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APPLYING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE
INTERACTION IN A FRENCH III CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative action research study examined the observed and reported experiences when eighteen high school students in a French III class applied communication strategies in a cooperative learning setting. Throughout the study, communicative strategies, such as circumlocution, were modeled and emphasized frequently. Data from the study suggests that communicative strategy instruction may help students become more independent and proficient in maintaining communication in the target language. The role of the students' native language, English, was also investigated in this study. While English was sometimes beneficial for clarification, prohibiting English was motivating and enjoyable for the participants. Finally, the data from the study also suggests that a collaborative classroom can help students develop positive relationships as they help and rely on each other.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
LIST OF TABLES	x
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
RESEARCHER STANCE	1
LITERATURE REVIEW	7
Introduction	7
Cooperative Learning	8
Pair Work	11
Group Work	12
Classroom Management	13
Communication Strategies	16
Modeling	17
Native Language Use	18
Circumlocution	19
Communicative Activities	20
Role Playing	21
Interviews and Conversations	22
Information Gap Activities	22

Problem Solving	23
Summary	24
METHODOLOGY	26
Setting and Participants	26
Procedure	27
Data Collection	30
Field Log	31
Student Work	32
Student Surveys and Interviews	33
Trustworthiness	34
MY STORY	37
A Dysfunctional Family	37
Initial Survey	42
Circumlocution – a First Attempt	46
A Pleasant Surprise	50
English vs. French	52
An Overbearing Real Estate Agent	55
Role plays: Play for Some, Work for Others	58
Describing Places	61
No English Allowed	64

Another Try at Circumlocution.....	68
Martinique Poems	73
Open-ended Survey Questions	76
Small Group Interviews	81
Conversation Circle	85
Project Presentations	90
Communicative Crossword Puzzles.....	92
Small Group Interviews: Round 2.....	99
Inside/Outside Circles: Talking About the Weekend.....	107
Performance Role Plays.....	110
Add-on Stories.....	111
Circumlocution with Random English Words.....	113
Final Open-ended Survey Questions.....	119
Final Survey.....	122
Back to the Beginning	123
DATA ANALYSIS	127
FINDINGS	135
NEXT STEPS	157
RESOURCES	160
APPENDIXES	164

Appendix A – Survey	164
Appendix B – Interview Questions	165
Appendix C – Open-ended Survey # 1	166
Appendix D – Open-ended Survey # 2	167
Appendix E – Principal Consent Letter	168
Appendix F – Parent/Student Consent Letter	169

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Results from Initial Survey in September	43
Table 2. Student responses during circumlocution activity	49
Table 3. Results from Final Survey in December	122
Table 4. Comparison of September and December Surveys	129

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Martinique poem example # 1	76
Figure 2. Martinique poem example # 2	77
Figure 3. Communicative Crossword Puzzle # 1	97
Figure 4. Communicative Crossword Puzzle # 2	98
Figure 5. Examples of add-on stories	114
Figure 6. Coded Bins	133
Figure 7. Theme Statements	134

RESEARCHER STANCE

Ever since I was a child, I have been fascinated with words. I loved to read at a young age and began regularly writing short stories even before starting kindergarten. I have always considered language to be the most complex form of art. The idea that we have so many words and infinite possibilities of how to use these words as tools to express ourselves is overwhelmingly amazing to me. In high school, French became my favorite subject. I loved learning new vocabulary and even enjoyed grammar, which I found always came easily to me. It was not until much later in my life that I realized that there was not much interaction in a lot of my middle school and high school French classes. Now I know that interaction is a key component to providing a purpose to language learning. Without interaction, I was gaining important tools but was often not using them.

In college, I found an even deeper appreciation for French as it moved beyond being just a fun subject that was easy for me and became challenging in a good way. My French teacher in college had an incredible way of making her instruction accessible but challenging at the same time. She spoke exclusively in French, which was new and exciting for me, but anxiety-inducing for many of my classmates. I went into college planning on being a lawyer, but as I met with my advisor at the end of freshman year, I was told I

would not have room in my schedule to continue taking French classes, and I couldn't bear the thought of stopping. I realized that I wasn't ever going to be ready to stop learning French. French language and literature had always been the constant enjoyment throughout my education, and I couldn't believe that I hadn't realized sooner that I was meant to be a French teacher. I relinquished my dream of becoming a lawyer but embraced another way to empower people to use words like an art form to communicate and, at times, to argue the case of the importance of world languages in the curriculum.

As a college student, I also worked for a pharmaceutical company that needed bilingual speakers to handle questions and problems with products from French-speaking Canadian consumers. Doing so provided a great opportunity for me, and I got to meet and interact with coworkers who were from various Francophone countries. I credit this job with greatly enhancing my communication skills. I was no longer in an artificial classroom setting or even traveling where one can often get by with a decent knowledge of vocabulary and certain memorized phrases and questions. I was now confronted with people with real concerns and problems and had to think quickly to communicate effectively. I will never forget my first French call that I received at that job. I had trouble understanding the woman on the phone, and she angrily demanded to speak to someone who could

understand French better than me. I was humiliated as I went up to my manager and told him what was happening. I immediately questioned what I was thinking to have taken this job. Was I an impostor? I was the only French speaking employee there who was not a native speaker. How did I really think that I was going to do this? In addition to becoming accustomed to the Canadian accent and expressions, which were quite different from the French that I had heard from my French teachers who were either American or from France, the trouble was that up until that point, I had only really spoken French in classes and never had the immediate pressing need to communicate for real purposes. As for the job, my manager assured me afterwards that the woman was extremely difficult to understand, even for him, a native French speaker. Thankfully, that first communication was my worst, and things did get better.

As a French teacher now, although I have limitations of being in a somewhat artificial setting and my students might not feel the same sense of urgency to communicate as I did when I had a job that depended on it, I still believe that I can create meaningful opportunities for communication. My primary goal for my students is effective communication, and I believe that developing communication skills in French will help strengthen their critical thinking and communication skills even in their native language. I hope that

many of my students will someday be able to use French in an authentic setting with a native French speaker. However, I am realistic enough to know that this will not happen for some of my students. Even if they cannot travel, at least at this point in their lives, I believe that learning a new language gives them a whole other palette that they can use to express themselves. There are certain words and ideas that I just think can be better expressed in French. Therefore, I want to at least motivate them to view the language as another tool to communicate, even if for now it is just with each other.

Like many language teachers, I have had my share of frustration with encouraging students to communicate in the target language. When engaging in speaking or writing in French, my students often think of what they want to say in English and then try to mentally translate it in French no matter how much I try to discourage it. If they don't know how to say something, they often immediately revert to English, ask how to say it, or simply give up and do not try to communicate that thought. Sometimes I wish I had a nickel for every time a student said, "How do you say...in French?" I never know the best way to handle this. I don't want to stifle creativity or curiosity. However, I also don't want them to rely on me or a dictionary or English too much because the reality is if they are in France one

day and need help, I probably won't be there to tell them how to say what they want to say. I notice that students have great difficulty coming up with different ways to say the same thing. Many of the times when students ask, "How do you say,.." or get frustrated that they cannot say something, they don't realize until I prompt them that they actually do know enough vocabulary that they could say something else that means the same thing. I want to encourage students to use what they know to communicate and to have the confidence to realize that they do know enough to be able to communicate most things.

The research question for my study is: What are the observed and reported experiences when students use communication strategies in a cooperative setting? I am very interested in communication strategies because many students neglect to use them, which supports the need for explicit modeling and practice to encourage students to use all tools available to them. I would like to examine ways to help students maintain communication in the target language as well as examine the role of native language in their interactions. While I certainly believe that the target language should be used as much as possible, I want to determine if and when the native language can be beneficial.

Based on past experiences, I expect to encounter obstacles along the way during this study. Students' personalities may play an important role in this study. Shy students may be reluctant to speak in groups, especially with classmates whom they do not know well. I also may have students who dominate too much in pairs or groups. There is also always the potential for off-task discourse and behavior during cooperative learning activities. I think that a key component for success will be to develop activities that are motivating, personally relevant, and encourage some level of dependency on peers. I hope that by making students more aware of their own thinking and by encouraging them to take a collaborative approach to maintaining meaningful communication, they will gain confidence and be willing to take risks using the language.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Effective communication in the target language is one of the most important objectives of foreign language educators. However, traditional classroom structures are often not conducive to maximizing opportunities for communication. While communication has long been a central goal in foreign language education, it has changed in recent decades. Instead of just focusing on communication regarding the four communicative modes, listening, reading, writing, and speaking, now the emphasis has been placed on purpose and context of the communication (Cutshall, 2012). Allowing many opportunities for students to collaborate with their peers and modeling communication strategies that students can use in pairs and groups are key components to making communicative goals meaningful and attainable.

When implemented properly, cooperative learning can be a powerful tool to enhance students' communicative competence. In contrast to traditional approaches that often focus on learning grammar and vocabulary in isolation, a communicative classroom setting provides a meaningful context for students to develop their language skills (Omaggio Hadley, 2001). Explicit teaching and application of communication strategies are also crucial components to successful cooperative learning in the foreign language classroom. As Boufoy-Bastick (2001) states, "Empowerment is realized by the learner's metacognition of what

content and ability he or she has and how these can be used to enhance his or her own learning” (p. 3). By designing a classroom atmosphere that maximizes meaningful opportunities to communicate and by providing scaffolding as well as encouraging support from fellow students, language teachers can help their students develop the critical thinking skills necessary to build confidence and become independent and effective communicators.

Cooperative Learning

Studies have shown that when students work in an atmosphere of cooperative learning rather than an atmosphere with competitive or individualistic goals, students cultivate more positive relationships with their peers, which is very important for adolescents (Roseth, Johnson, & Johnson, 2008). Classroom discourse patterns have traditionally been teacher-centered with the teacher posing questions, a student answering, and the teacher responding (Alley, 2005). Group and partner work allow much more talk time for each student and put more responsibility on students to initiate and continue conversations. High-level thinking skills naturally arise during group work because through interaction, students encounter “problems, issues, and questions they would not have come upon on their own” (Myers, 2000, p. 18). Furthermore, research shows that group work is beneficial to foreign language learners since they are more likely to express their own opinions and ideas as well as construct meaning in a group setting (Alley, 2005).

In world language classes in particular, methods of teaching have been changing dramatically in recent decades. More traditional methods include a heavy emphasis on grammar, memorization of isolated vocabulary and rules, frequent use of the native language, and more value placed on individual accuracy instead of communicative competence. However, the movement towards communicative language classrooms has been gaining strength. According to Krashen (2003), mechanical structures such as grammar do not need to be explicitly taught as they will naturally be acquired through comprehensible input, which occurs when learners understand what they hear or read. Communicative competence, a person's ability to communicate effectively, is complex and includes components such as vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and use of strategies to avoid communication breakdown (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound design (Burke, 2007) is one philosophy that provides guidance to educators seeking to enhance communicative competence in their classrooms. Some key elements of the design are allowing abundant opportunities for students to make their own discoveries, giving students a sense of responsibility for their own learning, collaborating to help others learn and to accomplish common goals, and developing a safe atmosphere in which students can take risks. In the specific context of foreign language learning, the Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound design emphasizes interaction and use of the target language as much as possible, even with beginners. Important parts of

the teacher's role in this design are to equip students with communicative strategies and design activities that reflect real world scenarios and when possible integrate cultural aspects to make communication as meaningful as possible for the students.

Similar to the Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound design, Constructivist Foreign Language (CFL) teaching also encourages teachers to provide students with opportunities to make discoveries and construct their own knowledge (Boufooy-Bastick, 2001). The two major goals of CFL are “enculturation,” in which learners experience the values of the target culture through integration of culture and language, and “empowerment,” which refers to the learner becoming independent and extending learning beyond the current classroom. In implementing CFL, it is imperative for the teacher to carefully design lessons that integrate these two goals as well as ensure that students will be able to be successful.

Social interdependence theory, the idea that results for each individual are determined not only by their own actions but also by the actions of the other participants, is a major philosophy behind cooperative learning. However, design and execution of cooperative learning activities is important because social interdependence can be positive or negative, as the actions of each individual may advance or hinder the common goals for the pair or group (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Therefore, the teacher must consider many factors in order to make

cooperative learning successful including creating clear objectives, determining size of the groups and how groups will be chosen, clearly defining expectations, promoting positive social interdependence, providing guidance, and collecting data to make appropriate interventions (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

According to a study that focused on the effects of various instructional methods on students at two different high schools, students reported collaboration and discourse as the most enjoyable parts of school. The study also found that students were more engaged during collaborative activities, and this engagement led to an overall increase in motivation (Johnson, 2008). These findings are important to language teachers who often face students who are unmotivated because they do not see an immediate relevance to using the language in their own lives. Even if students will not be using the target language abroad immediately, teachers can still make an effort to increase motivation by encouraging communication among classmates and making tasks as authentic and engaging as possible.

Pair work. Pair work may be the most reflective of a real world scenario because when a student speaks to a native speaker in the future, it will most often be with one person at a time. Pair work also offers the advantage of providing the maximum amount of participation time. Teacher-dominated discourse allows for minimal verbal participation. Work in a small group of four students allows for much more talking time. Pair work, however, ideally allows for each student to

be speaking for half the time. When planning pair work, it is important for the teacher to consider how pairs are chosen or if students choose their own pairs. Swenson and Strough (2008) determined that neither gender nor level of friendship had a significant impact during pair work. However, the study did determine that while there was little impact between friend pairs and non-friend pairs, performance was diminished in pairs who had conflicts with each other or did not get along.

Small group work. Work in small groups can also be very beneficial in a classroom geared towards communicative competence. While small group work may not allow for as much speaking time for each student as pair work, it does have the added benefit of additional perspectives. In a study that examined the effects of different classroom strategies in high schools, researchers found that group work made up a small fraction of students' time in school compared to other strategies. This study also showed that students reported higher engagement, enjoyment, and motivation with group activities compared to other activities, such as lectures or videos (Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider, & Shernoff, 2003).

A common belief that is not always best is that all groups must have the same number of students. It may be more advantageous to differ group sizes according to student needs. As Rance-Roney (2010) suggests, for example, "a group of reticent students may be capped at three to force all to speak, while a larger group of six dominant students will receive valuable practice at social turn-

taking (p. 21). However, Johnson and Johnson (2009) do warn that accountability is important, and larger group sizes can make students feel less important to the group and therefore decrease each individual's contributions to the group, potentially leading to passiveness or off-task behavior.

Teachers must also decide whether to use student-selected groups or teacher-selected groups. While allowing students to choose can give them a certain level of comfort with each other, teacher-selected grouping allows them to interact with more members of the class and gain different perspectives. Kagan (2009) also states that because allowing students to select their groups can lead to behavior problems and reinforcement of cliques, it is best for teachers to strategically choose groups. According to Rance-Roney (2010), "Choosing group membership requires much artistry, as it demands sensitivity to cultural contexts, to individual personalities in the class, and to the variety of skill levels" (p. 22).

Classroom management. Many teachers avoid using cooperative learning because of potential problems, such as off-task behavior. Teachers' perceived obstacles to cooperative learning often lead to excluding students who have behavioral issues, such as hyperactivity (Zentall, Kuester, & Craig, 2011). Research shows that the climate of the classroom has a significant connection to students' perceived abilities, and if students feel that they have a climate in which they are supported, they will have a more positive view of their abilities (Hardré, Crowson, Debacker, & White, 2007). The concern regarding the environment not

only lies with students potentially becoming unruly or noisy during group work, but also with ensuring that all students are participating. A common problem, especially with small groups, is that certain students dominate while others remain inactive. Both dominant and passive behavior during group work can be results of personality, ability level, or social issues with the other group members. When groups are heterogeneous based on proficiency level, one advantage is that students can help each other. However, this type of grouping may lead the higher proficiency students to dominate the conversation, leaving little practice opportunity for students who may need it most (Rance-Roney, 2010). Kagan (2009) contends that heterogeneous groups are preferable because they are more likely to promote students helping each other, which can actually make management easier for the teacher, and heterogeneous groups create diversity of gender, ethnicity, and background. Homogeneous grouping based on proficiency, can be advantageous because it often allows more equitable opportunities for participation. In terms of grouping based on personality, some researchers believe that heterogeneous grouping promotes acceptance of others (Mitchell, Reilly, Bramwell, Solnosky & Lilly, 2004). However, Rance-Roney (2010) argues that homogeneous grouping based on personality can be beneficial because “active students are grouped together to fight it out, allowing reticent learners to interact more casually” (p. 23)

Johnson and Johnson (2009) define three different types of interaction that can take place in cooperative learning groups. Promotive interaction is ideal. In this type of interaction, students encourage and respect each other and work well together to achieve common group goals. However, two problems that teachers must try to avoid are oppositional interaction and no interaction. Oppositional interaction occurs when students are actually working against each other and inhibiting other group members from making progress in achieving goals. No interaction can occur when students resist working together. This does not necessarily mean that students are not doing work. It often means that the group members ignore each other, work individually, and focus on their own individual efforts. In order to encourage promotive interaction, Johnson and Johnson (2009) urge teachers to explicitly teach and model social skills that are necessary for students to help each other achieve common goals.

In order to be successful, a cooperative learning lesson must be well planned with clear goals and expectations, as well as teacher scaffolding. A key component to achieving goals in cooperative learning is a shared responsibility between the students and the teacher. According to Rance-Roney (2010), "The importance of learner interaction in acquiring a second language has made the teacher-directed student-centered classroom the standard for effective instruction, in print if not in practice" (p. 20). In this type of classroom, the students do most of the talking and are encouraged to make their own

discoveries, but the teacher also plays a crucial role as a facilitator and provides support by teaching students strategies to maximize efficiency of communication during group work. As Alley (2005) suggests, while teacher-centered instruction is sometimes necessary and valuable, group work allows for many more opportunities for output in the target language, increases motivation, and results in more individual attention for each student.

In order to successfully implement cooperative learning, teachers must be prepared to relinquish traditional patterns of classroom discourse. A main obstacle to student participation is that teachers often do too much of the talking in class (Moguel, 2004). While teacher talk is certainly appropriate and necessary for certain goals, such as imparting information, conveying goals and expectations, and modeling strategies, it is crucial to find a balance that allows as many opportunities as possible for students to communicate.

Communication Strategies

The communication strategies that students learn in a foreign language class will be potentially even more valuable than the vocabulary and grammar that they learn. When a student actually encounters a native speaker, he or she will have to use a variety of communication strategies. Communication strategies encourage higher-level thinking because students need to determine how they will use the knowledge and strategies that they have, even if they are limited, to

communicate their thoughts or ideas. According to a study (Naughton, 2006) in which students were trained to use various communicative strategies including paraphrasing and asking questions for clarification, it was determined that when communication breakdown occurred, students were aware of the problem and frequently used repair strategies. Communication skills involve not only output in the form of speaking and writing. Active listening is just as crucial to meaningful communication. Farrell and Mallard (2006) conducted a study focusing on students' use of receptive strategies during information-gap activities and found that students use strategies such as asking questions, making relevant statements or utterances, or even sometimes faking comprehension in order to continue a conversation. Through this same study, the conductors determined that the type and frequency of the receptive strategies used correlated to the task and the proficiency of the participants and often indicated when participants took active or passive roles in the communication.

Modeling strategies. Communication strategies may not come naturally to most students, and therefore need to be explicitly taught and modeled. According to Naughton (2006), who studied the effects of students' interaction before and after the students were explicitly taught communication strategies, "The institutional nature of classroom discourse bestows upon the teacher a privileged position, which he or she can use in order to shape patterns of interaction in an attempt to maximize the creation and exploitation of learning

opportunities” (p. 179). Communication strategies show students that they have options other than immediately reverting to the native language.

Native language use. The role of the native language in second language acquisition has been a much debated topic. Some proponents of the communicative approach insist that the key to increasing proficiency is keeping instruction in the target language and finding ways to make the language comprehensible, even to beginners. According to Cutshall (2012), “Staying in the target language the majority – if not all- of the time is critical to creating an environment where communication can take place” (p. 36).

Native language use may seem like the enemy to maximizing communication in the target language. However, the native language can also be seen as another tool that students can use in some instances during cooperative learning. While many teachers tend to encourage speaking in the target language during group work and view speaking in the native language as off-task, native language speaking can actually be beneficial as long as it is related to the task (Alley, 2005). For example, students might use the native language to clarify directions with each other or discuss the meaning of a word. According to Myers (2000), “The L1 is not to be feared in the L2 classroom. Indeed it may be constructively manipulated in certain contexts to encourage learning” (p. 11). First year French students in one particular study all used English for various task-related reasons, including to confirm that they had understood the task and to

discuss grammatical structures (Myers, 2000). Metacognitive talk, which includes talking about the task, and meta-talk, which is students talking about their own discourse, is often necessary and is almost always done in the students' native language (Alley, 2005). Based on the research, it seems that using the native language for a portion of the group work is likely to help students become more productive when they then use the target language for the task and may actually result in more target language output as students can gain confidence by getting clarification in their native language.

