2018

Speaking (like the) French: The Success of a Three-Week Domestic Immersion Program

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Speaking (like the) French: the success of a three-week domestic immersion program

"Speaking (like the) French" was designed in 1993 to address the frustration that strikes too many students who feel that they plateau at an intermediate level of language acquisition. After the traditional sequence of three or four semesters of college language instruction, often following several years of study in high school, students may feel that their learning stagnates; they lose interest in their initial goal of attaining linguistic competence, and many abandon their studies in the language before they reach a higher level of mastery[1]. Yet students who manage to pass or bypass this low moment often go on to spend a year or semester studying abroad and regain their momentum to reach a greater level of fluency. Could a course be designed to counter the plateau effect? What kind of intermediate level course might re-motivate student interest by enabling them to surmount the period of stagnation and to increase their learning measurably and efficiently? The January interterm at XXX College, a period students usually spend unengaged academically, offered an opportunity for an experiment. The three-week academic hiatus provided the ideal time to develop an immersion experience that differed not only in structure but also in intensity from the more regularly paced semester courses. The proven success of the Middlebury summer language school's total immersion program, condensing two semesters of college-level language courses into seven to eight weeks, suggested a model for an interterm course that would likewise condense one semester into three weeks[2]. Such an intense immersion experience, albeit shorter than the Middlebury program, could serve multiple objectives. Not only might it allow students to

progress more rapidly than during the slower paced semester courses, therein addressing the problem of the "plateau effect," but the different structure and methodology that the immersion course would require might also make that progress more visible and attractive to students and thus encourage them to continue their study of the language beyond the intermediate level. Could a three-week intense immersion experience lead students to "dream" in French?

Research on immersion programs

In the last twenty years a number of researchers in second language acquisition have tried to measure the benefits of study abroad on target language acquisition and, more specifically, to compare linguistic gains between formal classroom instruction on a college campus at home and the more holistic study abroad combination of formal study and language and cultural immersion. Yet, other than the research conducted on early immersion programs in primary schools, mostly in the context of bilingual education in Canada, there are few serious studies that focus on learning a second language/culture in an immersive context at home, and there were none when we first conceived "Speaking (like the) French" in 1993. Of the studies that have since been published, four are of particular relevance. Freed, Segalowitz and Dewey in their 2004 essay, "Context of Learning and Second Language Fluency in French," reveal some pertinent findings. They compared the acquisition of fluency and communicative competence of twenty-eight students in three different learning contexts—a regular semester classroom language instruction, a semester study abroad and a seven-week domestic immersion program[3].

Interestingly, the study reveals that students involved in the on-campus immersion program made the "greatest gains in oral fluency, despite the similar number of hours of classroom-based instruction for the two groups"(294). These unanticipated findings show that on several of the nine measured variables they performed better than the study abroad students. Students in the immersion context reported using French more outside of formal classes, in speaking and writing activities. In fact, the students in the study abroad semester program reported speaking more English than French on a weekly basis. In contrast the students in the intensive immersion environment on campus reported using significantly more French than English during the seven-week program.

This compelling study challenges the general belief that learners who spend time abroad in the L2 culture necessarily become more fluent. That said, there are many different study abroad programs, of various level of rigorousness, and it could be that programs that enforce a "target-language only" pledge may have a different measure of success. Nevertheless this study is important because it highlights the benefits, quality, and advantages of domestic immersion programs that extend contact hours with the target language to include co-curricular activities.

In their paper, Malone, Rifkin, Christian and Johnson (2003) also cite the benefits of intensive summer institutes. They discuss, of course, the Middlebury summer language institute, and claim that students show clear gains in their language proficiency with 30% of students who enter at the Intermediate level exiting with an Advanced level of proficiency. Similarly to the Freed, Segalowitz and Dewey study, they attest to the significance and salience of the concentrated nature of instruction: "Many students report

that they learn more language at Middlebury in one summer than they do in a semester or even a year on a study abroad program" (12).

More recently, as student interest in study abroad has shifted from year-long programs to shorter and shorter programs, researchers have begun focusing on the various academic and cultural effects and benefits of the few short-term domestic immersion programs that exist for college-age students. Two publications in particular corroborate and nuance the findings of the pioneering studies mentioned above on the impact of domestic language study immersion. In the most recent study, and the one most pertinent to our own, "Exploring the Effects of Short Term Spanish Immersion Program in a Post-Secondary Setting," Miano, Bernhardt, and Brades (2016) pose three research questions, two of which echo ours:

1. To what extent can an intensive 2-week Spanish immersion experience enhance second language Spanish Students' oral and written proficiency?

