise had.

Not only did this project enhance student learning in both official languages (Core French), but it also allowed them to see their teacher as a lifelong learner – in each class students happily assistance me and each other in navigating the technology. “

By making advances with technology in her language classes, Hazel has learned a lot. The iPad can motivate students, can offer new ways to create a variety of activities, can revitalize teaching. Hazel has already planned to try other projects with Pictello: a treasure hunt where the teacher writes the text of the Pictello book and students must look for the location of the object in the school grounds and add a photo; also the students will present “A Tour of the Neighbourhood” or “A Tour of the School” or “A Tour of Vancouver”. Hazel is still excited by the possibilities and has, at this point, only used one single app with very positive results. She will try other applications later but for now there is so much she can do with Pictello and the students are so enthusiastic.

What impact does a single application have in a French second language classroom? Apparently, a good deal. Continue le bon travail, Hazel!