Circumlocution strategies. Students have a natural tendency to want to revert to their native language when they are trying to produce in the target language, whether it is through writing or speaking. Circumlocution is a strategy in which students use paraphrasing to describe something in a different way. It is particularly useful if students do not know a certain word or phrase.

Circumlocution allows them to keep their communication in the target language and still communicate their information or idea. Many students do not fully understand how valuable circumlocution is as a skill, and it is recommended that circumlocution in speaking and writing is explicitly taught. The ability to effectively paraphrase in the target language often can reveal the difference between a beginner and more advanced level of proficiency (Omaggio Hadley, 2001).

Explicit teaching and modeling of strategies such as circumlocution can help students avoid frustration when trying to communicate. Teaching these strategies shows students that although they may not be fluent yet in the language, they have other tools that they can use to communicate. Circumlocution also encourages students to think in the language and is ultimately more valuable and will help them be more easily understood than strategies that beginners often use like trying to translate ideas word for word, which often does not produce the best results (Omaggio Hadley, 2001).

Communicative Activities

There are many different types of communicative activities that can be used in a language classroom. Some examples of communicative activities are role playing, interviews, information gap activities, and problem-solving scenarios. When selecting activities, it is helpful to keep the activities as relevant and interesting to students' lives as possible. When planning which types of communicative activities to use, teachers must also consider appropriateness of the task to age and ability level as well as the objectives of the activity.

Communication in the foreign language classroom can take place in different forms. One way to classify different modes of communication is distinguishing them as interpersonal, interpretive, or presentational (Cutshall, 2012). Interpersonal is often the most common form used in a communicative classroom. Interpersonal communication involves individuals making meaning.

An example would be students having a conversation. Another important element of interpersonal communication is that it should be spontaneous rather than contrived or scripted. Interpretive communication involves interpretation of written or spoken language, especially in cultural contexts. An example of the interpretive mode would be students listening to and interpreting a speech by the French president. The presentational mode involves students conveying information or ideas to others. Students might present their ideas through writing or speaking (Cutshall, 2012).

Role playing. Role plays have many advantages in the foreign language classroom. They can be implemented with students of virtually any level. Teachers can also incorporate culture through role plays to add another dimension (Omaggio Hadley, 2001). One disadvantage of role plays is that they often represent an artificial situation. However, they are useful particularly with social situations, such as going to a restaurant or a store, and they are often fun for students. According to Lightbown and Spada (2006), role-playing is beneficial because it allows students to “practice a range of sociolinguistic and functional features of language” (p. 113).

Role playing can also be a way for students to build confidence using the target language. According to Even (2008), through integrating drama in the foreign language classroom, “the ordinary classroom becomes the platform for students to develop their own voices, invent and shape their own personae, take

clear stances, and adopt their own attitudes in and towards given situations, always in interaction with others” (p. 162). Even (2008) also suggests that role play activities can be used to make literature more interesting and to teach grammar in context.

Interviews and conversations. Interviews are a common type of communicative activity that can serve many purposes, including helping students get to know each other. The most beneficial type of interviews are those in which each person does not know what the responses of the other person or people will be (Cutshall, 2012). When the interview or discussion is as spontaneous as possible, it is more reflective of reality. This combats the common problem of lack of motivation that students may face when confronted with contrived activities.

Information gap activities. Information gap activities are typically done with pairs of students. In information gap activities, one person has information that the other person needs and vice versa. Therefore, each member must communicate the information through speaking and listening. Information gap activities relate to Social Interdependence Theory (Roseth, Johnson, & Johnson, 2008), which is based on the idea that the actions of each person in the group will impact whether or not the rest of the members will reach a common goal. The theory promotes positive interaction between group members because students

must work together to contribute to the group rather than compete with the other members.

The nature of an information gap activity often increases motivation to understand each other because understanding and communicating effectively is crucial to completing the task. This intense need to understand is in contrast to some other types of communicative activities, such as interviews, where students can ask and answer questions without truly depending on understanding the other person or people. One study (Farrell & Mallard, 2006) was conducted in which pairs of French students were grouped homogeneously based on ability level and given cards with pictures. Each partner had different cards that the other partner could not see, and they had to come up with a story based on the pictures. The study determined that during this information-gap activity, the participants used frequent strategies to clarify and try to continue the conversation. Information gap activities increase motivation and camaraderie because each participant is relying on the other partner or group members and in turn has increased accountability knowing that the partner or group members are relying on him or her. Johnson and Johnson (2009) state, “Failing oneself is bad, but failing others as well as oneself is worse” (p. 369).

Problem-solving scenarios. Using communication strategies to convey a message when one has limited vocabulary in a second language is in itself a form of problem solving. Problem-solving scenarios are useful to encourage

communication because students have a common goal. Students help each other reach higher level thinking skills because being exposed to views other than their own causes them to rethink their own views, which often leads them to a solution. Students have also shown to use higher level reasoning when working with peers compared to working individually (Kagan & Kagan, 2009).

Problem or task-based communicative activities can often incorporate authentic materials and a context that reflects the target culture. Authentic materials can include maps, advertisements, menus, and websites in the target language. However, when using authentic materials, teachers must be careful because these materials are meant for use by native speakers and may not always be appropriate for the students' level of proficiency (Omaggio Hadley 2001). Problem-solving activities are most engaging for students when they are either related to their own lives or are realistic.

Summary

Cooperative learning is a valuable way to increase proficiency in foreign language classes, particularly in the areas of speaking and listening. When communication strategies are modeled and practiced, students can maintain communication in the target language with less frustration and less reliance on the native language (Naughton, 2006). In addition to enhancing communication skills, cooperative learning can also help build relationships between peers and lead to a more positive, collaborative classroom community (Myers, 2000).

The reason that most students give for why they are taking a foreign language class is that they want to be able to communicate effectively in the language, especially with native speakers (Cutshall, 2012). If the end goal for students is communication, it is the responsibility of educators to work towards that goal and provide opportunities for communication in the classroom that will reflect real world situations as much as possible (Boufooy-Bastick, 2001). While grammar and vocabulary are important components of effective communication, they must be applied in a meaningful context. By restructuring the traditional classroom setting to maximize students' opportunities for collaboration and by arming students with useful communication strategies, world language teachers can foster motivation, confidence, and skills that will help improve students' communicative competence.

METHODOLOGY

Setting and Participants

I teach French at a rural high school in eastern Pennsylvania. Approximately 1,800 students in grades nine through twelve attend the high school. Approximately 99 percent of the students graduate from high school, and approximately 88 percent of students attend a post-secondary institution. The school does not have a great deal of ethnic diversity. The majority of the students are Caucasian. At the high school level, students can choose between French, Spanish, German, and Latin. I am the only French teacher at the high school, which means that I have many students for four consecutive years. The students have nine class periods each day. Each French class is forty-two minutes long and meets every day for the entire year.

The participants in this study are students in a French III class. There are 18 students in the class: 13 girls and 5 boys. Two of the students are seniors, two of the students are sophomores, and the rest of the students are juniors. The students range in age from 15 to 17 years old. Fifteen of the students are Caucasian, and three of the students are Hispanic. Nine of the participants are members of the French Club for which I am the advisor. Seven of the participants will be going on a field trip to Quebec City with me

next summer. At my high school, there is no option for French III students to choose Honors, so there is a wide range of abilities in French III. The students in this class are cooperative, but they are also very quiet and it is sometimes difficult to get them to participate, especially during whole group instruction.

Procedure

Throughout the study, students will participate in activities related to the three units that will take place over the 10 week time period. These activities will integrate the strategies of circumlocution, questioning for clarification, repeating, and giving examples and detailed descriptions.

Weeks 1-4 - Home and Neighborhood Unit:

- Role play using "Situation Cards" – Each pair gets a card with roles for Student A and Student B. They read the situation and speak in French as long as they can regarding the situation. For example, one student may have the role of a guest while the other person is playing a host welcoming the other person.
- Information gap drawing activity – Each student describes a bedroom to his or her partner using as much detail as possible, as the partner draws based on the description. This activity reviews furniture

vocabulary as well as directional vocabulary, which is also included in this unit.

- Small group picture rotation – Groups of three or four students work together to write descriptions of magazine pictures that relate to home vocabulary. They are encouraged to include adjectives and location words in their descriptions.
- Circumlocution activity – Students write a description in French of a given vocabulary word and have the class guess the word.
- House search activity – Students will use guiding questions to establish criteria that they would be looking for in an ideal house. With a partner, they will then search actual French real estate ads to choose a house and explain their choice.

Weeks 5-9: Martinique Unit

- Describing places – Students will work in pairs to describe a chosen place as the class guesses.
- Asking questions to guess places – Students will ask questions to get information from their classmates in order to identify places.
- Martinique poem – In groups of three or four, students will write a poem about Martinique based on following given prompts.

- Communicative crossword puzzles – Each student in the pair receives a different crossword puzzle than his or her partner. First, each student receives a blank crossword puzzle with no clues and a separate piece of paper with the corresponding answer key. The student must write clues for his or her partner. The clues may not contain English. They can be a paraphrased description, drawing, or fill in the blank clue. When they are finished writing the clues, students switch crossword puzzles and complete the partner’s puzzle.
- “No English” discussion circle – The entire class arranges their desks in a circle. Each student receives an index card with a discussion question. The first student asks his or her question and calls on another student who answers the question and then asks his or her own question. In order to facilitate circumlocution skills, English is forbidden during this activity. Students may ask the person who asked the question to repeat or may say “Je ne comprends pas” (“I don’t understand”) if they must. At that point, they receive help, still in the target language, from me or their classmates.

Weeks 10-12: “What a Day!” Unit

- Role play – Students will choose from four scenarios and act out a scene based on that situation.

- Weekend activities interview– Students will interview their classmates about what activities they did over the weekend.
- Performance Role Plays – Students will work in pairs to prepare and present a brief role play based on a given situation.
- Add-on stories – Students will work in groups of four. Each person in the group will receive a different picture. Each student begins writing a story in past tense based on the picture. After a few minutes, students rotate their pictures, read what the previous person has written and add on to the story until the next rotation. Eventually, all students in the group have contributed to each story. Then, students choose their favorite of the four stories to share with the class.

Data Collection

Maintaining accurate data through several different sources, protecting the participants, and avoiding researcher biases are all precautions that I used to ensure the reliability of the study. I gathered my data through recording observations and reflections in my field log, collecting and analyzing samples of student work, surveying students, and conducting formal and informal interviews. I collected data as often as possible and kept it in chronological order in a binder. I analyzed this data in order to find recurring themes as well as negative cases.

Field log. Throughout the study, I kept a detailed field log to record student observations. In this field log, I documented my observations of what I saw and heard in the classroom as well as my interpretations and reflections on those observations. Student observations are one of the most important types of data because they allow the researcher to see more than they might see on paper. The observational data was particularly important to my study because there was heavy emphasis on students' speaking and interactions with their classmates. Observational data is perhaps the most difficult to collect. Therefore, I often took as many notes as I could during the observation and then wrote a more detailed description as soon as possible after the observation. According to Hendricks (2009), observational data "can help decide why an intervention was successful or unsuccessful and how the context of the setting impacted the study" (p. 82). Although it was sometimes challenging to collect data while teaching and answering students' questions, recording my observations gave me clearer data about students' engagement and attitudes towards the lessons. Writing quotes from students proved to be very significant as subtleties in their language, especially the use of figurative language, often gave clues to reveal student attitudes.

Student work. Samples of student work also served as valuable sources of data for my study. I examined students' writing samples to determine whether they were using the strategies that I was modeling in class, such as paraphrasing and creatively using the language. Some examples of student work that I collected were written dialogues, answers to interview questions, collaborative writing assignments, and activities that focused on circumlocution strategies such as a crossword puzzle in which they had to write clues in French for their partners. Although the study focused on cooperative learning, I found it valuable to collect not only group or pair writing assignments but also individual writing assignments because it allowed me to check whether each individual was applying the strategies that he or she had been practicing with groups or pairs. For example, at the end of the study, I collected an assignment from each student in which they used circumlocution to write descriptions of given words. This student work helped me see how well students were able to use this skill independently by the end of the study.

While writing samples were easy to gather as tangible data, speaking with each other in the target language was also important student work that occurred during the study, and I recorded this using observations as well as transcripts of discourse during communicative activities. According to Rex

and Shiller (2009), transcripts of classroom conversations serve as a “tool we use to capture, relive, and re-see complex interactions between people” (p. 10). Unlike just listening to conversations, transcripts can be re-read and analyzed to make meaning.

Student surveys and interviews. I gave the students the same survey at the beginning and the end of the study (Appendix A). The survey focused on their attitudes towards pair and group work compared to individual and whole class work. It also included an emphasis on how students use communication strategies when interacting. I chose to give the same survey at the beginning and end of the study so I would be able to track changes in attitudes and perceived abilities. I also conducted student interviews in order to get specific feedback during the study regarding students’ feelings about certain activities or strategies (Appendix B). For example, when we did an activity in which students were not permitted to speak English, I interviewed some students soon after to obtain statements about the level of challenge. I followed the advice of Burnaford, Fischer, and Hobson (2001), who encourage teacher researchers to conduct interviews as a conversation rather than a set of questions and answers and to prepare for unexpected answers in interviews and surveys. In addition to formal and informal oral interviews, I also gave the students two surveys (one in the

middle and one at the end of the study) in which I asked them to write open-ended responses to questions (Appendices C & D). For all surveys and open-ended responses, I told students not to write their names, which encouraged them to answer the questions completely and truthfully. Student interviews and surveys served not only as important sources of data for my study, but also to show students that their opinions and input are truly valued and are being used to promote positive changes.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is crucial when it comes to the validity and credibility of the study results and also the protection of its participants. I followed certain procedures to maintain trustworthiness of the results. First, I got my study approved by the Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB). Next, I obtained permission from my principal as well as the students' parents (Appendices E & F). When ensuring the trustworthiness of the researcher, the human aspect is just as important as establishing credibility of data. It is very important to ensure that the participants are well informed about the study and understand that they will be protected and that their participation will be confidential (Hendricks, 2009). I explained to students and parents that all information about the students that would be included in my study would be anonymous. Students were

assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities. Students and parents were also assured that they could choose not to participate and that they could withdraw participation at any time without penalty.

Another aspect of trustworthiness is avoiding potential researcher bias. As a teacher, it is crucial to avoid intimidating students or influencing them with one's own opinion, which can affect results (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, (2005). In order to avoid intimidation during student interviews, for example, I was careful to listen to students and not ask leading questions. I was biased in thinking that teaching students communication strategies would enhance their time working with pairs and lead to less off-task behavior. However, I remained open-minded to the possibility that the study could have very different results than I expect. I was also biased because I enjoy working in groups and communicating with others and sometimes assume that most other people also enjoy this type of interaction in the classroom when in fact, many students have anxiety about working in pairs or groups, especially with students whom they may not know well. Another way that I avoided potential bias was to engage in negative case analysis, a process through which I examined parts of the study that seemed to be discrepant from other findings.

Accuracy of the results is an important part of trustworthiness. In order to ensure that the results of the study were as accurate as possible, I kept detailed records of all data collected in the study. I recorded observational data as it was happening or as soon as possible after the observation in order to remember as many details as possible. Providing as many details as possible makes it easier for other educators to determine if the outcomes would be similar in their own classrooms (Hendricks, 2009). One important way to establish credibility is triangulation, a technique in which the researcher uses data from at least three sources. For my study, I used data from my observations in the form of my field log, samples of student work, and student input from surveys and interviews to ensure that I was gathering data from several different sources, each of which was critical to my analysis of the study.

MY STORY

A dysfunctional family

I have the fortunate experience of being the only French teacher at my high school, which means that my students and I have consistency and I have many of my students for four years. Over the past five years, one of the best parts of this set-up has been that by the time students reach the upper levels, even by level II in some cases, they are truly like a family. It is not uncommon for students to cry on their last day of French class in senior year. Several have even experienced an “It’s just not the same!” mini-crisis when they go on to take French in college. French is the constant part of their high school career. They have the same teacher and same classmates each year, and we spend enough time together to develop a comfortable, friendly, and supportive atmosphere.

Unfortunately, I have not yet been able to achieve a family-like community in my 4th period French III class. Overall, this is a quiet class, and there are not many outgoing personalities. While that may sound like a dream to some teachers, it can be a nightmare in a class in which communication is the primary goal. Despite the fact that these students are generally on the quiet side, they seem to get along well with their fellow classmates and are generally cooperative and willing to participate, even

though if I ask questions during whole group instruction, it can sometimes become painful to coerce them to speak. There is a great variety in level of proficiency. I have some students who are able to communicate relatively easily in French and who feel confident using the language and taking risks and being creative with the language, while others are very hesitant to communicate in French.

When I told them about my action research study, they had almost no reaction. Some smiled, especially when I told them that I would be making up fake names for them that only I would know. Even when I asked if they had any questions, they remained silent. I am not sure what their lack of reaction means, but I thought it was a little unusual. However, true to form, all of the students dutifully handed their permission slips in within a few days.

Before I start the story of our journey, I find it useful to give a brief description of each of the members of our somewhat dysfunctional family: Elaine – an athletic girl with a positive attitude. She is respectful and nice to everyone. She takes school seriously but still likes to laugh and have fun. Amber – I still haven't figured her out. She does not make much effort to participate in class. Sometimes she does not complete assignments and even

sometimes leaves test questions or entire sections blank. Other times, she puts forth more effort and does well for a few months.

Becky – She is pleasant but quiet and is one of the only students who prefers working alone instead of working with a partner or group.

Aaron – Although he struggles with writing and traditional tests, he makes an effort to participate frequently in class and seems stronger in his ability to comprehend reading and listening than his ability to produce output in the form of speaking and writing.

Angela – a very quiet but friendly girl who is absent frequently. Although quiet, she does raise her hand to participate and ask questions.

Monica – gets distracted easily during group or pair work; frequently misses assignments and has trouble with writing. She has on a few occasions asked me for extensions on assignments due to problems at home. She has never elaborated on these problems, but she has at times had extended absences.

Nathan – an easygoing, kind football player who does not have a lot of close friends in the class but is happy to work with any other students.

Darren – a French prodigy who wants to major in the subject in college. He is obsessed with the French Revolution and *Les Misérables*. With a background in theater, Darren often likes to use French to say funny or nonsensical things. Although he has a sense of humor, he also takes academics very seriously.

Vincent – a shy, serious boy who thinks French is easy and is a very good writer. Although he is quiet, he is very willing to work with anyone in the class.

Evelyn – a perfectionist who gets good grades, but does not seem to allow herself to be creative or have much fun with the language. She gets frustrated because her best friend in the class, Mary, is often off-task during partner work.

Yvonne – a delightfully positive young lady who gets along well with other students but sometimes gets frustrated when others don't participate or are unable to communicate effectively.

Sharon – a shy girl who genuinely enjoys French. She is usually smiling and is a creative writer.

Kim – Although she is a member of drama club and also regularly delivers the morning announcements to the entire school via a newscast style television show, she is anything but outgoing in French class. She gets along with the other students, but rarely participates when the whole class is together and gets very nervous when she has to speak French.

Mary – a sarcastic girl who, although not shy speaking English with her fellow students, is uncomfortable speaking French, even though she is really

very good at it. Her insecurities sometimes manifest themselves in a negative attitude.

Veronica – another shy, quiet girl who doesn't like a lot of the other kids at school and who often feels uncomfortable working with different people. She obviously enjoys French, as evidenced by the fact that she frequently wears T-shirts with French writing. She also gets very nervous whenever we have a test, even though she always does well.

John – polite and always smiling, John does not always complete homework. His writing is also not the best. However, in class, he shines as he always works hard to keep his communications in French and avoids taking the easier route and using English.

Ronda – a very talented artist who truly cares about others. She has made me Christmas cards for the last few years in which she writes about how much she enjoys French class. I also frequently see her conversing with other students (often in French) at the beginning or end of class, many times offering encouragement or advice or simply asking about their days or weekends.

Sasha – gets off task easily during group or pair work, whether through socializing or her obsession with her cell phone. She avoids speaking French.

She has a tendency to roll her eyes often and seems to think that it is not cool to speak French in class.

It pains me to say that I just had a hard time coming up with a different description for each one of these students, even though I have had most of them for more than two years. Despite my efforts to cultivate a warm atmosphere, this particular group has managed to stay somewhat disconnected to me and to each other. Was I crazy to think that I could get these students, some of whom barely speak at all, to embrace a collaborative spirit? I was about to find out.

Initial survey

In order to gauge students' attitudes at the beginning of the study, I gave them a survey (Appendix A) that included statements about group work and their ability to communicate in French. I asked students to leave their name off the survey so that they could be honest about their responses. The survey consisted of 12 agree/disagree statements (with 4 choices: strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree) and space at the end for comments.