2. To what extent can a domestic immersion experience motivate learners to enroll in upper-level courses and/or study abroad?

3. What are students' reactions to a theme-based, short-term immersion experience? (288-89)

Their findings, based on pre-and post testing the oral and written proficiency of four groups of program participants from 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015, demonstrate that "most participants improved their oral and writing proficiency by at least one sublevel. A total of 40 out of 51 and 36 of 51 students showed this improvement in oral proficiency and

writing proficiency, respectively…. In all cases of improvement by two sublevels, the progress increased from Intermediate Mid to Advanced Low" (295). However, despite these tangible improvements, students did not use these gains to increase enrollment in upper-level literature and culture classes or to pursue their studies in the language and culture with study abroad. A second, comparative study between nine students in a seven-week home immersion program and nine students on six-week study abroad in Brazil, also finds that "home-country program students showed more gains in the ACTFL oral proficiency scale and demonstrated a broader lexical-syntactic repertoire, more cohesion resources, greater awareness/command of sociolinguistic rules and formal discourse, fewer errors, and less fossilization" (Cowles and Wiedemann 13). Although the research objectives of these four publications differed from the questions that we are investigating, they all agree on one of their conclusions: Short-term domestic immersion programs, from as short as two weeks to seven weeks of duration, lead participants to advance measurably in their linguistic progress and their intercultural or global awareness. Moreover, as Cowles and Weidemann emphasize, these findings "are remarkable because they contradict the conventional wisdom approach that immersion in the target country is the best way to increase competence in a foreign language in a short period of time" (10).

Our own starting point was primarily practical and pedagogical more than theoretical, determined by the goals we wanted our students to achieve in the three-week term— to overcome the "doldrums" by reigniting their motivation and by having them make tangible gains in their linguistic progress, measured by their enrollment in more

advanced courses following the three-week immersion. But we also hoped that the data we would collect from our students' end-of-term evaluations might provide evidence of the usefulness and value of a short-term domestic immersion program within a college curriculum.

Twenty-three years later and with thirteen years of detailed student evaluations, we can now say that our initial goals in creating this course were achieved. Although this affirmation is partially based on our subjective assessment of our students' experience and progress, an analysis of the evaluation survey we have had our students take and a study of the patterns of course selection that students chose the semester and year following this immersive three-week course provide both qualitative and quantitative findings that show that most students renewed their enthusiasm for the study of French, and that a majority of them continued their studies in the language, by either studying abroad or majoring in French. Indeed, what was first an "experiment" has been fully integrated in our French Studies curriculum, with student demand often surpassing capacity.

Designing a course based on communicative and pragmatic competence

From its inception, we conceived of the course to focus on oral communication and on pragmatic competence. There are various interpretations of the field of pragmatics, but broadly speaking, Levinson defines it as "the study of language usage"(5). Among the various definitions of pragmatics, Crystal's is especially useful: "the study of language from the view of *users*, especially in the *choices* they make, the *constraints* they

encounter in using language in *social interaction* and the *effects* their use of language has on *other participants* in the *act of communication*."(301, italics added). Kasper and Rose specify that communicative actions include not only using speech acts such as apologizing, complaining, etc., but also engaging in different types of discourse and participating in speech events of varying length and complexity. Pragmatic competence is thus not only the capacity to participate in communicative situations, but it is also the ability to use speech acts in socially appropriate ways, according to a specific cultural context; it involves knowledge beyond linguistic competence. Grammar is essential but it cannot be separated from social and cultural context. A good level of grammatical competence does not necessarily imply an equally good level of pragmatic competence. Working on pragmatic competence in meaningful interactions not only improves linguistic abilities, it also raises the student's level of enthusiasm and motivation. It not only brings linguistic skills to life, it situates them within a social and cultural context that gives them depth and breadth. It explores the emotional aspect of communicating and often brings laughter and theater into the classroom while stimulating higher cognitive processing.

Description of the course "Speaking (like the) French: Conversing, Discussing, Arguing, Debating" (FRN235j)

In order to provide our students with the linguistic tools that would allow them to achieve and comprehend linguistic action in a contextually appropriate way, we chose materials and designed exercises to expose them to authentic cultural situations, to

analyze culture-specific behaviors, to raise awareness of pragmatic norms, to develop

interactional skills. That said, from the outset we were also limited by the practical

constraints of fitting the material of a semester-long course within a three-week period.