Here are the results from the statements:

Table 1

Results from Initial Survey in September

Survey Statement	SA	A	D	SD
I enjoy working with a group or partner during class activities.	11	6	1	0
I feel confident speaking French in a small group or with a partner.	3	13	2	0
I feel confident expressing my thoughts and opinions through writing in French.	4	9	4	1
I usually feel comfortable working with my classmates, even if I do not choose my group.	4	10	3	1
I often get frustrated when I am trying to speak or write and cannot remember or do not know how to express something.	1	8	5	3
If I don't know how to say or write something in French, I often use strategies such as using synonyms or descriptions to express my ideas.	2	14	2	0
During group work, I often engage in off-task talking.	0	9	8	1
During group work, I get frustrated because other group members engage in off-task talking.	2	3	9	3
I use English often during group or partner activities.	0	11	6	1
I use French most of the time during group or partner activities.	1	11	3	1
I often find it necessary/helpful to use English during group activities to clarify directions or meanings.	4	13	1	0
During group or partner work, one or two people often do most of the talking or work.	0	5	12	1

I was surprised at how consistent the results of the survey seemed. Most of the statements had a clear majority in one area. The vast majority of students reported that they enjoy group and pair work and that they feel confident speaking French with small groups or pairs. I was surprised to see that most students felt comfortable with people even if they did not get to choose their own group. A majority of students reported that they often get frustrated if they do not know how to express something. However, a majority also reported using strategies such as using synonyms or describing things in different ways to get around that problem.

The results were split in half for people saying that they often engage in off-task talking and people saying that they do not. However, a majority of people stated that they do not get frustrated by others' off-task talking, so apparently it is usually mutual! Most students reported using English sometimes especially for clarification but using French most of the time. A majority of students also seem to think that the amount of talking and work done in groups is usually divided evenly among the group members. I do wonder if students might have had some motivation to be dishonest even without including their names. I wonder if they were scared to admit to off-task or negative behavior in groups for fear that I will do less group work in the future or impose tougher restrictions on them.

As for the comments portion, I got some interesting feedback. I found it very surprising that many students said that they find writing in French easier than speaking in French. I had assumed that writing was more difficult because of issues like spelling and organization while I think of speaking as more casual. In writing, the mistakes are there on the paper. In speaking, mistakes are often not as noticeable because communication can often still occur and the conversation moves on. While the majority of comments about group work were positive, some students reported difficulty focusing. One said that it is easier to focus when we are together as a class. One student also wrote about the fact that her partner is almost always off-task but she would feel bad if she told her she did not want to be her partner because they are friends.

Although most comments were positive, it was hard not to take some comments personally. One student said that we should do different things because whenever we do group work the activities are “mostly the same every time”. This really bothered me, and I did take it personally. I consider creativity one of my strengths as a teacher, and I am always trying to provide variety so that students do not feel like we are always doing the same type of thing. Students commented that their classmates are all nice and some even said that they prefer having groups chosen because they get to work with

other people. Overall, most people said that working in groups or pairs helps them because it makes them feel more comfortable and confident communicating in French. One student stated, "I think my ability to communicate in French is pretty good. I often almost say phrases in French without thinking about it and then stop myself because that person wouldn't understand me." This was, of course, music to my ears. I was surprised and pleased by students' reported level of confidence using French.

I was also surprised by how willing they are for the most part to work with anyone in the class and feel comfortable. I thought for sure that most of them would say that they only felt comfortable choosing their groups. The one person who said that he or she does not enjoy group activities reported not knowing who to pair up with when choosing groups or partners as well as worry and frustration over not using correct grammar or not knowing how to say some things. Hopefully I can help students who feel this way focus more on the goal of communication rather than complete mechanical accuracy.

Circumlocution – a first attempt

Before embarking on cooperative learning activities, I decided that I wanted to see how strong students were individually with using circumlocution, a skill that will be crucial for them for their future

communications with partners or groups. It is the lack of circumlocution ability that often causes communication to breakdown. A key to maintaining communication in the target language will be for students to problem solve and decide how they will use the limited vocabulary they have in order to express themselves. I gave each student a random word that they had learned in French I, II, or III and told them to write a description of the word in French. I told them that they could include clues, synonyms or antonyms, or a definition of the word in French. I also told them that they could not act the word out because using only words to communicate was part of the challenge of this activity. I assured them that it was okay if their description sounded a little awkward because their main goal was communication. To motivate the students, I told them that this was a realistic situation that they might encounter if they are ever traveling in a French-speaking country and either cannot think of a word or did not yet learn the word. I told them the story of when I was at a restaurant in Paris and got water without ice. I really wanted ice but could not think of the word for ice cubes, so I asked for "the things that make your drink cold." Sure, it sounded a little awkward, but the waiter appreciated my efforts, understood exactly what I meant, and I got what I wanted. I also told them that we all must do this sometimes even in

English if we forget a word, to which Mary exclaimed, “I don’t ever do that.” Maybe this would be more difficult than I thought.

As I walked around while students started writing their descriptions, some raised their hands and said, “I don’t know how I would describe this.” I had to find a way to help them without doing the work for them. John had the word for “eyes.” To me, many things came to mind of how to describe them. But then again, I paraphrase for a living! I told him in English, “You could tell what they do, like look and see. Or tell what colors they can be. Or you could even say that they need glasses sometimes.” John looked satisfied and said, “Oh... Okay!” and started writing. I didn’t know if I did the right thing here. I helped him, but I still did most of the thinking, which is in direct contrast to the goal of my study. I would need to find a way to encourage them to do this type of thinking and making connections on their own. Maybe I was right. Maybe they needed this kind of think-aloud for a while in order to start thinking that way themselves? I was already confused!

I must note that as I tell our story, I have included direct quotes from students, which at times contain grammatical errors with their French. Here are some of the descriptions that students wrote and read to the class:

Table 2

Student responses during circumlocution activity

Student	Given word	Description	Meaning
Ronda	billet (ticket)	"C'est une petite feuille de papier. C'est nécessaire pour voyager en avion ou en bus."	It's a little piece of paper that you need to travel by plane or bus.
Veronica	cadeau (gift)	"Tu achètes pour ton ami pour Noel."	You buy for your friend for Christmas.
Amber	gourmand (someone who loves to eat)	"J'adore faim."	I love hunger.
Kim	imperméable (raincoat)	"Tu portes quand il pleut"	You wear when it rains
Aaron	timide (shy)	"contraire de 'parler'"	Opposite of 'to speak'
Monica	mignon (cute)	"I did a fill in the blank. Le garçon est _____. Le chien est _____." (laughs)	The boy is _____. The dog is _____.
Becky	valise (suitcase)	"Il te faut en vacances pour mes tee-shirts, mes jeans, mes pantalons"	I need on vacation for my T-shirts, jeans, pants.

As students read their descriptions aloud, their classmates were able to guess the word relatively quickly in all cases. While the fact that they were able to communicate effectively was a success, I did notice some critical errors that could interfere with comprehension. For example, although Aaron's description of "shy" as "the opposite of 'to speak'" was on the right

track, I would consider the opposite of “to speak” to be an action like “to be quiet.” Another example of a potentially problematic error was when Amber said “I love hunger” when she really meant quite the opposite in describing a person who loves to eat. Despite some of these issues, I still thought that this was a successful attempt at circumlocution and was pleased that everyone was able to come up with a description that the class understood.

A pleasant surprise

After the circumlocution activity, I determined that although some of the students had difficulty using the strategy at first, they were all able to communicate with some modeling. I realized that I would really have to keep emphasizing the fact that communication strategies are just as important as the vocabulary. For the first partner activity of my study, I chose an activity that would push students to communicate because they would be relying on each other. In order to review vocabulary for bedroom furniture, students did an information gap activity in which they worked in pairs. An information gap activity is one in which one partner has information that the other needs and vice versa. The two people then have to communicate in order get the missing information. Each partner got a picture of a bedroom. Each partner had the same bedroom in the picture, but the furniture was arranged differently and they had to hide their picture from their partner

while describing the bedroom in as much detail as possible as their partner drew the items in the bedroom. The goal was to give as much detail as possible to get the partner's drawing as close as possible to the original picture. Before sending them to pair up, I reviewed location words so that they could describe the location of the items in the room. I reminded them that they could use strategies such as asking each other questions for clarification. I also reminded them that if they forget a word, there is almost always another way to say it, even if it sometimes sounds a little more awkward.

I paid close attention to how students chose their partners. Most people chose very quickly while a few people looked uncomfortable and were unsure whom to work with. Vincent came up to me and told me that he did not have a partner so I paired him up with Angela, who also did not have a partner. As the students started describing their rooms, most of the groups seemed on task and using French. Aaron was getting frustrated because he was forgetting how to say certain words. I was impressed because he did not want to ask his partner, John, how to say the word. John actually tried to help him by keeping his language in French. When John used the word "devant" (in front of) and Aaron couldn't remember what it meant, John helped him by saying "Madame Ezzell est devant vous." (Madame Ezzell is in front of you.)

Based on John's example, Aaron then knew what the word meant. I was surprised and pleased that they chose to take the more challenging route to figuring out the word, especially since these two students are not the highest achieving students in a traditional sense regarding tests, writing and homework.

It made me wonder what made these students automatically use these strategies while other students, even those with seemingly stronger French skills, get more easily frustrated or revert to English. It is important to note that during this activity, although students understood that they were supposed to communicate in French, I did not specifically forbid use of English. Therefore, John and Aaron decided on their own to keep their interactions in French, even though at times it was more difficult.

English vs. French

I was surprised and interested by my early findings of when students chose to use French instead of English. Although I would in future parts of my study forbid any use of English, I still wanted to observe the role of the native language and the role of the target language during group and pair work. This is why I did not specifically tell them to use only French in their speaking with one another for the following collaborative writing activity. In order to help students practice house vocabulary and adjectives, students

were placed into groups of 2-3 and were given magazine pictures that related to a house theme. I told them to work together to come up with written descriptions of each picture. They would rotate the pictures so they could eventually write about each one. Since they had just learned adjectives that precede the noun and their forms, I told them to try to include them if possible but not to be limited to that. I also encouraged them to include prior knowledge, such as vocabulary from past years.

I noticed that while some groups went right into speaking French and writing their description based on what they were saying, others would say what they wanted to say in English first and then try to translate it into French. I want to help them avoid this type of thinking and get them to think as much in the language as possible. Students also used English to question each other about grammar, saying things like, "What would be the form of *nouveau* to go with kitchen? Wait...is kitchen masculine or feminine?" While I don't want students to always focus on grammar, I did view this English use as on-task and positive as they were consciously thinking about the grammatical structures they were using.

Students generally remained on-task during the activity. Some got distracted by the pictures themselves, adding comments about the rooms in English. "That's a nice bedroom! That's so cool!" Elaine said. "No, it's not!

That rug is hideous! And the bed looks too old-fashioned!" Mary said. Elaine looked like her feelings were hurt, but she is friends with Mary and she smiled as she said, "Fine. I'm just not going to say anything." I noted in my head that their little argument that they just had over why or why not they liked the bedroom in the picture could have easily taken place in French because they know how to say all of the things they said in French. When I pointed this out to them, they just smiled and agreed with me but stopped arguing and got quiet. How can I get this ingrained in them to do automatically? I don't think I want to outlaw English all the time during group work, because I think it can be valuable when used sparingly for certain purposes, but how do I get them wanting to use it for these side conversations that could actually be educational if done in French since they do relate to the material? Or maybe I should not allow English, which would force them to say those comments in French. They would miss out on using English to question each other about mechanical things like they were doing, but the communication in the target language would probably be more valuable in the long run.

While most groups were able to work together pretty independently, some asked me how to say certain words. For example, one group asked how to say "pond." I told them and sure enough, when we shared the descriptions

with the class, this group mentioned that the picture included a pond and they pronounced it wrong, not to mention no one in the class understood it because they did not know the word, so I told them. So, is it valuable for me to tell them when they ask how to say something like this? I don't want to say no because they want to learn something new, but at the same time, I really want to get them to use what they know to communicate independently without relying on me.

An overbearing real estate agent

At this point, I was about two weeks into my study, and I had already begun to question my role in the classroom. I struggled between wanting to provide a comfortable atmosphere in which I provided support and modeling to the students while at the same time wanting to challenge them to think for themselves and take more risks. One day, it became very apparent that although I wanted a more student-centered atmosphere, I was in some ways preventing it by taking control any time students resisted speaking.

I gave students a set of questions to help determine qualities that they would be looking for in a house. I then asked them to share their answers with the class in a casual discussion. When I asked the first question, which was, "Où est-ce que tu veux habiter?" (Where do you want to live?), no one volunteered to answer. I said, "Come on! This is a fun question. You can live

anywhere. Where would you choose?" Then, I got a few reluctant volunteers. Aaron said he would live in Utah. I asked him "Pourquoi?" (Why?) and he shrugged his shoulders. I tried to prompt him to explain in French by asking if he had family there. He said no and answered only, "C'est froid" (It's cold.) I asked if he had ever been there and he said no. When asked if anyone chose to stay in Pennsylvania, I saw a few hands. Again, it was like pulling teeth to try to get them to explain why in French. I didn't get much more of a response than "J'aime..." (I like it). So I took over and agreed with them that Pennsylvania is a good place. I went on to explain in French that we have all four seasons, different types of weather, we are pretty close to big cities like New York and Philadelphia, pretty close to the beach, we have city, country, mountains, and forests. As I explained this, several students enthusiastically nodded in agreement and understanding. Uh oh. It was good they understood me, but was I controlling things too much? They wouldn't answer right away, so I almost immediately let them off the hook and did the work for them. All they had to do was passively sit there, listen and nod, and I accepted that as a response. I need to push them more to communicate. The other questions went similarly. The kids gave very brief answers and I elaborated for them.

After identifying criteria they would want in a house, I gave them four actual house ads to look at with a partner. Together, they were supposed to identify the important information about each house and decide which one they would most like to buy and why. Students used a lot of English to read through the ads, relating knowledge of cognates and words they already knew. It wasn't exactly communicative, but more analytical. They did seem to enjoy the activity though. I think they enjoyed it because I gave them some freedom to make a choice and use their imagination in the opening questions. They also seemed excited about figuring out what the prices would be in dollars. Some students chose the most expensive house while others took a more practical approach and chose the cheapest one that needed work because they liked that it was in the country and had a lot of land. I overheard Elaine say, "It's all about location." I thought this was a funny statement coming from a teenager. But so true! When asked to explain their choices to the class, I also got a lot of resistance to using French. They tried to use English and I kept trying to prompt them by taking over and using French, but several of them continued to use English to justify their choice. Explaining a choice is a high level skill, but they should be able to do it at this level. I am starting to see that I am enabling them to rely on me too much to take over without pushing them to give more output.

Role plays: play for some, work for others

After noticing that much of the English used and hesitation experienced during communicating had to do with students' fears of inaccuracy, especially relating to grammar, I decided to give them a more casual task that would hopefully allow them to have fun with the language. I gave students situation cards with a person A/person B role. They were instructed to read their roles first and then speak as long as possible in French on the given topic. Before telling them to get in their groups, I again emphasized that they should be using communication strategies to keep their interactions in French. I also told them that this was a casual way to just practice speaking, and that even if they were making mistakes, it was ok because they were still communicating with each other. I also modeled how they could use strategies such as paraphrasing or gestures to avoid using English. I chose the pairs randomly for this activity.

I noticed some positive things going on throughout the activity. Some groups voluntarily switched roles after a few minutes. I did not tell them to do this, so I was impressed that they took initiative and switched on their own rather than sitting there and moving to off task behavior because they were done. Darren was making his group laugh by acting things out and going beyond the typical vocabulary and making his interactions silly. For

example, when playing the role of a host welcoming guests into his house, he offered his partners eggs and acted it out. I was pleased to see them having fun and being creative with the language. I also observed this group correcting each other and themselves. When Elaine said “fille ou garçon” (girl or boy) but really meant to say “brother or sister”, she corrected herself and the group members shared a laugh at the misunderstanding. Darren continued his silliness when he pretended to point out “un tapis sur la fenêtre” (a carpet on the window”). His partners laughed. Then he laughed and repeated it this time in English, “Ha ha! There’s a carpet on the window.” Darren is also the student who had mentioned before that he enjoys being creative and silly with the language and that helps him learn. I know that he also does this outside of class with his friends who are in French IV.

Some other groups did not have such an easy time. Mary, my student who has been somewhat resistant since the start of my study, gave only one word answers and said in English, “I don’t know how to say it!” Her partner, Yvonne, who is a very strong student, helped her come up with the words she needed. I also heard her saying, “I’m not Evelyn! I’m not going to take this!” Evelyn is the girl who usually works with Mary when they are allowed to choose their groups, and since they are friends, Mary and Evelyn often playfully tease one another.

Some other things I noticed that were happening: Monica said, “ I don’t know how to say ‘on’.” Her partner Sharon said, “I think it’s ‘sur’”. I also witnessed other students acting things out. Elaine said the phrase “à la mode” (chic, fashionable) to describe a room in a house. I liked that she made this connection because we had only used that word before to describe clothing. I also noticed when students were confused and had to ask each other a question, some asked the question in French while others asked in English. They had to use a map to give each other directions for one of the situations and Yolanda said, “Où est la gare?” (Where is the train station?) looking at the map trying to find it. This came out very naturally in French as if she wasn’t even thinking about it. At almost the same time, Aaron said in English, “Where is the train station?” I hope to figure out why it seems natural for some students to automatically speak French and others revert to English right away if they have a question. Some students also relied heavily on looking at their vocabulary lists while others could converse easily without looking. I also wondered why students were so afraid of making mistakes even though I often tell them that it is okay to make mistakes. I can’t help but wonder how these students would speak with a native speaker if they are scared to speak to classmates who are also just learning the language. I

imagine they would be paralyzed with fear. Where does all of this anxiety come from?

Describing places

In order to guide students but still put them on a path towards being more independent, I had them participate in modeling before a pair activity. First, I asked them to identify some ways that one can describe a place. Then I asked them to give examples based on their hometown. After modeling some different ways that one can describe a place (weather, people location, size compared to other places, what there is to see and do, etc.), students worked in pairs to choose a place and write a description. I told them they could pick a city, state, or country, but it should be relatively well known because the class then would have to guess based on their description. I allowed them to choose their partner for this. I considered prohibiting English for this activity but I did not because at this point I still wanted to see when students used English and for what purposes and when they automatically used French.

As students paired up, they had brief discussions over which place they wanted to describe. Most of these interactions were in English. They also tended to use English to ask each other factual questions or clarify information about their destination such as, "I think they speak English there."

(Veronica) and “What is there to do in Poland? I have no idea!” (Nathan). Once they began writing their description together, most of their speaking was in French. They did sometimes use English to ask questions about or correct grammar or word choice. Most students referred to my prior modeling on the board where I had given examples describing our own city. Many students seemed to enjoy this activity, especially when they got to choose the place.

Here are some of the descriptions:

Darren and Nathan: (Poland) – “Il fait froid. C’est loin des Etats-Unis. Tu peux visiter Auschwitz. C’est au nord-est de la France et près de Finland. (It’s cold. It’s far from the United States. You can visit Auschwitz. It’s northwest of France and near Finland.)

Aaron and Vincent: (Maine) – “C’est dans le nord des Etats-Unis. Il fait froid. Tu peux faire du ski. Il y a des montagnes. C’est près du Canada.” (It’s in the north of the United States. It’s cold. You can go skiing. There are mountains. It’s near Canada.)

Sasha and John: (New York City) – “C’est au nord de la Pennsylvanie. C’est une ville. C’est grand. Il y a la grande pomme.” (It’s to the north of Pennsylvania. It’s a city. It’s big. There is the big apple.)

Mary and Evelyn: (Canada): “On parle anglais et français. Il fait très froid. On peut faire du ski, faire du patin à glace, ou jouer au hockey. C’est au nord des Etats-Unis. C’est très grand.” (People speak English and French. It’s very cold. One can go skiing, ice skating, or play hockey. It’s to the north of the United States. It’s very big.)

Ronda and Yolanda: (California): “C’est un état qui se trouve dans l’ouest des Etats-Unis. Tu peux voir un film et rencontrer des personnes célèbres. Il y a beaucoup de personnes riches et quelquefois méchantes. Tu peux aller à la plage.” (It’s a state that is located in the west of the United States. You can see a movie and meet famous people. There are a lot of people who are rich and sometimes mean. You can go to the beach.)

The class guessed the place after each pair shared their description. I also encouraged the listeners to ask questions in French to get more information if they were unsure of the place. Nobody asked questions in French. I asked questions sometimes in order to get more hints for the class if they were having trouble guessing. For most of the groups, their classmates were able to guess their location right away, which showed to me that they communicated quite effectively. However, I noticed that some students spoke quietly and seemed hesitant and not confident as they shared their responses, especially when using new words.

No English allowed

Although students did well with describing places, I wanted to challenge them further. The following day, we did an extension of the previous day's guessing places activity. This time, I wanted them to focus on asking questions about a place. Students were placed in 3 groups of 6. Each student was given three slips of paper with places on them (18 places total). I told them that their group members would need to ask questions to guess the place. In contrast to the previous guessing places activity, I told them that if they were the person with the destination, they should not give any clues but instead make the other group members work for the information by asking questions to narrow it down. Before sending them to their groups, I started by asking them to give me some questions that might be important to ask. The questions they came up with were:

“Où se trouve...?” (Where is ...located?)

“Quel temps fait-il?” (What is the weather like?)

“Qu'est-ce qu'il y a à faire et à voir?” (What is there to do and see?)

“C'est un état/ville/pays?” (is it a state/city/country?)

“C'est plus grand que...?” (Is it bigger than...?)

“C'est moins grand que...” (Is it smaller than...?)

I put these questions up on the board to help them, but I also told them that they could ask other questions as well. I told the students that they should not be speaking any English and reminded them that they could use different strategies to avoid English. When they got into their groups, I heard a few students speaking English and I told them to stop and speak only French. The students were able to get through all 18 of their destinations more quickly than I thought. I did notice that they tended to rely heavily on the questions that we came up together and put on the board. The questions were there for them to use, but I was a little disappointed that I did not hear a lot of other, original questions. Not only did they rely on the questions, but they even seemed to go through them in the exact order, almost always starting with “Où se trouve...” (Where is...located?) I thought that this might be a bad thing that they were too dependent on the questions on the board. However, I also thought that hearing them ask, “Où se trouve” so many times was not a bad thing as this is a difficult to remember phrase and hopefully using it so many times to communicate might help it stick in their memory.

Students really seemed to enjoy the restriction on not using English. I noticed a lot of students smiling during the activity as they strived to keep their communication going. Once again, John really impressed me. When he heard one of his group members using English, he prompted them by saying,

“Anglais! Parlez français!” (English! Speak French!) He also impressed me when the group members asked one girl if her place was a city, state, or country and the girl did not understand the question and he immediately took the lead, explaining in French, “La Pennsylvanie est un état. Allentown est une ville. Les Etats-Unis est un pays.” (Pennsylvania is a state. Allentown is a city. The United States is a country). I congratulated him after class and said that I have been noticing him keeping his communications in French and using strategies that are often difficult for many students. I asked how he knew to do this and why he chose French even during times when I did not specifically prohibit English. He told me, “I just remembered that this one time you told a story about how you were in France and you needed ice cubes but forgot the word and had to explain it. Since you told that story, I always think of that and I try to do that too.” I was really surprised by his answer! I didn’t think that they would even remember this little story I had told a while ago or that it would have had such an impact.

I also noticed similar things from Ronda. For example, when she asked what the weather was like and her classmate did not say anything right away, she prompted by giving examples like “Il fait froid? Il fait chaud...?” (Is it hot? Its it cold?) I felt that in some cases students tried to limit their questions. For example, if they found out it was a country in

Europe, they tended to run down a list of guesses rather than ask more questions to get more specific information. I had to prompt groups a few times to ask more questions. They sometimes seemed a little frustrated by not knowing the place yet they were not asking questions that would give more obvious clues, like “What is there to do there?” I also noticed that students’ lack of knowledge in geography played a role in limiting their efficacy in some cases. I assumed that the places I chose were so well known that students would be able to describe where they were, but in some cases, they were not sure.

I really liked prohibiting English because it forced the students to find ways to communicate. I think in the future I will have to have a more concrete way of enforcing this as some students still used English a few times. Also, students were using English when they were finished even though I encouraged them to converse in French. I may have to actually count it as a grade or give some incentive next time. Based on what I have seen so far, I do not believe that I would want to prohibit English all the time because I think there is some use for it in the language classroom. However, I do think that activities in which students are forced to avoid English can make the experience more authentic. Afterwards, I asked the students if the activity was easy or difficult. Most said it was easy, but a few said it got frustrating

sometimes when they couldn't think of how to say something. I emphasized to them that this was reflective of real world situations. Many of these students will be traveling to Quebec this summer, and I told them that this skill of keeping their communication in French and being willing to take risks and make mistakes is very important because when they do travel, they will have to communicate their needs to people, and they may either not have or not recall the exact vocabulary so they will have to use strategies to convey their message.

Another try at circumlocution

Now that we were almost halfway through the study, and students had proven that they could keep their communications in French only, I decided to do a circumlocution warm-up similar to the one I did at the beginning of the study. I knew that I would have to continue to emphasize using communication strategies, especially using different ways to describe things. Some students, like John, had already benefitted from the frequent modeling of strategies while others needed more practice. I put several words on the board and told students to write a description of each in French using as many details as possible. The words related to vocabulary that they had recently learned during a unit relating to Martinique, a French-speaking Caribbean island. The words were: île (island), pêcheur (fisherman), St.

Pierre (the former capital of Martinique), moustique (mosquito), forêt tropicale (rainforest), and la plage (beach).

I connected this to the previous day's activity by emphasizing that this was like what they were doing when they were describing places without using English. I took the first word, island, as an example. I told them to think of a way to describe it so that I would know exactly what it is. I said that this word would be very easy to describe in English and that the first thing we think of is probably that it is land with water surrounding it. I did sort of a think-aloud with them as I said, "OK. Well, we don't know how to say 'surrounding' and I really want to say that. I have to really think outside of the box and come up with a different way to say it using words that I know." I also told them that I realize that they may not ever be in a situation where they have to describe a beach or an island to someone in French, but that this is a very important skill and that they need to get used to thinking in this way. Many of the students in the class are going on a trip to Quebec with me in June, and I reminded them again that when they are in Quebec or when they eventually travel to a French-speaking place, they cannot go up to people and use English and that they will likely have to use this skill if they do not know or forget a word and need something. I gave students a few minutes to write their descriptions and asked them to share. While they were writing, I

walked around and looked at their responses. While some were adequate enough that one would be able to guess what they were describing, many others were not very detailed. I also noticed that many people had trouble formulating their descriptions into complete sentences and instead just wrote phrases or words. Here are some of the responses:

Île (island):

Darren: “Une ville dans la mer” (a city in the ocean)

Nate: “Il y a l’eau au nord, au sud. À l’est, et à l’ouest” (There is water to the north, to the south, to the east, and to the west”) Awesome! I commended him and explained to the class that although this is quite wordy and might not be the most efficient way to express what an island is, it was said in a way that told us exactly what it is. I also reminded them that when they do this, it may sometimes sound awkward and take a longer explanation, but that is okay.

Aaron: “terre dans la mer” (land in the sea) This surprised me because they never really learned the word for land. When I asked how he knew it, he said, “Because we learned England was “Angleterre,” so terre must mean land.”

Other students nodded and agreed that they knew that because of “Angleterre.” Wow. How do they make a connection like that, which to me is

not an obvious connection and then with other things, they do not make connections?

Pêcheur (fisherman):

Vincent: “un garçon avec un bateau et beaucoup de poissons” (a boy with a boat and a lot of fish.)

Yvonne: “un garçon qui trouve les poissons dans la mer pour le marché” (a boy who finds fish in the sea for the market)

Moustique (mosquito):

Monica: “petit et pénible” (small and annoying)

Me: “Yes, that’s good. But how can we add to it to distinguish it from other things that might be small and annoying. You could be talking about your little brother.”

Angie: “Ils mangent vous!” (They eat you.) This was not said totally correctly, but it still got the point across

Me: “Good! Now that’s getting a little more clear.”

Nate: “Les insectes petits et pénibles” (Small, annoying insects)

Me: Good! We could even add to be more clear, “Ils sont pénibles quand tu fais du camping” (They’re annoying when you go camping.)

St. Pierre (the former capital city of Martinique):

Veronica: “une ville à la Martinique près d’un volcan” (a city in Martinique; near a volcano)

Darren: “la vieille capital de la Martinique. Il y a le sable noir.” (the old capital of Martinique. There is black sand.)

La forêt tropicale (rainforest):

Sharon: “Il pleut beaucoup” (It rains a lot)

Me: “Good. Yes. Il pleut beaucoup. Give me more to talk about a rainforest specifically. Saying it rains a lot is a good clue, but if I had no idea what you were talking about, I would need more information than that.”

Evelyn: “Il y a des bananiers et cocotiers” (There are banana trees and coconut trees).

Me: What else?

Vincent: “Beaucoup d’arbres. C’est très vert” (A lot of trees. It’s very green)

Me: “Good... We could also add, Il y a des animaux qui habitent dans la forêt tropicale, par exemple, les singes.” (There are animals that live in the tropical forest, for example, monkeys).

La plage (the beach):

John: “le jardin de la mer” (the yard of the ocean)

Me: “Nice! That’s very creative and poetic.”

Elaine: “Il y a le sable et la mer” (There is sand and the sea)

“Un maillot de bain” (a bathing suit) – Becky

Me: In French: “Yes, that’s good. You wear a bathing suit to go to the beach.

But...a bathing suit is not the beach.” In English: “So, that’s a good clue, but you have to make sure it’s clear what it is so you can say, ‘Il te faut un maillot de bain’ or ‘on porte un maillot de bain’” (‘You need a bathing suit’ or ‘People wear a bathing suit’)

Me: “How about explaining the beach by activities people do there? Qu’est-ce qu’on fait à la plage?”

Mary: “Faire de la natation, jouer au volley, bronzer” – (swim, play volleyball, tan)

While I had been able to pull pieces of descriptions from different students to get a complete description of each word, I realized that there was still much work to be done as students were still not doing the kind of complete circumlocution that would make a topic clear to a listener or reader.

Martinique poems

After learning about the culture of Martinique as well as vocabulary relating to the island, I told the students that they would be working in groups to write a poem about Martinique. I fully expected them to complain. I know from past experience, typically the word “poem” incites even more anxiety than the dreaded “project.” In order to help decrease anxiety, I

provided students with a structure for how to form their poem. I struggled with wondering whether the structure should be provided in English or French, but decided to keep it in English so that students could focus more on writing their poem versus struggling over what the directions meant. I told students that they could include new vocabulary but that they should also try to be creative and include things that they had learned in the past.

To my surprise, I did not hear any complaints when I told them that they would be writing a poem. Students really seemed to enjoy the activity. One group took a creative approach by describing the island using a food metaphor (Figure 1). They described Martinique as “île des ananas dans la mer de la glace” (island of pineapples in the ice cream sea”, for “activities to do” they wrote “Traversez la forêt de bonbons” (cross the forest of candy). They ended the poem saying “Je meurs de faim” (I’m dying of hunger). Other groups described the volcano as “une montagne fâchée” (an angry mountain) and une montagne méchante” (a mean mountain). This was significant because it showed evidence of them using circumlocution, which I have been trying to get them to do a lot lately (Figure 2). I also liked what another group did when they wrote “déguster la culture” (to taste the culture). The students had learned the phrase “déguster les fruits tropicaux” (to taste the tropical fruits), so it was good to see that these students were able to take

part of that phrase and connect it to something else. They were really starting to become more creative with the language. I was also quite shocked by their willingness to share their poems. I had put them in random groups of three students by counting off by numbers. When I asked them to share, I was certain that I would have to pick people but was delighted to see each group eagerly volunteer to read their poem, and I also noticed some students who almost never volunteer were the readers for their groups. I think that having random groups for this particular activity actually helped. The students stayed on task, worked efficiently and encouraged quiet students to participate as some of them happened to get paired with other quiet students, which supported the idea of Rance-Roney (2010), who theorized that during group work, dominant students who are grouped together can learn lessons in sharing the spotlight while quiet students who are grouped together can benefit by being forced to talk.

Figure 1: Martinique poem example # 1

MARTINIQUE

charmant et vivant
(adjective) (adjective)

île des ananas dans la mer de la glace
(metaphor or your own nickname for Martinique)

ciel de l'eau et la mer des flûtes
(things to see)

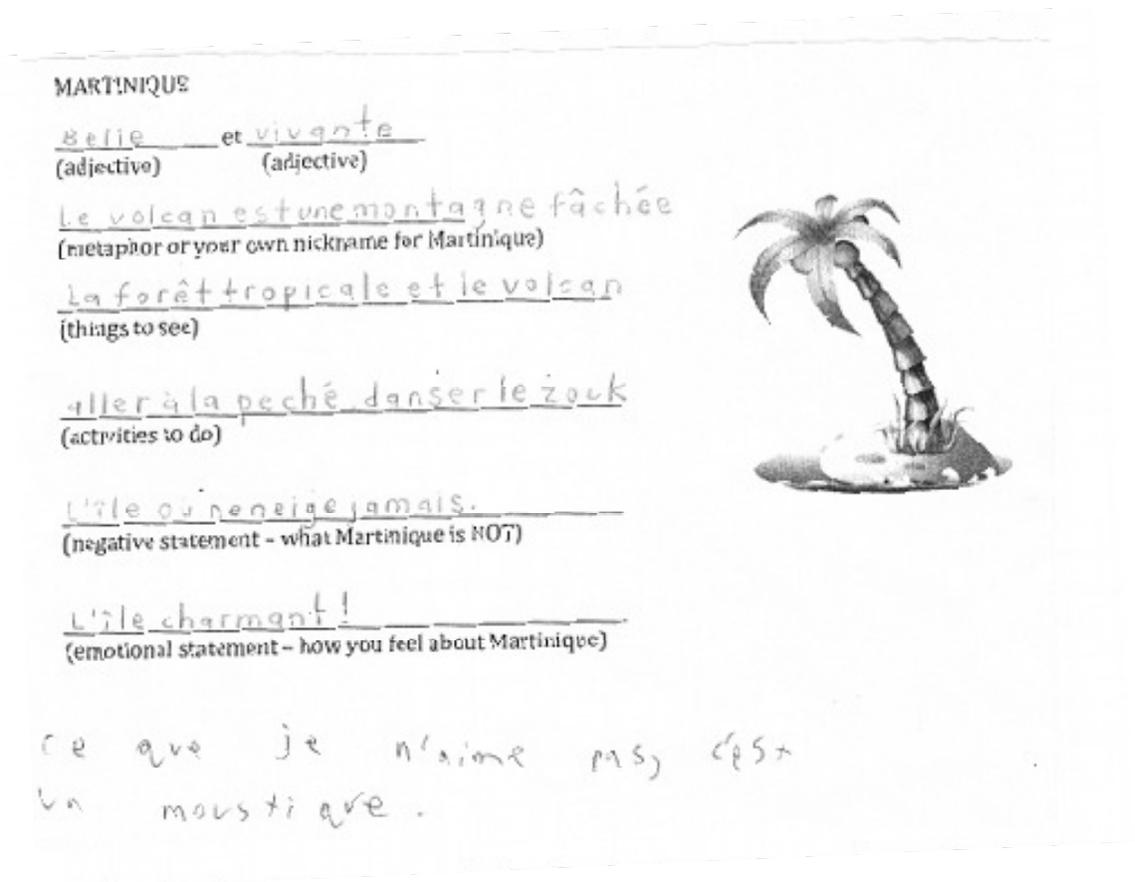
promener traversez la forêt ^{des} boribon
(activities to do)

Pas d'hiver mais pas l'hiver
(negative statement - what Martinique is NOT)

Je meurs de faim
(emotional statement - how you feel about Martinique)



Figure 2: Martinique poem example # 2



Open-ended survey questions

About halfway through the study, I gave the students a set of open-ended questions and asked them to provide written responses. I decided to do these written interview questions in addition to oral interviews because students could be more anonymous and could have time to think about their answers. Here are the findings:

1. *Do you prefer individual, partner, or group activities in class? Explain your choice and your opinions on each of them.*

The majority of students prefer group or partner activities. Some common reasons were that they were more interactive, if you didn't know something, someone could help you, it helps to listen to other people, and it helps to hear others' perspectives.

A couple of people preferred partners more than groups because they said in groups sometimes not everybody participates. One person preferred group more than partners because it is "less awkward" and this person said that she does not have a lot of friends in the class and that makes it hard sometimes to find a partner.

Few people said that they liked individual work. One person said that some things are better for individual work and several others said that they don't mind individual work sometimes even though they prefer cooperative activities. The biggest complaint about individual work was that you don't have your group members to help you.

2. *Do you feel confident speaking in French without relying on English? How is your confidence affected in different settings such as whole class, with partners, or with groups?*

Most people said that they feel more confident in pairs or groups. Several students said they feel confident as long as they are not expected to use words that they have just learned. Several students expressed concern that they are scared of mispronouncing words or making mistakes in front of the whole class. The majority said that they do use French most of the time but occasionally find it difficult and might have to use English if they don't know how to say something yet. One person said that she feels confident that she can get her point across but not confident that the grammar and structure is all correct.

3. What do you feel are your strengths and weaknesses in French? Why do you find these things easy or difficult?

A vast majority of students made some reference to mechanics (like grammar or spelling) when explaining their weaknesses in French. They expressed a lack of confidence in wondering if they were saying things the right way. Verb forms and articles were mentioned a few times. I was surprised that there was a split between people saying that writing was easier than speaking and people saying the opposite. Some people said that speaking was easier because it is easier to understand people and they weren't as worried about mistakes in spelling and grammar. Others said that writing was easier because they could have time to think about how to form

their sentences and not have to worry about pronunciation. I would have thought that writing would definitely be harder for most people, so I was surprised to see how many people said that it was easier for them. A couple of people said that they feel specifically good at describing things. Some also said that nouns and vocabulary are easy but verbs are hard, which I have definitely seen evidence of so far in the study.

4. Do you feel that your performance is affected by teacher-selected vs. student-selected groups? In what ways?

Many students said that there was no difference for them either way. Some said that teacher selected were better because they stayed more on task, one person said that made them work harder, and one said that they liked to meet different people this way. People who said that student selected were better cited reasons such as feeling more comfortable and therefore being willing to speak more.

5. What are some specific partner or group activities that we have done in class that you enjoyed or did not enjoy? Explain your choices.

The participants had split opinions on information gap activities including either drawing while listening or just exchanging needed information with a partner. Most students liked these. A few said that they did not. Several students said that they liked certain non-communicative

activities like putting sentences in order together or playing Pictionary or the ladder game. Not surprising. It probably makes them feel more comfortable because there is one correct answer and they don't really have to communicate in French, while with the information gap activities they are forced to communicate in French because the other person is relying on them. Some also mentioned that they liked describing pictures because they could apply things they have learned and it also helped some to see a picture as they used the vocabulary. Others said that they did not feel that describing pictures was helpful in any way.

6. If you are speaking French and forget a word or expression that you want to say, what are some strategies that you use to avoid using English?

Most students had a similar answer, saying that they describe words in different ways in French or use synonyms, antonyms, or examples. Some admitted that they sometimes just use English, ask what the word is, or look it up.

Small group interviews

At the halfway point in the study, I chose to interview students in small groups so that they might feel more comfortable than one-on-one interviews, and they could comment when they felt appropriate. Here is a transcript from this first round of interviews:

1. *How did you feel when we did the activity in which you were not allowed to speak English?*

Nathan: I like that group activity with asking questions to guess the places. It was fun. It was challenging but you knew how to say things and it was exciting to be able to speak another language.

John: It was hard sometimes because you don't know what to say but that's what's fun about it too.

Ronda: Sometimes it was an issue trying to keep the other people in the group speaking in French. They sometimes tried to speak English.

Sharon: It wasn't hard. I think it helps me to improve. The only part that was hard sometimes with the places activity is that I just didn't know where some of the places were. So the communicating wasn't hard; it was more just knowing information about the places.

Amber: It's kind of funny when we can't speak English because we have to act stuff out sometimes and try to figure out what someone means. I think it's easy to stay in French without using English because we're already working in French, so that makes it easy to stay in French.

Vincent: It's easy. Being able to stay in French just comes naturally for me. It worked well because group members helped each other stay in French by explaining where things were.

2. How did you feel about asking questions to get to information vs. giving descriptions?

Nathan: It was more difficult. But I actually liked asking the questions better. It made it more interesting and not as awkward as being the only one in class giving a description. It also made other people have to participate because it wasn't just giving them the information. We should do this more. Some people might not like it, but it's going to help them.

3. I noticed you doing very well with using strategies to keep your communication in French and help your group members understand things without reverting to English. How did you know how to do this and why did you do this?

Nathan: I really don't know. I just do it.

Ronda: Well, we're in French class. I know if I don't practice then I won't understand it. I also use French outside of class with some of my friends, and I just really like using it. I think we should do more speaking just in French because it really helps.

4. Talk to me about some specific activities that we have done in class. Talk to me about the kind of activity that we have done where you are with a partner and you have information they need, they have information you need and you

have to talk to communicate that. Sometimes it is drawing, other times you are just writing down information. Do you like or dislike that? What is it like?

John: It's funny when we draw to see how the drawing comes out.

Nathan: I don't like it. I don't know why. I just really don't like it. (*I prompted him several times to try to get a real reason but he was unable to give one*).

Ronda: I like the drawing ones because I like to draw, but also it's pretty easy. It can be hard to do though if your partner isn't giving good clues.

Vincent: I like that type of activity because you really have to explain things to your partner.

Amber: Yeah. It makes you have to speak French more.

5. I am seeing that a lot of people are having a hard time using complete sentences and instead feel more comfortable using words or phrases. Do you agree with this? Why do you think that is? What could we do in class to help people use complete sentences and details more?

Vincent: Well, I talk like that in French because that is how I talk in English. I don't usually use complete sentences in English.

Amber: I think the sentences are hard because I forget stuff like verb forms. The nouns and vocab are easy but the verbs are hard to remember.

Sharon: Yeah. I think verbs are hard too. Maybe if we went over verb forms more, we would be more comfortable.

My thoughts on the last comments: We already do go over them in many different ways! I don't want to be the type of teacher who is constantly drilling verb forms, but lots of students have cited grammar concerns such as verb forms as a main reason they don't feel confident in communicating.

Conversation Circle

The following activity was not a small group or pair activity, but it definitely gave me some valuable data for my study. Students sat in a circle, and I gave each person a card with a question on it. I explained to students that they would read their question and choose another person to answer it. That person would answer and then read their question and so on. Some questions called for factual answers, but most were opinion based. Some questions also called for the reader to fill in the blank with their own choice (for example, "Où se trouve _____? *Fill in the blank with a place*). I told the class that they would not be allowed to speak English at all. I told them that if they did not understand a question, they could say "Je ne comprends pas" (I don't understand), and their classmates and I would help them by using strategies such as repeating, giving examples, or explaining the question in a different way. I told them that they would each get an orange ticket if they maintained the no English rule. Our school has created a system in which students can receive tickets from their teachers for doing

positive things in the classroom and around the school. They can then cash in these tickets for different rewards and privileges. I decided to use this small reward this time because when I tried prohibiting English in other activities, a few students still had spoken some English. I modeled a few sample questions with the students before starting.

The activity started with Aaron having confusion with a fill in the blank question. He just said “blank” instead of filling in the blank. I prompted him with examples and then he understood. Here are some other notable interactions from the conversation circle:

Darren: “Tu préfères visiter New York ou Paris? Pourquoi?” (Do you prefer to visit New York or Paris? Why?)

Ronda: “Paris parce que c’est plus intéressant.” (Paris because it’s more interesting.)

Me: “Pourquoi?” (Why?)

Ronda: (hesitates for a while) “Il y a plus activités à faire qu’à New York.” (There are more activities to do than in New York).

Me: “D’accord” (OK). *I thought her answer was a bit weak considering her strong ability level. I tried to push her for more, but there is a fine line between pushing and making someone uncomfortable in front of the whole class, so I let her move on to her question after her second response.*

Ronda: “Où se trouve au Japon?” (Where is in Japan located?) (*grammar error that would be obvious to native speakers*)

Becky: (*didn't understand any part of the question so I gave examples. Then when she did understand the question, it became clear that she wasn't sure how to explain where Japan is. I prompted her by saying that she could use any location words like “near to”, “far from,” etc.*) “Loin de Northampton” (Far from Northampton).

Me: “Oui, c'est vrai! C'est bien.” (Yes, that's true. That's good.) *I was trying to help her recover from becoming a bit nervous at not knowing what the question had meant.*

Kim: “Ce qui m'ennuie, c'est l'école. Et toi?” (What bores me is school. And you?)

Elaine: *Glances at Darren because he pointed at her when she wasn't really listening, which prompted Kim to choose her because she had not answered a question yet. “Je n'ai pas écouté...” (I didn't listen...) Kim repeats, and Elaine responds, “Je ne comprends pas.” (I don't understand). She didn't understand because Kim pronounced “ennuie” so incorrectly that it was unrecognizable.*

Me: “Synonyme pour barbant” (Synonym for boring) *I say this clue at the exact same time as a student does. Ahh! Why do I always do that*

automatically!? I need to make them help each other instead of always stepping in! Elaine answers and proceeds with her question.

Elaine: “Qu’est-ce qu’il me faut pour un voyage en Martinique?” (What do I need for a trip to Martinique?)

She calls on Nathan. He doesn’t understand because she pronounced it incorrectly; He starts answering with activities. She corrects him by prompting him with examples of things one might need. Then he understands and is able to answer.

Vincent: “Qu’est-ce qu’il y a à faire en Guadeloupe?” (What is there to do in Guadeloupe? *Guadeloupe is a French speaking island similar to Martinique.*

Sasha does not understand. I prompt the students to give her help this time. Vincent restates it as “Qu’est-ce que tu peux faire?” (What can you do?)

Sasha: “Nager” (Swim). *She is possibly the most resistant in the class. I push her to say more. Faire de la planche à voile (Go windsurfing).*

Aaron: “Tu te lèves tard ou tôt le week-end?” (Do you wake up early or late on the weekends?) *Pronunciation is so inaccurate some words are hard to understand.*

Monica: “Tard” (Late).

Me: “Quelle heure?” (What time?)

Monica: “Six...” (Six...)”

Me: “Six heures??! Tu te couches (*act out going to sleep*) à six heures?” (Six o’clock? You go to bed at six o’clock?)

Monica: (*laughs*) “No! Dix...?” (Ten...)”

Mary: “Quel temps fait-il en Angleterre?” (What is the weather like in England?)

Sharon: “Il fait beau.” (It’s nice out.)

Me: “D’accord... Quelquefois il fait beau. Il pleut souvent en Angleterre, mais quelquefois il fait beau.” (OK...Sometimes it’s nice out. It rains often in England, but sometimes it’s nice out.)

When we were done with all the questions, we had a few minutes left of class. I wanted to encourage them to have more of a casual class discussion, so I asked, “Qu’est-ce que vous allez faire ce week-end?” (What are you going to do this weekend?)

They were incredibly resistant. Nobody would talk and I had to prompt them several times to try to get them to speak. When I got nothing, I started to ask if anyone was going to the movies, but get few responses. Evelyn offered in French that she and Mary were going to go out to eat together. When few other people were willing to respond, I asked what they will do over the Thanksgiving break. Again, I got very little response.

“Manger.” (Eat). I asked if they would be going shopping and again got one word answers.

I considered the conversation circle to be a bit of a disaster. While there were a few occasions where students used strategies to help each other understand, there were many problems. Pronunciation problems had been serious enough to inhibit communication on some occasions. Students clearly tried to say as little as possible when they did have to talk. I was most disappointed by their complete lack of willingness to engage in a casual conversation at the end of class. I just don't understand what they are so afraid of. They are all just learning the language, so nobody can speak it perfectly. I don't usually explicitly correct anyone's pronunciation or grammar errors in front of the class. Furthermore, everyone in this class is generally very nice, and they get along with each other. Obviously, students are going to be more comfortable speaking to one or two people rather than the whole class, but I still had hoped that by working with different people and practicing strategies, they would become more comfortable speaking in general, even if it is sometimes in front of more people.

Project Presentations

It wasn't long before I was able to get some answers as to why students were generally cooperative when working in pairs or groups yet so

unwilling to speak in front of the class. They had to do a project for which they had three different options. I wasn't even planning on using this as data for my study since it was an individual project. However, it ended up being an important moment. I asked students to do a brief presentation of their projects. It wasn't a very formal presentation. They just had to show which option they chose, what they did, and read it to the class. I have often done this same project in past years and did not have a problem with students presenting. In fact, most students enjoyed the presentations. To my surprise, several students did not have the project done while a few others refused to present it, and those who did gave generally lackluster presentations. Frustrated, at the end of class, I asked students to write some feedback about the project. I told them to include information about the level of difficulty, why they did not choose to present if that was the case, and if they get nervous presenting in front of the class and why. Mary refused to present, which was not completely surprising to me. She wrote that "some people just don't like speaking in a foreign language in front of anyone, so we shouldn't have to do that." Aaron also refused to present, which did surprise me because he participates often in class. He wrote that he did not present because he thought he did a bad job on the project and was embarrassed to show it. Several other people wrote similar things, saying that they were

either insecure about their French skills or their project. A few people wrote that they did not mind or even enjoyed showing their projects. Others stated that it made them uncomfortable to have people looking at them. Their honesty was valuable although difficult to read. One student wrote that she was nervous but not that nervous because she assumed “nobody was listening anyway.” Another student wrote that he wanted to finish his presentation as soon as possible mostly because “I wanted to get back to my seat to finish my math homework. No offense.” Reading students’ opinions and apparent lack of connection to their classmates during the presentations made me question whether I will do this in the future. It seemed that most students were not interested in sharing their projects or hearing about other people’s projects. Ideally, I would like students to be comfortable speaking to the whole class. However, I will have to determine if the presentations are worth anxiety that they cause most students.

Communicative Crossword Puzzles

Most of the communication taking place for the first several weeks of my study had been through speaking, so I decided to have the students use strategies they had learned to communicate through writing. As a review activity, I had two different crossword puzzles (one on green paper and one on blue paper). Each student received an answer key along with a blank

puzzle (Figures 3 and 4). Their task was to create clues for the words and later switch with a partner to try to complete the partner's puzzle. I told them that they were not allowed to use English for the clues. Their options were to write a description, a fill in the blank sentence, synonym or antonym clue, or draw the clue. Part of the reason I offered drawing as an option was to see how often students would choose to draw vs. choose to write out a description. Also, I knew that many of the words would not be easily drawn, so everyone would have to write some descriptions. Before they started, I modeled how to write a good description and fill in the blank so that the answer would be made as clear as possible to the reader. I also modeled examples of clues that would be insufficient.

As students wrote, they remained quiet and on task, and very few asked me for help. Many seemed to get through the task quickly without a struggle, while a few got frustrated, took a longer time, and relied on their textbook. While some students worked with their friends, some worked with someone they usually did not work with because they had to choose someone with the opposite color and also someone who was done around the same time they were. After they switched, they quietly worked on the puzzles, and eventually, they were instructed that if there were any clues they could not figure out, they could check with their partner to give them

verbal clues and they could also check with their partner to check the answer key. Some students laughed at the clues and told each other they liked some of the descriptions and drawings. Others argued over the clues (in English) saying, “How was I supposed to get that based on that clue??!” Evelyn argued with her partner saying, “That’s not even what it means!!” As students argued, their partners tried to justify their clues. As they argued, students did not seem to be genuinely angry. Many of them were smiling and playfully arguing, but they generally seemed to enjoy the activity.

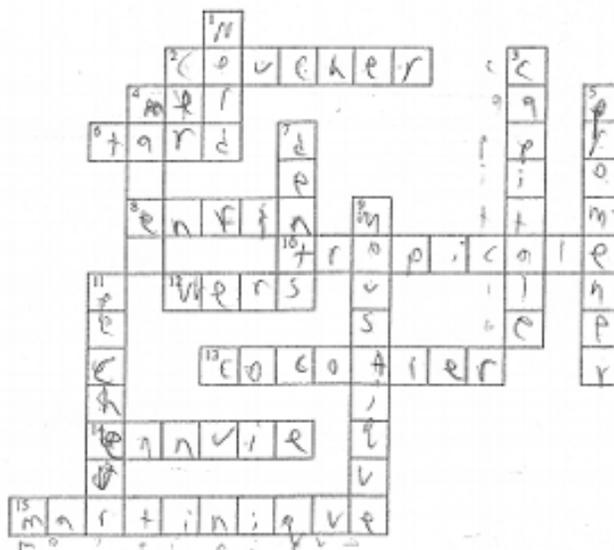
It was interesting to see that some students chose not to draw for any of their clues, while others drew clues as much as possible. Many students successfully used synonym and antonym clues. While many clues were good descriptions, a few did not make sense at all. For example, one student wrote “Synonyme pour tu” (synonyme for you) when the word was supposed to be “boring.” Others were similar to the meaning but not quite, such as “synonyme pour beaucoup” (synonyme for a lot) or “synonyme” pour très” (synonym for very) for the word “more.” I understand why they used those clues, but they were not exactly the correct meanings. In some cases, grammatical errors could have made things very confusing to the reader. For example, John wrote, “synonyme pour pied” (synonym for foot) for the word “to walk.” What he really meant was synonym for “on foot” which we learned

as a mode of transportation. Leaving out “à” in “à pied” (on foot) was a critical piece that could inhibit comprehension. There were, however, a few creative descriptions. Darren wrote, “dans ton maillot de bain, c’est pénible” (in your bathing suit, it’s annoying) as a clue for “sable” (sand) and “quand tu veux porter des vêtements, tu t’ _____” (When you want to wear clothes, you _____) for “habiller” (get dressed). I was super impressed and surprised to see Aaron’s clue of “où l’eau rencontre le sable” (where water meets the sand) for “plage” (beach). Typically, he makes an effort but is weak in writing. I thought that was quite a nice, almost poetic clue. He also used “montagne chaud” (hot mountain) as his clue for volcano, which is also significant because it would have been an extremely easy one to draw, but he chose to do a description. Another one was “volcan de l’eau” (volcano of the water) for “chute” (waterfall). This goes against other things I am seeing. Typically and unsurprisingly, I am seeing that students who are doing well with communication skills, particularly circumlocution, are those star students who do very well on tests, pick up on things quickly have near perfect grammar, etc. ...But Aaron is not that type of student. In his writing, he often struggles to make complete sentences. Sometimes his writing is barely comprehensible due to grammatical inaccuracies that are so frequent that they inhibit understanding. So I find it really interesting that he excels at

communication skills. I have noted before in my observations that in group or pair work with speaking, he often does challenge himself even when he gets frustrated – he does not revert to English often. I wonder if this has something to do with his choice of partners. When they are allowed to choose, he often chooses to work with Vincent, who is one of the star types that I mentioned and who works well with others. If not, he works with John, who is also probably a good influence and is interestingly similar to Aaron in that he has one of the lowest grades in the class, but is a standout in my observations with his communication skills and committal to describe things in French, even when awkward or difficult.

Figure 3: Communicative Crossword Puzzle example # 1

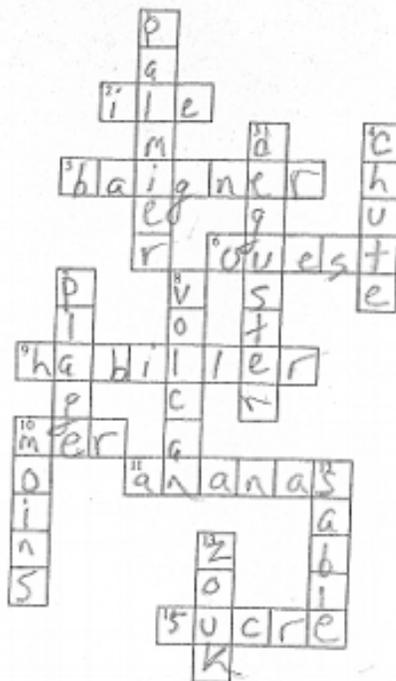
Français III Chapitre 4A



- | ACROSS | DOWN |
|--|--|
| 2 pourquoi est-ce tu utilises ton lit | 1 contraire de sud |
| 6 contraire de tôt | 3 Fort-de-Franc est la _____ de martinique |
| 8 synonym pour finalement | 4  ton chien au parc. |
| 10 deguster des fruits | 5  tu peux _____ |
| 12 synonym pour très | 9 un petit insect penible |
| 13  un synonym pour penible | 11 ils cherchent les poissons |
| 14 une petit ile dans la mer caraïbe | |
| 15 | |

Figure 4: Communicative Crossword example # 2

Français III Chapitre 4B



ACROSS

- 2 dans la mer. (Martinique, Guadeloupe)
 5 synonym pour nager
 6 Nord, sud, l'est, _____
 9 _____
 10 au bord de la _____
 11 des fruits tropicaux, jaune
 14 des champs de canne à _____
) Après se laver, les vêtements,

DOWN

- 1 dans la forêt tropicale
 3 _____ des fruits tropicaux
 4 une _____ d'eau
 7 synonym pour au bord de la mer
 8 contraire plus grand que
 12 danser le _____ populaire dans Martinique
 13 à les plage, contraire la mer.

Small group interviews: Round 2

Seven weeks into the experience, I decided to get more small group interview data from some different participants. I interviewed Yvonne and Darren together because they are similar in that they are both doing a great job with taking risks with the language and using strategies to maintain communication in French. I chose to interview them together so that I could tailor the questions to them, and I thought I might get more honest answers in this case since they have similar abilities.

Here is a transcript along with my comments in italics.

Me: I have noticed both of you doing an awesome job lately. You are both doing the things that I hope people achieve by the end of my study. You are already using communication strategies and keeping your communication in French as much as possible. I have also observed both of you helping your classmates in French. Can you talk to me about how you know to do that or why you do that? These skills are difficult for many people.

Yvonne: I enjoy talking in French a lot. Like, I really want to make it my third language and speak it really well. I know Spanish, and that's what I think really helps me capture the language and be able to understand it.

Darren: Yeah, I just love it like so much. I feel like I could major in French in college. I love languages. I like the whole culture and people and being able to communicate with all different people is really exciting to me.

Yvonne: Yeah, I definitely want to study it in college too. Either a major or a minor, but I just don't want to stop learning it.

Me: When you work with other people in pairs or groups, do you feel like they influence you positively or negatively and why?

Darren: I think it's positive for the most part, especially when we get to pick our groups.

Yvonne: The one thing that bothers me is when people don't want to keep in French or they just sit there and don't want to talk.

Me: What about the activities when you are specifically told that English is not allowed?

Darren: Those are my favorite activities!

Yvonne: Yeah, I really like that too. I freak out if an English word slips out by accident. But, it's fun. It's really funny to see how people act things out and the things they have to do to get people to understand.

Darren: I actually enjoy when people don't understand a word because then I get to try to get them to understand and I try not to make it too obvious. Like when I was working with (Elaine), the word was "la mer". I knew there

was a really easy way to describe that by saying “au bord de..” but that’s just boring and she would have gotten it right away just because that’s how we learned it in the book. But I like to use words in different ways and challenge myself and other people more than just saying the obvious and not using the language that much. Sometimes I wish we had harder words to describe.

Me: I know what you mean. Like the other day, when we did the activity where you each had nine words and had to describe them to your partner without English, I felt like it was good, but it was still not a true test of the skills because for example, as soon as someone would say, “pénible” (annoying), the other person would automatically know that it was “moustique” just because that was one of the vocabulary words and we always described it like that. But in real life, if someone said “pénible,” it could mean lots of things and you would have to give a much more detailed description to get the person to know what you mean.

Darren: Yeah, exactly. I think it would be cool if one day you just gave us random English words that we may not have even learned in French and try to describe them, because that would really test whether people can do it or not.

Me: That is a great idea! We will have to try that. With random words like “stapler.” Then people won’t have preconceived ideas of possible words it

could be. It could be anything and people would be forced to give a good description.

Me: The other day we did the activity where we were all together as a class and each person had a question to ask a classmate. People were not allowed to speak English. I felt that this activity did not really go as well as I had hoped. Even at the end, when we had extra time and I asked what people were doing on the weekend, almost no one would answer me at all. Can you talk about this? Why do you think this happened and is there anything we could do in class to help make people more comfortable or willing to talk?

Darren: I think it's partly just because it was in front of the whole class and people get nervous. Even me sometimes, I overthink it in a large group setting. Like, I'll get hung up on a small thing like "is it *le* or *la*?" and then I just won't say anything because of worrying about that one thing.

Yvonne: I feel like sometimes people just don't retain what you are saying. How are you supposed to be able to speak French if you won't speak at all in class? People notice that you get upset when we won't speak.

Darren: You should just call people out and force them to speak French more.

Yvonne: All of the activities are fun and helpful. Nothing is ever boring. How will these people do in French 4 where I would think there will be even less English if they can't do it now or they won't even try?

Darren: It's really hard for me to understand how people don't know words that we have heard so many times. Like when you teach us stuff, we use the words so much and we do a lot of activities with them and then I also like to use new words that we learn that might not be introduced to us in the book but are still used, and I hear them and I assume that other people know what they are and people don't understand what I am saying. And with the pronunciation, some people pronounce every letter, but I like to use the correct pronunciation and actually say it right.

Yvonne: When you're in front of the class, you act it out so we know what it is and we try to do the same thing to help people when we're in groups, but it's like, you ask someone a question and it's like dead silence.

Darren: And I don't want to sound pretentious. Sometimes it's awkward for me to speak French. I don't want to speak with an accent even though I know I'm saying it correctly. Other people aren't using an accent, so I don't want to sound pretentious.

Yvonne: Your accent IS good! Yeah, I don't want to be the only one yelling out the answer all the time, so sometimes I just don't say anything.

Darren: Yeah, I usually know it but I don't want to seem pretentious.

Me: Do you think mechanical things like grammar and pronunciation play a role? How?

Darren: I used to think of it just like English. But now, I feel like sometimes if it's a simple enough sentence, I just automatically can think in French.

Yvonne: Yeah, sometimes even when I'm writing English I write French by accident.

Darren: Grammar isn't that big of a deal. It's more pronouncing things right. Me and my friends, we would say random things and it still helped us with the grammar just by using it outside of class. I remember joking around about something in French with my friends who spoke French. My other friends didn't know what we were talking about and it was really funny. We were able to hide something we didn't want to tell them.

Yvonne: At home, I speak French to my mom and she doesn't know what I'm talking about! I think about the grammar because I want to say it right. I think people just have to understand that you can't say things word for word from English to French. It's just more complicated than that.

Wow. What a great interview. I found it fascinating and significant that they said they don't want to use accents or volunteer answers because of sounding too smart. Usually I think of social anxiety with languages as not wanting to make mistakes. I relate to what they said though. I remember feeling that way sometimes in high school French. People would make remarks like, "She already knows French. She sounds like a French person. What is she

doing in this class?" I had forgotten about that until now. It was also interesting to see that they are experiencing some of the same frustration with their classmates who have different abilities and personalities as I have been experiencing. This makes me want to switch their groups around to really experiment with homogeneous and heterogeneous groups based on personality and ability to see what happens. Will quiet people rise to the occasion or will very little talking occur? Both of these students are obviously highly motivated which gives them reasons to want to succeed.

The next group of students I interviewed were Becky, Evelyn, and Veronica.

Here is the transcript:

Me: Let's talk about some specific activities that we have done in class. When we do activities where you are not allowed to use English, what is that like?

Veronica: I like it. It's fun.

Evelyn: I like it too. But it's hard sometimes to remember that you can't speak English. And also it might take longer to describe things and get things done because you can't use English.

Becky: It's hard to remember stuff from a long time ago, like from French I.

Me: Do you feel like you working in groups and pairs do your group members have a positive or negative influence on you?

Becky: It's positive. You get to be with your friends.

Veronica: It depends what it is.

Me: Talk to me about the conversation circle that we did the other day. Not a lot of people were talking. Why do you think that is?

Evelyn: I think people get nervous about saying things correctly.

Veronica: I'm a shy person, so when everyone is looking at me I don't feel comfortable.

Me: Are there certain things during group or partner work that you think prevent you from communicating well?

Evelyn: If we're doing something where we don't know a lot of words.

Me: Do you think writing or speaking is more difficult for you? Why?

Becky: Writing is easier. You know the words. It's just hard to think of them right away.

Evelyn: Yeah. Writing is easier because pronunciation is the hardest part.

Veronica: Speaking is harder. You have to keep going. You can't really stop to think. Writing allows more time for that.

It was very hard to get this group to talk to me! They wouldn't even answer me at all for some questions. It was the total opposite of the previous group. I had been surprised that many students said writing was easier on their survey but after hearing their explanations, I understood more.

Evelyn is an interesting contrast to Darren and Yvonne. She has the same level of ability as the other two, but is not taking the same risks or seeming to take as much enjoyment in unstructured activities. Her choice of partner, Mary, may be a factor. Mary has a slightly negative attitude and can get easily off-task, and I could definitely imagine Mary looking down on her for using an accent or speaking French too much because I have observed her playfully teasing Evelyn about her ability.

Inside/Outside Circles: Talking about the Weekend

After reviewing past tense, I wanted to put this grammatical concept into a meaningful context as well as provide an opportunity for students to have casual conversations. I used the format of inside/outside circles, which meant that half of my students would be in the outside circle facing in while the other half of the students made up the inside circle. This grouping technique would ensure that each student would always have a different partner, and it would also force students to talk to people they don't normally talk to. Since there was an odd number, I had to get involved too. At first I was disappointed that there was an odd number because I thought that it would be more difficult to make observations this way, but I embraced the opportunity to be involved and actually get to communicate with the students. During the activity, students had to fill out a chart including the

following information: how the weekend was, what the person did, and a comment or question that they said to keep the conversation going. I explained to them before the activity that part of the reason we were doing this is because I want them to be able to have a normal, relaxed conversation and go beyond just the minimum by making comments and showing interest in what others had to say. I encouraged them to keep talking as long as they were with their partner, even if they had to change the subject. I questioned whether I was stifling them by giving them the paper to fill out with specific questions, but I believe that they needed that structure to feel comfortable and have some direction in their conversations.

This was quite a simple activity, but students really seemed to enjoy it. I think there was something about the format of inside/outside circles and moving around and being fast paced that the students really liked more than just finding a partner. I noticed some really positive things during this activity. Almost all of the students that I talked to were able to successfully continue the conversation with me, showing interest, understanding, asking questions, and giving details. In some cases, I even got to find out some new and interesting information from the students about their families and interests.

The only negative part was when I got to Sasha, who has not really been an outright problem, but I detect a bit of a negative attitude, she doesn't often participate, and she is very resistant to using all French. When I told her what I did and it came time for her to make a comment or ask me a question, it was just complete silence for what seemed like forever. I thought of a particular professor from my college education class emphasizing the importance of "wait time," which meant that kids need time to just think before they give an answer and that silent, awkward time is ok. This was more than wait time though. I was getting no response or reaction from her! I prompted her by saying she could ask any question or comment. The question words were even on the board. Still nothing. Finally, when I sensed that she was getting really uncomfortable and embarrassed, I told her, "Can you think of anything in English and I can help you say it?" Then she said "Where?" I found it hard to believe that she did not know how to say "where" or any other question or comment. I wondered if she was just panicking because she felt pressured talking to me.

I also tried to listen to other people as much as I could while still paying attention to my own conversations. The kids really seemed to enjoy this. Most of them were smiling throughout, and I did not notice much silence or English – they seemed to really be able to continue their

conversations in French, even beyond the specified questions. For example, I heard people excitedly talking about shopping “vendredi noir” (black Friday) and talking about their purchases, what time they went, how crowded the stores were. Afterwards, I commended them and again reiterated that it is an important goal for them to be able to have a comfortable conversation. I made them laugh by telling them that if they are having a conversation with someone and they just ask them “What did you do this weekend?” and the person responds “I saw a movie,” and they say nothing back, the person will probably think they are really weird and/or unfriendly. I think giving examples like that really can motivate the kids because they realize that in order to communicate effectively, they really do have to take risks.

Performance Role plays

Today, students did a role play in pairs in which they had to give excuses using past tense for a given situation. They got to choose the situation. I gave them some time to plan in pairs, and then I asked them to present it to the class. I told them that if they were more comfortable, they could write down what they wanted to say. Everyone chose to write it down. Yvonne and Ronda did a particularly good job in which they really acted it out and came up with funny excuses. Also, Ronda was playing the part of an old teacher who couldn't hear well so she was getting the excuses wrong, an

extra detail that they made up. A lot of the students really got into it, acting things out and actually sounding angry. The audience was laughing as they watched and listened. This was positive because usually when I have done dialogues in class in the past, common problems are that they are often just reading in a monotone voice from the paper and it is sometimes hard for the class to understand. This time, it showed me that perhaps the work we have been doing in groups is making some of the more shy students feel comfortable with each other.

Add-on stories

We were now nearing the end of the study. I decided to have students do a collaborative creative writing assignment. Students selected their own groups of three or four people. Each student in the group got a picture that would serve as a writing prompt. I instructed them to begin writing a story based on that picture. The only restriction I gave them was to use past tense, since we had been reviewing that grammatical concept. I told students to write continuously until I told them to stop and rotate. Each member of the group would eventually contribute to each story (Figure 5). This activity served a dual purpose as it would allow me to gauge their ability to understand the previous group members' writing as they read it, and to produce the language creatively and spontaneously through writing. Many

students seemed to like having the freedom to be creative with their stories, but some others struggled. I noticed some students writing a sentence or two and then stopping, and I had to prompt them to continue. Another student asked me, "How much do we have to write?" As they switched their stories and read what the previous people had written, many of the students laughed in enjoyment at the story. There were some problems with communication though. Vincent said to Aaron, "This doesn't even make sense! How am I supposed to continue this?" Aaron got defensive as he tried to explain what he meant. Although I encouraged students to work independently during this, they still sometimes asked each other for help on how to say things. Some students also relied too much on their books for help, even though I told them to try to just write as continuously as possible. Despite some bickering over meaning, they enjoyed choosing their favorite story to share with the class, and some groups even did not want to pick just one to share but picked two.

Figure 5 : Examples of add-on stories

J'ai passé une journée épouvantable. Dans le matin
 Je me lève à 2h00! Je suis très fatiguée. Après ça
 à 2h10 j'ai pris un petit déjeuner. J'ai fait des œufs
 et du jambon mais je n'ai pas eu du pain! donc je
 suis allée au marché, mais c'était 2h45! Je suis fatiguée
 alors j'ai dormi dans un gare et je me
 lève à 18h35! oh non! je vais arriver en retard
 à l'école!!! Mon classe est 13h00! ...
 Je me lève à 2h00. C'était un cauchemar.

Sandra a passé un journée épouvantable. D'abord,
 elle n'a pas entendu son reveil et elle a raté
 le bus. Ensuite, elle est arrivée en retard et oublié
 ses devoirs. Après ça, elle a eu un huit sur l'interro
 et elle a reçu collée après l'école. C'est terrible aussi.
 Sandra est triste. Mais Emilie a passé un bon jour.
 Emilie a reçu une bonne note. Elle a
 gagné le match de 5 cartes. Elle a acheté un t-shirt
 c'est super! Quelle journée formidable!

Circumlocution with random English words

I felt that the following activity was the climax of the study, and it happened just a few days before the end. The students did an activity that was actually suggested by one of my students, Darren. Students were not allowed to use English and had to describe random English words in detail to

get classmates to guess. English was not allowed to describe or ask questions; it could only be used to guess the word. They also were not allowed to point or act out. I promised them a sticker and orange ticket if they complied. The reason I did this with English words was to create a true test of their circumlocution abilities. This way, they would not have preconceived notions about what the words could be based on their vocabulary. I carefully chose the groups this time and it was four people per group, two paired up across from the other two. I tried to create heterogeneous pairs based on ability and personality. Here is what I observed:

Yvonne: (spoon) "Tu l'utilises pour manger..." (You use it to eat.)

Monica: "Spoon."

Darren: (coasters) "Le boisson est dans..." (The drink is in...)

Yvonne: "Straw? Ice?"

Yvonne: (freckles) – "C'est sur vous...C'est petit et beaucoup." (It's on you. It's little and a lot).

Darren: "Sur ma figure?" (On my face?) "Skin? Pores? Eyelashes?"

(I cut in to ask them how they knew the word "figure." They never learned it!

Yvonne and Darren tell me that I said it once because it was in something that we read and they remembered it from that....Wow. Amazing. How do they

remember something I said only once and others don't remember something they heard 50 times?)

Emily: "Lips?"

Darren: "Haha! Beaucoup de (a lot of) 'lips!'"

Darren: "C'est pénible?" (Is it annoying?)

Yvonne: "Non...Les personnes rousses ont souvent...C'est mignon." (No... Red-haired people have often. It's cute.)

Darren: "Freckles!"

One of the most heartwarming moments of the activity is when I see Darren and Monica high five each other after successfully guessing one. These two are opposites in ability and personality, are not friends at all, and would not normally choose to work together, but in this case, they felt that they had accomplished team work.

Other groups did not start out as lively, especially Evelyn and Amber vs. Vincent and Veronica.

Evelyn: (loan) "synonyme pour 'donner'..." (synonym for "to give")

Lots of silence. It pains me. It's not just a synonym for 'to give.' Why doesn't she say that it could be for a house or a car? Or that you are borrowing the money and have to give it back? They know how to say all of that in French,

so why can't they realize it? I want to step in and take over, giving them other clues, but I hold back.

Amber: (eyebrows): "C'est mince quelquefois. C'est marron ou noir." (It's thin sometimes. It's brown or black).

Evelyn (eyebrows): "au nord de les yeux" (to the north of the eyes (*nice circumlocution!*))

Vincent: "Eyebrows?"

Veronica: (scale) "Tu regardes si tu as grossi ou tu as maigri..." (You look if you gained weight or you lost weight)

Amber: "Scale!"

Another group is having a hard time with that same word.

Aaron: (scale) "Pour toilette..." (For bathroom)

There is a very long period of silence. His partner, Elaine, usually good at this, does not know what to say and it is getting uncomfortable. I step in and say, "Pourquoi est-ce que tu regardes ça?" (Why do you look at that?)

Elaine: (hesitant) "Maigri ou grossi...?" (Lost weight or gained weight?)

John: "Scale."

Elaine: (printer) – "avec un ordinateur..." (with a computer...)

(Their classmates have no idea.)

Aaron: "Pour papier." (For paper)

Kim: "Printer!"

This team also had a really hard time getting the word "translate" but were giving some creative clues from some usually quiet people!

Kim: "derrière le livre..." (behind the book) *I recognize that what she really means is "back of the book" because there is a glossary there, but I'm not sure if the students pick up on what she means.*

John: (getting animated with his hands and enunciating each word) "Tu ne parles pas français. Tu parles anglais. Le prof blank." (You don't speak French. You speak English. The teacher blank.) scold him for using English when he said "blank." He smiles and says, "Le prof mmmm." Everyone laughs.

Becky: "vocabulaire en anglais à droite de vocabulaire en français!"

(vocabulary in English to the right of vocabulary in French)

Sharon: (loan): "à la banque..." (At the bank...)

Ronda: "Je prends l'argent et tu retournes. Synonyme pour prendre." (I take money and you return. Synonym for "to take".)

Mary: "Borrow?"

Nathan: "Loan."

Nathan: (sunscreen): "Quand il fait chaud à la plage..." (When it's hot at the beach...)

Ronda: "Sunglasses?"

Mary: "Non...Protection."

Sharon: "Sunblock."

Ronda: (bee) "un animal jaune et noir" (a yellow and black animal)

Mary: "Bee."

They also took the word coasters as "rollercoasters" even though that's not what I meant. This is an example of how background knowledge and interests can influence things.

After a few minutes, there was a lot of laughing. Darren pointed to his partner, Monica and jokingly said, "Cette fille,.." (This girl...), shaking his head. I almost wanted to cry seeing the group dynamics that were going on and seeing engagement and enjoyment of absolutely everyone in the room, even those who are usually most resistant. I also saw very surprising circumlocution from students who do not typically exhibit that. Immediately afterwards, many students said that the activity was really fun and that they want to do this more often, including students like Monica and Sasha, who often avoid speaking!

Final open-ended survey questions

At the end of the study, I gave students a series of open-ended questions and asked them to provide written responses. They were allowed to leave their responses anonymous.

Here are the questions along with a summary of their responses:

1. Please comment on the following activities that we have done in class.

Include information such as what you liked or disliked about the activity, what was easy and/or difficult about the activity.

a) describing random English words using only French without acting things out:

Students overwhelmingly enjoyed this one. Almost everyone said that it was fun but challenging. Several students called it their favorite activity. Nobody said they did not like it.

b) writing activity in which each group member starts out with a different story prompt and we rotate every few minutes until each member contributes to each story:

Students had mixed opinions about this activity. While some said it was fun and allowed them to be creative, others expressed frustration with their group members for not writing enough or not understanding what people

had written. Another problem they said was being creative under the time constraint.

c) Casual conversation type of activities (such as when you interviewed each other about the weekend and were encouraged to continue your conversation as long as possible in French):

Some students said that they enjoyed this because they got to interact with different people and it helped their communication skills to try to continue the conversations. Others said that they did not really like this because they felt awkward and did not know what to say after a while.

2. Do you feel that you have improved your communication skills in French since the beginning of the year? Explain. Comment specifically regarding use of communication strategies like finding different ways to describe your words or ideas. What are the most important things you have learned?

Almost all of the students said that their communication skills have improved and most said that the strategies they have learned and expanded vocabulary have helped them.

3. What is your relationship with the other students in the class? Do you feel that it has changed at all since the beginning of the year as you have worked with different people? How do your classmates affect your performance in groups and in front of the whole class?

Responses overwhelmingly said that their relationships with classmates have improved as they worked with different people. A few people said that talking in front of the whole class is still awkward.

4. If you went to a French-speaking country, how confident would you feel that you would be able to communicate your needs to a native speaker using the vocabulary and strategies that you have learned? Explain.

There were mixed responses on this one. Some said they would feel confident. Others said they would feel self-conscious especially about understanding the native speaker or not having enough vocabulary for certain topics.

5. What activities have helped you the most with developing your communication skills in French? Also, tell if there are any activities that do not help you and why.

An overwhelming majority said that activities in which English was prohibited were most helpful.

6. What makes you feel comfortable in class? What makes you feel uncomfortable? Why?

An overwhelming majority said that they feel comfortable in groups and uncomfortable talking in front of the class.

7. What are some things that your teacher can do in the future to help you enhance your communication skills and to help you feel more confident speaking in front of other people?

Most people said to have more activities speaking only French. Some also said that more casual conversations would be helpful.

Final Survey

On the last day, I gave students the same survey that I gave at the beginning of the year to see how things have changed.

Table 3

Results from Final Survey in December

Survey Statement	SA	A	D	SD
I enjoy working with a group or partner during class activities.	14	3	1	0
I feel confident speaking French in a small group or with a partner.	8	9	1	0
I feel confident expressing my thoughts and opinions through writing in French.	5	8	4	1
I usually feel comfortable working with my classmates, even if I do not choose my group.	4	10	4	0
I often get frustrated when I am trying to speak or write and cannot remember or do not know how to express something.	3	10	4	1
If I don't know how to say or write something in French, I often use strategies such as using synonyms or descriptions to express my ideas.	5	11	1	1
During group work, I often engage in off-task talking.	0	8	9	1
During group work, I get frustrated because other group members engage in off-task talking.	1	3	12	2
I use English often during group or partner activities.	2	5	12	1
I use French most of the time during group or partner activities.	2	13	3	0
I often find it necessary/helpful to use English during group activities to clarify directions or meanings.	4	7	7	0
During group or partner work, one or two people often do most of the talking or work.	0	8	11	1

The survey showed that a very large majority of the participants enjoy working in pairs or groups. Students also reported a high level of confidence for both speaking and writing French. Although many students reported getting frustrated sometimes when they have trouble expressing something in French, most students also said that they are able to use strategies to keep their communications in French. While almost half of the students reported engaging in off-task talking during group work, most students do not get frustrated by group members' off task talking. Most of the participants said that they do not use English often and use French most of the time. However, many of the students find English helpful sometimes for clarification.

Back to the Beginning

At the end of the study, I decided to do an activity to assess the students' circumlocution abilities. Circumlocution was one of the main strategies that I had emphasized throughout the study because when mastered, it can truly give students the key to express almost any idea. This was also an appropriate way to close the study because I had asked students to use circumlocution to write descriptions at the beginning of the study to gauge their ability. Back then, many of them felt stuck right away and told me they did not know how to describe their words. For the final circumlocution activity, I gave the students a list of random English words to describe in writing. This would be a true challenge because these were not words that they were used to describing in French or that they had

heard me describe before in French. As I gave them the list of words, I told students to try to write something for all of them, even if some were difficult. I also reminded them that it was alright if their descriptions were wordy or awkward because their goal was to describe the word in as much detail as possible so that another person would know exactly what they were talking about.

Here are some responses that students wrote:

Sunset:

Vincent: “Le soleil va sud de la terre.” (The sun goes south of the earth.)

John: “Quand le soleil lest perdu. Il est joli.” (When the sun is lost. It is pretty.)

ribbon:

Ronda: “un chapeau pour un cadeau” (a hat for a present)

burglar:

Sharon: “mauvaise personne qui prend l’argent à la banque” (bad person who takes money at the bank)

promotion:

Evelyn: “gagner quand tu travailles” (to win when you work)

braces:

Amber: “C’est pénible; pour les dents” (It’s annoying, for the teeth)

guilty:

Yvonne: “Quand tu as pris quelque chose. Tu es quoi?” (When you took something. You are what?)

vitamins:

Elaine: “Petit, avec un boisson le matin, manger pour fort et grand” (Small, with a drink in the morning, eat for strong and tall)

zipper:

Ronda: “Les dents d’un sweat-shirt pour fermer” (the teeth of a sweatshirt to close)

crib:

Darren: “Les bébés dormir dans un petit lit” (The babies to sleep in a little bed)

sink:

Becky: “Où brosser les dents” (Where to brush the teeth)

I was proud of many of the descriptions that students were able to think of for these words. Clearly, many of them were getting more comfortable with saying things in an imperfect way to get a point across. Some of them were obviously even taking pleasure in using language creatively, even poetically, to describe a concept. Despite these successes, I was also disappointed by a lot of things I saw on this final activity. Even though I repeatedly told the students that they must write something for each word, some still left blanks. In many cases, the descriptions were still not thorough enough to express the idea clearly. For example, one person described “ribbon” as “pour ton anniversaire” (for your birthday), which could be many things. Likewise, many students described “crib” as “pour un enfant” (for a kid). These types of descriptions were frustrating to me,

especially because I am certain that the students know how to say the words for *bed*, *where*, *to sleep*, *bedroom*, and *to go to bed*. I was surprised to see very weak descriptions from certain students like Mary and Aaron, both of whom I have observed many times successfully using circumlocution when speaking. Perhaps it is just more difficult for some of these students to write the descriptions than to speak them.

As the final day of the study came to an end, I was left with more questions than when I began. While my students had obviously made some progress, I knew my work was just beginning, and I looked forward to seeing how my participants would continue to grow.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data Sources

Throughout my study, I collected data from various sources in my effort to learn as much as possible during my investigation. I analyzed data in the form of observational journal entries and reflections, student work samples, surveys, and interviews.

Field log

Some of the most valuable data I collected were from observing student interactions during class activities. Throughout the study, I recorded my observations as much as possible in my field log. I often included dialogue from the students so that I could later analyze it to determine when they were using French, when they were using English, and how they were interacting and communicating with each other. I wrote down my observations of exactly what I saw and heard and then reflected on my observations.

Student work

Although much of the study focused on students' speaking skills, communication through writing was also relevant. I collected collaborative and individual samples of student work. While collaborative work such as the stories based on picture writing prompts showed me how students

communicated and worked together through writing, I also found individual writing samples to be valuable. These samples of students' individual work allowed me to see how each student was progressing with strategies, especially circumlocution. The communicative crossword puzzle (Figure 1) was one of the most valuable samples of student work because it involved students using circumlocution to write detailed clues as well as interpreting their partners' clues.

Student surveys and interviews

A critical part of the study was the students' expression of their own opinions and ideas. I gave the same survey at the beginning and end of the study in order to track changes (Appendix A). Students had four choices for each statement: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Here are the results:

Table 4

Comparison of September and December Surveys

Survey Statement	SA	A	D	SD
<i>I enjoy working with a group or partner during class activities.</i>				
September	11	6	1	0
December	14	3	1	0
<i>I feel confident speaking French in a small group or with a partner.</i>				
September	3	13	2	0
December	8	9	1	0
<i>I feel confident expressing my thoughts and opinions through writing in French.</i>				
September	4	9	4	1
December	5	8	4	1
<i>I usually feel comfortable working with my classmates, even if I do not choose my group.</i>				
September	4	10	3	1
December	4	10	4	0
<i>I often get frustrated when I am trying to speak or write and cannot remember or do not know how to express something.</i>				
September	1	8	5	3
December	3	10	4	1
<i>If I don't know how to say or write something in French, I often use strategies such as using synonyms or descriptions to express my ideas.</i>				
September	2	14	2	0
December	5	11	1	1
<i>During group work, I often engage in off-task talking.</i>				
September	0	9	8	1
December	0	8	9	1
<i>During group work, I get frustrated because other group members engage in off-task talking.</i>				
September	2	3	9	3
December	1	3	12	2
<i>I use English often during group or partner activities.</i>				
September	0	11	6	1
December	2	5	12	1
<i>I use French most of the time during group or partner activities.</i>				
September	1	11	3	1
December	2	13	3	0
<i>I often find it necessary/helpful to use English during group activities to clarify directions or meanings.</i>				
September	4	13	1	0
December	4	7	7	0
<i>During group or partner work, one or two people often do most of the talking or work.</i>				
September	0	5	12	1
December	0	8	11	1

From September to December, more people strongly agreed to enjoying working with partners or groups. Only one student disagreed in September and December. In December, more people strongly agreed to feeling confident speaking French in small groups or pairs, but student confidence in writing remained about the same. Some areas that remained similar from September to December were comfort level around classmates even in teacher-selected groups, reported off-task talking, and perceived equity of participation among group members.

While students gave similar answers to some of the statements from September through December, responses to other statements revealed significant changes. While there was a slight increase in students' reported frustration level when trying to speak French, the survey also showed a significant decrease in the number of people saying they often use English as well as a significant decrease in students who find English useful for clarification. In September, only one student reported not finding English necessary or helpful for clarification while in December, seven of the eighteen participants reported that they did not find English necessary or helpful. The slight increase in frustration level can be attributed to the fact that students had more frequent situations in which English was prohibited.

In addition to the September and December surveys, I also used two surveys (one in the middle and one at the end of the study) in which I asked the students to write open-ended responses to questions (Appendixes C & D). While the September and December surveys allowed me to easily track changes, the open-ended responses provided me with more details. In contrast to oral interviews, these written responses also had the advantages of anonymity to make students feel more comfortable being honest, and the written responses also gave students more time to think about the questions and formulate a complete response without the pressure of coming up with an immediate oral response as in a spoken interview.

Oral interviews, both formal and informal, proved to be valuable sources of data. I did some small group interviews in which I had prepared questions (Appendix B). Other times, I engaged in informal individual interviews to get more information from students. I wrote down the students' words during these interviews so that I would have their exact quotes to reflect upon afterwards. I found out some surprising information from these interviews, including their feelings about different class activities, their own perceptions of their abilities, and frustration and anxiety about working with other students.

Codes, Bins, and Theme Statements

Throughout the study, I placed all of the data from observations, student work, surveys, and interviews into my field log. About halfway through the study, I began a process called coding, which helped me analyze my data as I uncovered patterns. As I reread my field log, I wrote down codes, which were words or phrases that often led to recurring themes. I created a table in which I listed each code along with related codes and the page numbers that included each code. This process showed me which themes were coming up frequently in the data and just as importantly, which were not often present. After identifying the codes, I organized the codes into bins that each represented a larger theme (Figure 6). I then wrote theme statements that summarized the findings relating to each topic within the study (Figure 7).

Figure 6: Coded bins

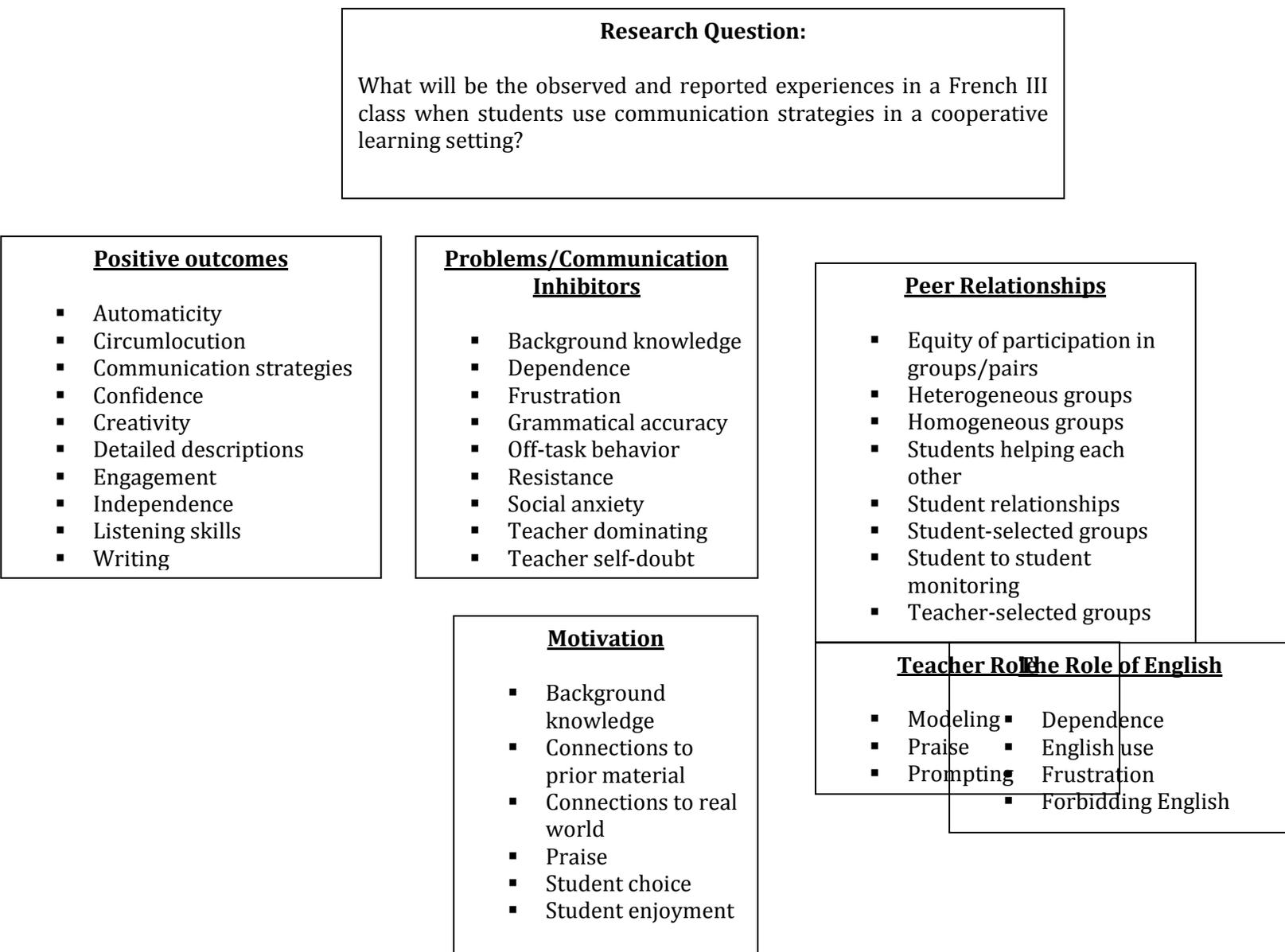


Figure 7: Theme Statements

Theme Statements

1. Students' attitudes towards each other and their own abilities can enhance or inhibit communication. Social anxiety, off-task behavior, low self-confidence, and overdependence are all factors that can inhibit communication.
2. Connections to prior material as well as connections to the real world are crucial elements of building the confidence necessary to promote communication.
3. It is important for the teacher in a communicative classroom to model strategies and find a balance between providing praise, creating an environment in which students feel comfortable, and challenging students to increase output.
4. Forbidding use of the native language can often inspire an enjoyable challenge in which students feel an urgent need to apply communication strategies. However, occasional use of English can serve as an additional tool to help students clarify instructions and analyze their language use, which often leads to increased confidence and therefore more efficient output in the target language.
5. As students help and monitor each other, they build relationships, often positively influence each other, and increase their sense of accountability as others rely on them in order to communicate.
6. Over time, practicing use of communication strategies such as circumlocution, questioning, and acting out, leads to automaticity, engagement, creativity, and eventual independence.

FINDINGS

Problems/Communication Inhibitors

Students' attitudes towards each other and their own abilities can enhance or inhibit communication. Social anxiety, off-task behavior, low self-confidence, and overdependence are all factors that can inhibit communication.

Research shows that the climate of the classroom has a significant connection to students' perceived abilities, and if students feel that they have a climate in which they are supported, they will have a more positive view of their abilities (Hardré, Crowson, Debacker, & White, 2007). Through my study, I hoped to cultivate a more collaborative environment in which students could feel comfortable with each other and build confidence through strategy use. However, from the beginning, their anxiety acted as an obstacle to communication.

In the open-ended written survey questions, the vast majority of students expressed a lack of confidence with grammar and pronunciation when asked to comment about their weaknesses in French. I was also surprised to find out from oral interviews and the written surveys that many people considered writing easier than speaking. I had assumed that writing would be more intimidating since it is more formal, there is less interaction, and mistakes are more visible. The students explained to me that they sometimes feel more comfortable with writing because they do not have to worry about pronunciation and have time to think about how to form their sentences. While writing is important, this was alarming to me because my students are much more likely to

speak the language in a real world situation than write it. I knew that I would have to try harder to make students as comfortable as possible speaking.

Social anxiety was also evident when I asked students to present a project they had done, and some students refused to present. When I asked all students to comment afterwards that day, many students reported that they were uncomfortable speaking in front of the class. During the conversation circle activity with the whole class, it was also extremely difficult to coerce students to speak, even casually about plans for the weekend.

Oral interviews also provided valuable data regarding students' anxiety and lack of confidence. Many students said that they are afraid to make mistakes when they are speaking or writing. I had assumed that anxiety usually stemmed from students' lack of confidence in their French ability. However, in a surprising interview, Darren and Yvonne told me that they often want to speak but feel awkward because they do not want to be the only ones answering. Darren said that he feels uncomfortable speaking with a French accent because even though he knows he is speaking correctly, he does not want to seem "pretentious."

Finally, another inhibitor to efficient communication was problematic interaction between partners and group members. Fortunately, this group of students was very cooperative and generally worked quite well together. However, there were still a few problems. In oral interviews, strong students like Yvonne, Darren, Ronda, and Evelyn expressed their frustration with other

students who either engaged in off-task behavior, did not understand what they felt should be understood, or did not speak enough during communicative activities. Other students, like Aaron, Veronica, and Sharon, expressed worries that they did not know as much as their group members and became shy to speak. Johnson and Johnson (2009) warn of the risks of oppositional interaction, in which students are preventing their classmates from achieving goals, and no interaction, in which students are resistant and more focused on themselves as individuals.

I tried to combat these problems by always switching the way that I formed groups. Sometimes they were heterogeneous and sometimes they were homogeneous, based on personality and ability. Sometimes they were teacher selected, and other times they were student selected. As Rance-Roney (2010) stated, different groupings can be effective for different purposes. For example, when I grouped quiet students together for collaborative writing, it was interesting to see some students who are ordinarily shy take charge when grouped with other people. One student had written on a survey that she sometimes felt “overpowered” by more dominant group members, and in some cases pairing shy students together caused them to feel more comfortable.

Overdependence sometimes acted as an inhibitor to meaningful communication, and it occurred in several different forms. Sometimes students depended too much on me, asking me questions immediately when they got

frustrated. This was evident at the beginning of the study when I asked students to try using circumlocution to describe words and several students raised their hands right away and told me they did not know how they would describe their words. Other students depended too much on materials like their textbooks. No matter how much I encouraged spontaneity, some students still felt more comfortable having their book open to the list of vocabulary to look at while they were speaking.

Motivation

Connections to prior material as well as connections to the real world are crucial elements of building the confidence necessary to promote communication.

According to Omaggio Hadley (2001), a communicative classroom setting provides a meaningful context for students to develop their language skills. In order to make the communicative activities as meaningful and motivating as possible for the students, it was crucial to connect material to their own lives and real world situations as well as build confidence by making connections to previously learned material.

I continually tried to build on students' background knowledge in order to help build confidence and motivation. When students did an information gap activity in which they had to describe a picture of a bedroom using as much detail as possible while their partner drew the bedroom, I took some time to first review

location words, which they had previously learned and that would be useful for them during this activity. Before an activity in which students had to guess places through asking questions, I asked the students to come up with examples of questions that are useful to gather information about a place. Making these connections with background knowledge seemed to help make activities go more smoothly as students then used that material that I reviewed during their interactions. Conversely, I also witnessed at times how a lack of background knowledge could inhibit communication. For example, during a few activities that involved speaking or writing about places, it became evident that although I tried to choose common places that I thought everyone would be somewhat knowledgeable about, many students had no idea where certain countries were located and therefore had difficulty describing or answering questions about them.

I tried to motivate students often by tying in real world examples. One example of a real world situation motivating a student was when I told the students about a time when I was in France and had to use circumlocution because I had forgotten how to say “ice cubes.” Later on in the study when I asked John, a student who was doing particularly well using circumlocution, why he thought he was so good at using this strategy, he related it back to my story saying that he thinks of that story and that is why he tries to keep his communication in French and find ways to get around using English.

Many students in this class will also be travelling on a field trip to Quebec with me this summer. I brought Quebec up as an example several times, reminding students that when they are in a real world situation in which they are communicating with a French speaker, there will undoubtedly be times when there is something they want to say that they either have not yet learned or forgotten, and they will need to problem solve in order to communicate.

I also encouraged them that although they are in a classroom and I am in some ways forcing them to communicate, they should make their conversations as natural as possible. When they spoke to several different classmates about their weekends, I told them to not only tell what they did on the weekend but to respond by making comments and asking questions. They laughed when I told them to think about how weird it would be in English if you were talking about your weekend to someone and they did not respond. It is natural in real life to respond to people, show interest, and keep a conversation going. Casual conversations like the weekend activity also were interesting to students because it related to their own lives and interests. Students managed to maintain conversations during this activity, and seemed to enjoy it. Several students also remarked on the final open-ended survey questions that we should do more casual conversation activities during class.

Beyond realistic class activities and the upcoming Quebec field trip, some students also had personal motivating factors. Some students told me that

they use French outside of class with their friends, which is motivating to them because it gives them a way to practice. Students who take French at our school are in the minority. More students take Spanish and German. Therefore, there is a special connection for the students who take French. They can communicate in ways that other people cannot understand, and several students commented that it was “cool” to be able to converse in a way that others do not understand. A few students, including Yvonne and Darren, even told me in interviews that they want to continue to study French in college, possibly even majoring in the subject.

Teacher Role

It is important for the teacher in a communicative classroom to model strategies and find a balance between providing praise, creating an environment in which students feel comfortable, and challenging students to increase output.

Classroom discourse patterns have traditionally been teacher-centered with the teacher posing questions, a student answering, and the teacher responding (Alley, 2005). According to Moguel (2004), this tendency of teachers to do most of the talking during class time is detrimental to students because it prevents them from participating. In order to make my classroom more conducive to communication among students, I had to avoid traditional classroom roles in order to maximize students’ opportunities for interaction.

Throughout the study, I frequently questioned my role in the classroom. I found it very difficult to find a balance between helping the students but not allowing them to be too dependent on me. I also struggled with pushing them while not wanting to make them uncomfortable. My dominant role in the classroom became evident many times. Whenever students were resistant to speaking or seemed like they were getting uncomfortable, I always wanted to take over right away to help them. For example, during the house search activity, when I was asking students to talk about criteria that they would be looking for in an ideal house, students were extremely resistant when I asked them questions, even when I prompted them with follow-up questions and my own examples. I noticed that I too became uncomfortable with the silence after a while and started answering my own questions.

Modeling was a crucial component in this study. At the beginning, when I did the first circumlocution activity with them, students were heavily dependent on me, asking me how they should describe their words because they could not think of any ways to describe them. I provided frequent prompting, such as encouraging students to provide more details in order to make strategies like circumlocution effective. I continually emphasized the importance and thought process behind using strategies other than resorting to English. At the beginning, I wondered if I was modeling too much to the point of not making the students think for themselves. However, I realized that they needed to see the

thought process that I would go through to communicate with a limited vocabulary in order for them to start thinking that way. I then gradually moved to having the students assist with the modeling. For example, before doing a communicative activity in which they would be asking group members questions to identify a place, I prompted the students to come up with questions that would be useful for the activity, and I wrote those questions on the board. While I viewed their subsequent reliance on those questions written on the board as negative at the time, I realized that at that early point in the study, they needed that scaffolding, and it helped ease them into English-prohibited activities, which they were eventually able to do more spontaneously and with less modeling. By the end of the study, although I continued to remind students of their strategies and still incorporated modeling, I was able to observe students successfully communicating exclusively in French by using strategies such as circumlocution with nobody asking for help.

According to a study (Naughton, 2006) in which students were trained to use various communicative strategies including paraphrasing and asking questions for clarification, it was determined that when communication breakdown occurred, students were aware of the problem and frequently used repair strategies. My modeling had a similar effect on my students. While I would have assumed that use of communication strategies would come naturally to many people, my study showed me that they do not. Many of the students

simply did not realize all of the tools that they had available to use. Near the beginning of the study, John told me that he would have no idea how to describe “eyes” in French. When I suggested to him various things that he could associate with “eyes,” such as using them to see and look, possible colors that they can be, and that they sometimes need glasses, he exclaimed, “Oh! I didn’t think of that!” He went on to become very impressive at circumlocution throughout the study. Based on my observations of John and many other participants, the explicit modeling of strategies opened doors to them in situations where they had previously felt stuck. After much emphasis, they were able to realize that even if their communication is not perfect, there are almost always ways to get around a topic in order to express one’s self.

The Role of English

Forbidding use of the native language can often inspire an enjoyable challenge in which students feel an urgent need to apply communication strategies. However, occasional use of English can serve as an additional tool to help students clarify instructions and analyze their language use, which often leads to increased confidence and therefore more efficient output in the target language.

Cutshall (2012) states, “Staying in the target language the majority – if not all- of the time is critical to creating an environment where communication can take place” (p. 36). Immersing students in an

environment in which they constantly hear and are encouraged to speak the target language promotes rigor as well as a more authentic environment. At the beginning of the study, I wanted to examine when students used English and when they used French, so even though they knew that they were expected to speak to each other in French, English was not specifically forbidden. I found that in some cases, students were able to produce output automatically in French. For example, when students engaged in collaborative writing, some groups were able to write immediately in French while others always thought first in English and discussed how they would put their thoughts into French. When speaking, students kept their communication in French almost all the time with occasional off-task talking in English. I noticed that certain students insisted on keeping their speaking in French, even when they were not specifically forbidden, and it would have been much easier to use English. For example, students like John and Ronda often helped their partners by giving examples in French if their partner did not know a word rather than just telling them what it meant.

Some of the most significant moments in my study occurred when I forbid the use of English during certain group or pair activities. Every single student in the class enjoyed these activities, as evidenced by my observations of their demeanor during the activities as well as their comments during the

oral interviews and open-ended survey questions. Almost every student said that activities in which English was forbidden were the most helpful type of activity, that they were fun, and that we should prohibit English more often. When they could not rely on English, it gave them a sense of urgency to use strategies other than the native language. I witnessed students acting things out, questioning each other, giving examples, and using circumlocution to avoid English.

Prohibiting English had brought out the best in my students. During an activity towards the end of the study in which they used circumlocution to describe random words, I was elated to see their effective use of strategies. Despite the incredible success that my students had when I prohibited English, I still saw benefits at times to using the native language. In the past, I had often felt guilty any time that I used English or allowed students to use English, but throughout the course of my study, I began to view the native language as sweets on a food pyramid: only to be used sparingly and with caution. According to Alley (2005) and Myers (2000), the native language can sometimes be beneficial as long as it is on-task. During my observations, while I occasionally witnessed off-task talking in English, the vast majority of English use was task-related. Students sometimes used English to clarify directions or to ask each other questions about grammatical accuracy. Since anxiety was a problem preventing some students from wanting to produce output in French, gaining clarification in

English sometimes served as a confidence boost to them, which then made their communication in French more efficient as they became assured that they were doing the right thing.

Although English was sometimes a comforting support to certain students, there was a shift in attitudes towards English from the beginning to the end of the study. According to the September survey, only one of the eighteen participants did not find English useful or necessary for clarification while in December, seven of the eighteen participants did not find English necessary or helpful for clarification. Also, a majority of the participants reported in the September survey that they used English often during group or partner activities. In December, a majority of the participants reported that they do not use English often during group or partner activities. I attribute this change in attitude to the students learning strategies to help them avoid English.

Peer Relationships

As students help and monitor each other, they build relationships, often positively influence each other, and increase their sense of accountability as others rely on them in order to communicate.

When I began the study in September, I had been concerned about these students' relationships with each other because although they were cooperative, the atmosphere still felt cold. These students were very far from achieving the type of comfortable, almost family relationship that I had

experienced with most other classes in the past by the time students reached their third year of French with the same teacher and many of the same classmates. However, by the end of the study, I noticed their relationships develop as they encouraged and supported each other in collaborative efforts.

Studies have shown that when students work in an atmosphere of cooperative learning rather than an atmosphere with competitive or individualistic goals, students cultivate more positive relationships with their peers, which is very important for adolescents (Roseth, Johnson, & Johnson, 2008). Furthermore, research shows that group work is beneficial to foreign language learners since they are more likely to express their own opinions and ideas as well as construct meaning in a group setting (Alley, 2005). In the survey questions in September and December, all but one student reported that they enjoy working with a partner or group. In the open-ended written survey questions, again almost every student preferred pairs or groups to individual activities, and their biggest complaint about individual activities is that they do not have their group members to help them. Many students also wrote that it helps to listen to other people and hear others' perspectives. I also found countless times throughout the study from my observations as well as students' written and oral comments that they felt much more comfortable speaking with pairs or small groups than in a whole class setting.

I was surprised to learn students' opinions about teacher-selected groups and student-selected groups. Many students told me through surveys and interviews that it did not really make a difference to them. Some even said that they liked when the teacher selected the groups because they got to know different people that they might not normally work with. Others admitted that teacher-selected groups can sometimes be better because it is easier to stay on task. I had expected the students to all support student-selected groups.

I used a combination of teacher-selected and student-selected groups, and I saw several positive outcomes from this. Kagan (2009) states that because allowing students to select their groups can lead to behavior problems and reinforcement of cliques, it is best for teachers to strategically choose groups. I was very delighted to see certain students developing positive relationships with people whom they would not normally interact with at all. For example, I was delighted to see Monica and Darren, two students who are quite opposite in ability and personality and who I had never seen interacting before, high-fiving each other and joking with each other in French after a successful joint effort to get the opposing team to guess words they were describing. I also witnessed unforeseen friendships develop between students who have quite different interests. Nathan, the quarterback of the school's football team, and Darren, who hates sports and is very involved in drama club, both did not have a lot of close friends in the class, and by the end of the study, these two became good friends,

often choosing to work together when I gave them the choice. Even Veronica, who is very shy and said at the beginning of the study that she did not have many friends in the class, reported at the end that she had made several friends from working with different people. While teacher-selected groups proved to be very advantageous, allowing students to select their groups at times was also beneficial because it not only allowed them to be even more comfortable speaking, but also allowed them to further develop friendships that were emerging from previous teacher-selected groupings.

One of the biggest benefits to the collaborative work was that students helped each other in many ways. During English prohibited activities, students would monitor each other, playfully exclaiming, “Anglais!” (English!) if they heard a group member breaking the rule. Participants often went to painstaking lengths to help a classmate understand something, giving many examples in French and acting things out until they understood without resorting to English. During an activity in which students had to ask questions in order to guess a place, Kim did not understand the words for city, state, and country. One of her groups members, John, explained in detail for her by saying, “La Pennsylvanie est un état. Allentown est une ville. Les Etats-Unis est un pays.” (Pennsylvania is a state. Allentown is a city. The United States is a country). During his interview, Darren told me that he often takes a more challenging route when communicating with a partner because he wants to be more descriptive and does

not want to make things too easy because that may not help his partner as much. In oral interviews, several students made statements that showed that they genuinely cared about their fellow students' progress. Yvonne expressed not only frustration that some group members would not speak enough, but also worried that if some people do not speak in class and do not do their homework, they would not become better. Nathan also said that people should be forced to speak more because even if they do not like it, the practice will help them.

Communicative activities encouraged a reliance on each other that deepened the students' relationships. They were not merely helping each other; they needed each other to reach common goals. Social interdependence theory, the idea that results for each individual are determined not only by their own actions but also by the actions of the other participants, is a major philosophy behind cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Reliance on each other was especially evident during information gap activities, the type of activity in which each partner has information that the other person needs and vice versa. Many students liked information gap activities because they said that they forced them to communicate, while others expressed frustration because they said that if their partner was not giving enough description, they did not know what to do. Some students also stated in their interviews that during activities that relied heavily on effective communication, they were more motivated because they did not want to disappoint their classmates.

Positive Outcomes

Over time, practicing use of communication strategies such as circumlocution, questioning, and acting out, leads to automaticity, engagement, creativity, and eventual independence.

My principle goal during this study was to equip students with strategies that would be key to maintaining communication. I had become frustrated with students not realizing all of the tools that they could use to work with what they already know. As Boufoy-Bastick (2001) states, “Empowerment is realized by the learner’s metacognition of what content and ability he or she has and how these can be used to enhance his or her own learning” (p. 3). After much emphasis on thinking of alternate ways to communicate rather than reverting to English or giving up, I noticed several positive changes begin to occur.

Automaticity is an important goal for my students, both in terms of speaking French automatically but also thinking in French automatically rather than always thinking first of what they want to say in English and then mentally trying to translate. I observed evidence of automaticity many times during the study, especially towards the end. Yvonne told me in an interview that sometimes when she is writing English, she accidentally starts writing French. She also said that she sometimes speaks French to her mom, even though she does not understand. Similarly, Ronda said, When I go to my next class after this class,

sometimes it's like I forget how to speak English. I'm in French mode, and I sometimes accidentally start speaking French to people and then I realize they won't understand me." I also observed students sometimes asking each other questions for clarification during group activities, and they automatically asked the question in French, even if English was not specifically prohibited. Students would sometimes even use French to socialize with each other. Yvonne and Ronda often would engage in conversations in French even after class had ended as they were leaving, talking about the weekend or their other classes, easily and without hesitation.

I noticed that teaching skills such as circumlocution made students become more creative with the language. I continually emphasized to students that even if they did not know a certain word that they wanted to say, there is almost always another way to say it. I also kept reminding them that their alternate description might not be perfect and could even sometimes sound a little awkward, but if they communicate their point, then their goal has been achieved. According to Omaggio Hadley (2001), the ability to effectively paraphrase in the target language often can reveal the difference between a beginner and more advanced level of proficiency.

Since modeling circumlocution, I saw many examples of students creatively using the language. For example, when students wrote crossword puzzle clues for a partner during the communicative crossword activity, many

students chose to write descriptions for all of their clues, even though they also had the option to draw. Aaron, who normally struggles with writing, came up with some very creative descriptions such as “où l’eau rencontre le sable” (where water meets the sand) to describe the beach, and “une montagne chaud” (a hot mountain) to describe a volcano. It is noteworthy that both the beach and a volcano would have been quite easy to draw, but he chose to write descriptions instead. Students’ spoken and written descriptions often became quite poetic. In the circumlocution activity at the end of the study, Ronda described a ribbon as “un chapeau pour un cadeau” (a hat for a present). It was evident that students were becoming much more comfortable with being creative with the language and allowing themselves to say things that might even sound awkward in order to communicate. I was also very surprised when students were so excited to not only write but share their Martinique poems with the class. In those poems, groups used metaphors and detailed descriptions that showed evidence that they were getting accustomed to describing things in different ways and with detail. For example, one group compared everything in Martinique to food. Another example of when I observed creativity with the language was during role plays. Students would often say silly things in French and act out while they were speaking during the role plays, often resulting in laughter from their group members and motivating them to continue the conversations.

Student engagement was another positive outcome that I witnessed during this study. As students got used to using strategies to maintain their communication, I noticed that students were almost always on-task during group work. The challenge of English only activities was also very engaging and enjoyable for the students. Even students who were the most resistant at the beginning changed their attitudes at least at certain times during the study. Students who were very resistant to using French – I saw their attitudes change. In the past, Mary, Monica, and Sasha typically used French as little as possible. Monica, who often gets distracted and off task said to me after a challenging no English circumlocution activity that it was fun and we should do that activity again. At the very beginning of the study when I explained the importance of circumlocution and that we even use the strategy sometimes in English, Mary said, “I don’t do that.” She also refused to present her project because she said that she does not want to talk in front of people. Towards the end of the study, I noticed her participating more and she also said that she really enjoyed the no English activities. Sasha was perhaps the most resistant. She almost never voluntarily participates and when she speaks, it is as little as possible. Normally, when I greet students at the door as they are entering class, she avoids eye contact with me and does not respond. The day after what I considered the most successful day in my study, which was the no English circumlocution activity in which students had to describe random English words that they had not learned to have

their group members guess, Sasha actually entered the class smiling and greeted me in French. Maybe this does not seem like a major victory, but to me this was a significant change for that particular student.

Students also exhibited evidence of becoming more independent by the end of the study. Before the study, students would often immediately ask me how to say something if they did not know how to express themselves. I noticed as the study progressed, they asked me questions like this very infrequently, as they were becoming used to thinking of ways to get around obstacles like these. When students did the first circumlocution activity in September, many students raised their hands and told me they did not even know how to begin and that although they understood what the word meant, they could not think of any ways to describe it. During the final circumlocution activities, I was able to just observe as I got much fewer questions. While total independence would take much longer than a few months to develop, I did observe less reliance on me. While some students still relied heavily on their partner or group members, I viewed this as more positive than relying on people or things that are outside of the conversation.

NEXT STEPS

As I embarked on a study that I knew would only span about two and a half months, I wondered if it would be enough time for me to see any changes. After seeing some significant findings in that short amount of time, I became very motivated to continue to implement elements of my study in the future to see how my students could progress even further. I feel so fortunate in some ways to be the only French teacher at my school. This means that I have the opportunity to watch students change over the course of four years in some cases. As for the participants in my study, I will get the chance to have many of them as students next year as well since most of them were juniors.

Just since I have finished the official study time period a few months ago, I have observed some exciting developments. Participation, even when they are together as a whole class, has increased. Students seem more comfortable with each other, and even more unlikely friendships have developed between students who previously did not interact. Most of the students from this class have chosen to move on to Honors French IV next year.

As a teacher, I learned to rethink my role in the classroom. It had been very difficult for me to step back and give more control to the students at first. I struggled to push them without making them uncomfortable. I often rushed to help them without always giving them enough time to think for themselves. However, I see now that by guiding them rather than dominating, I have helped

them get on a road towards becoming more independent. I had never understood why students would usually not use strategies to communicate. This study showed me that these strategies do not come naturally to most people and must not only be explicitly modeled, but repeatedly emphasized and practiced in order for students to begin automatically thinking in that way.

I look forward to continuing to work towards the goal of communicative competence with my students. I have already seen a great shift in the students' relationships with each other. A topic that I have always struggled with as a language teacher has been native language use. I have never doubted that an environment that is rich in target language use is absolutely critical. However, I have often wondered if English is always the enemy or if it could be another beneficial tool. I determined from the study that when students did use English, it was usually task related and sometimes helped them clarify directions or meaning, which in turn enhanced their subsequent communications in French. Although reliance on English did dwindle as the study went on, I would like to see students become more confident and get to the point of not needing to use English at all. Although my students know that they are always expected to communicate in French, I definitely plan to completely prohibit English more often, since that prohibition was so successful during my study. I am confident that teaching them to rely on strategies, which are useful in real world situations,

rather than English, which may not always be useful, will continue to enhance their communication.

Beyond implementation of strategy instruction, I would like to also continue collecting data in order to promote positive changes in my classroom. As teachers, we often become so immersed in what is often a long list of daily responsibilities that we unfortunately do not always observe our students as closely as we should. While it is admittedly unrealistic to expect that I will engage in the frequency and detailed level of data collection that I did during my study, there are still many things that I can continue to do. Interviews, surveys, and careful observations were all crucial indications of what to continue and what to change. Involving students through surveys and interviews shows them that their opinions are valued and also provides important feedback. I learned many things during this study from my students that I could have never learned without their honesty and cooperation.

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Appendix A - Survey

1. I enjoy working with a group or partner during class activities.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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2. I feel confident speaking French in a small group or with a partner.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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3. I feel confident expressing my thoughts and opinions through writing in French.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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4. I usually feel comfortable working with my classmates, even if I do not choose my group.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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5. I often get frustrated when I am trying to speak or write and cannot remember or do not know how to express something.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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6. If I do not know how to say or write something in French, I often use strategies such as using synonyms or descriptions to express my ideas.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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7. During group work, I often engage in off-task talking.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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8. During group work, I get frustrated because other group members engage in off-task talking.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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9. I use English often during group or partner activities.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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10. I use French most of the time during group or partner activities.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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11. I often find it necessary/helpful to use English during group activities to clarify directions or meanings.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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12. During group or partner work, one or two people often do most of the talking or work.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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Appendix B - Interview Questions

How did you feel when we did the activities in which you were not allowed to use English?

Talk to me about the type of activity we have done where you are with a partner and you have information they need, they have information you need, and you need to talk to communicate that. Do you like or dislike this? Why?

(When applicable) I have noticed that you have been doing a good job using strategies to help your classmates and stay in French. Why do you do that and how do you know how to do that?

Are there certain things during group or partner work that you think prevent you from communicating well?

Do you think writing or speaking is more difficult for you? Why?

What could we do in class to help you communicate better in French and avoid English?

What could we do in class that might make people more comfortable or willing to talk?

When you work with other people in pairs or groups, do you feel like they influence you positively or negatively and why?

Appendix C – Open-ended survey # 1

1. Do you prefer individual, partner, or group activities in class? Explain your choice and your opinions on each of them.
2. Do you feel confident speaking in French without relying on English? How is your confidence affected in different settings such as whole class, with partners, or with groups?
3. What do you feel are your strengths and weaknesses in French? Why do you find these things easy or difficult?
4. Do you feel that your performance is affected by teacher-selected groups compared to student-selected groups? In what ways?
5. What are some specific partner or group activities that we have done in class that you enjoyed or did not enjoy? Explain your choices.
6. If you are speaking French and forget a word or expression that you want to say, what are some strategies that you use to avoid English?

Appendix D – Open-ended Survey # 2

1 Please comment on the following activities that we have done in class. Include information such as what you liked or disliked about the activity, what was easy and/or difficult about the activity.

- a) describing random English words using only French without acting things out

- b) writing activity in which each group member starts out with a different story prompt and we rotate every few minutes until each member contributes to each story:

- c) Casual conversation type of activities (such as when you interviewed each other about the weekend and were encouraged to continue your conversation as long as possible in French):

2. Do you feel that you have improved your communication skills in French since the beginning of the year? Explain. Comment specifically regarding use of communication strategies like finding different ways to describe your words or ideas. What are the most important things you have learned?

3. What is your relationship with the other students in the class? Do you feel that it has changed at all since the beginning of the year as you have worked with different people? How do your classmates affect your performance in groups and in front of the whole class?

4. If you went to a French-speaking country, how confident would you feel that you would be able to communicate your needs to a native speaker using the vocabulary and strategies that you have learned? Explain.

5. What activities have helped you the most with developing your communication skills in French? Also, tell if there are any activities that do not help you and why.

6. What makes you feel comfortable in class? What makes you feel uncomfortable? Why?

7. What are some things that your teacher can do in the future to help you enhance your communication skills and to help you feel more confident speaking in front of other people?

Appendix E – Principal Consent Letter

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am currently working towards completion of my Master of Education degree at Moravian College. This program has encouraged me to continue to learn and reflect upon my own teaching practices. This semester, I will be completing a study in which I research the effects of using communication strategies in a cooperative learning setting. I hope that this study will help enhance students' communication skills in French and allow them to become more proficient in using strategies to enhance peer interaction. The study, including analysis of results, will be completed by May 15, 2013.

Throughout my research study, students will participate in various pair and group activities in the classroom to maximize communication time. I will collect data in the form of observations, interviews, surveys, and samples of student work. Collecting this data will help me determine which activities and strategies work best to enhance communication in French.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and a student can choose at any time to withdraw his or her participation. There is no penalty for students who do not participate. Students do not participate in the study would still be expected to participate in all class activities and assessments, but their data would not be used in the study. All participant information will be kept confidential. I am the only person who will know the identity of the participants. In order to protect the identity of the participants, pseudonyms will be used for all students involved with the study. Data will be stored in a locked cabinet and will be shredded at the end of the study.

Any questions regarding this study may be directed to me, Lauren Ezzell at ezzell@nasdschools.org or 610-262-7812 or to my advisor, Dr. Joseph Shosh at Moravian College at jshosh@moravian.edu or 610-861-1482. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lauren Ezzell

I agree to let Lauren Ezzell participate in this research study for her French III class.

Principal Signature

Date

Appendix F – Parent/Student Consent Letter

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am currently working towards completion of my Master of Education degree at Moravian College. This program has encouraged me to continue to learn and reflect upon my own teaching practices. This semester, I will be completing a study in which I research the effects of using communication strategies in a cooperative learning setting. I hope that this study will help enhance students' communication skills in French and allow them to become more proficient in using strategies to enhance peer interaction. The study, including analysis of results, will be completed by May 15, 2013.

Throughout my research study, students will participate in various pair and group activities in the classroom to maximize communication time. I will collect data in the form of observations, interviews, surveys, and samples of student work. Collecting this data will help me determine which activities and strategies work best to enhance communication in French.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and a student can choose at any time to withdraw his or her participation. There is no penalty for students who do not participate. Students do not participate in the study would still be expected to participate in all class activities and assessments, but their data would not be used in the study. All participant information will be kept confidential. I am the only person who will know the identity of the participants. In order to protect the identity of the participants, pseudonyms will be used for all students involved with the study. Data will be stored in a locked cabinet and will be shredded at the end of the study. There are no anticipated risks to students participating in the study. However, in the event of any unforeseen effects, you may contact the guidance department at 610-262-7813 or the nurse's office at 610-262-7812.

Please indicate your decision below regarding whether you will allow your child to participate in the study. If you would like any further information or if you would like to see the survey and/or interview questions, please contact me. Any questions regarding this study may be directed to me, Lauren Ezzell at ezzell@nadschools.org or 610-262-7812 or to my advisor, Dr. Joseph Shosh at Moravian College at jshosh@moravian.edu or 610-861-1482. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lauren Ezzell

_____ I agree to allow my child to participate in this research study. I understand that all data will remain confidential and anonymous and that my child can withdraw his or her participation at any time during the study.

_____ I do not allow my child to participate in the study.

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

_____ I agree to participate in this research study. I understand that all data will remain confidential and anonymous and that I can withdraw my participation at any time during the study.

Student Signature

Date