To achieve the equivalence of a full semester course, the program had to maximize

contact hours as well as hours spent on task in the target language. The interterm course

was designed to meet for a minimum of seven hours per day for the fifteen days of class

time (three weeks duration), with an additional two to three hours of work at home per

day, and some film viewings and discussions on weekends[4]. From this intense rhythm,

several consequences about the aims and content of the course followed. First, the course

focused mainly on developing oral skills, both oral production and listening

comprehension, and though it included substantial reading assignments, it did not

concentrate on writing or grammar. Students were expected to know and have mastered

grammar basics so that they could concentrate on familiarizing themselves with a wide

range of oral expression of native speakers and on practicing the more advanced

syntactical structures introduced in the culturally authentic situations, conversations,

interviews, formal presentations, debates, discussions and arguments modeled in the

basic materials of the course. To encourage our learners to become better communicators

and to stimulate their involvement, we concentrated on interactional skills and pragmatic

and sociolinguistic competence. Second, we structured the day to include class discussion

of reading and film viewings; independent, interactive computer viewing and exercises;

small group discussions and research projects; role-playing games in small groups and

with the entire class; independent work on pronunciation; and viewing of films and a

variety of television programs. Finally, the pace and intensity of the course called for fully integrating technology and computer-activated learning both to create variety in the tasks and methodologies and to supplement the instructor's active involvement. We therefore designed every unit to include a series of scaffolded, interactive computer materials based on the films, television programs, interviews, and, eventually, internet sites that students could use independently or in small groups. The computer exercises allowed them to control the pace of their learning as well as to practice the syntactical structures, the vocabulary, and the gestures of the language acts featured in the materials before implementing these structures more freely and in a linguistically and culturally appropriate manner in the more developed role-play that culminated each of the four units.

Integrating Technology and Blended Learning

Although by 1993 the promise of technology and computer assisted language learning had been heralded for some time, and some programs had been developed, nothing was available commercially that fit the aims and needs of the course as we envisioned it[5]. We thus set out to design the materials ourselves[6]. The materials, themes and exercises that we selected and developed were all chosen to enhance the oral communicative competence of the students enrolled, to focus on pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence, and to provide insight into French social and cultural practices. Just as the exercises for each unit were scaffolded from passive to active, from simple to more complex, from controlled to free role-play, the **four units** of the three-

week course were also designed to progress from what we considered the easiest

sociolinguistic situations to understand and practice—**conversation** with friends and

family—to a more controlled discursive production—**presenting**, reporting and

explaining a set of events or facts—and a more open-ended "press conference" and

interview—to, finally, the most complex social and discursive situation—**debate and**

argument. We were equally attentive to the content of the materials we chose, selecting

topics that would hold up over time and that would be deemed relevant to a cohort of

twenty-year old students—the nuances and complications of sentimental relationships

amongst a group of friends living in a "nouvelle ville", Cergy-Pontoise, as portrayed in

Eric Rohmer's film, _L'Ami de mon amie_[7]; the French educational system and the cultural

values and behaviors it promotes, as discussed in several television shows we sampled

and in a number of contemporary films[8]; the controversy over wearing the veil as seen

from the different perspectives of adolescents, teachers, immigrant families and the

French government; and finally the currency that intellectuals and writers maintain in

French culture as dramatized by Bernard Henri Lévy, Gabriel Matznef, Maurice

Bardèche and Roger Grenier in an intense discussion about Céline, Vichy and the role of

the French in the World War II on a typically engaging episode of _Apostrophes_.

To give a clearer idea of the type of exercises we designed to lead the students

progressively to more independent communicative competence, the first unit,

"Conversations," based on Rohmer's film, _L'Ami de mon amie_, can serve as an example.

Progressing from observation to analysis to production, learners first observe linguistic

and pragmatic norms in authentic environments. Students begin by watching and

analyzing short video clips from the film that reflect different social interactions. This phase of observation is followed by group discussion on the speech acts, the linguistic practices and the pragmatic norms of the characters in their setting. In a series of interactive computer exercises, students interact with the film's characters, recording their responses as if they were themselves in conversation with the characters practicing the speech acts such as greetings, invitations, giving and receiving advice, negotiating compromises. They can play back the scene with their recorded response and judge whether their part of the conversation is appropriate. The newly acquired linguistic structures and communicative patterns are then put into practice more freely with several role-plays, re-enacting similar situations or scenes. At this point, students produce discourse that integrates appropriate vocabulary, correct grammar, idiomatic usage, proper register, behavior, etiquette, tone, and body language, moving from imitating linguistic behavior to creating it more freely. The unit ends with a day-long elaborate role-play simulating a family conversation about how to spend their winnings of the loto, each member trying to persuade the others that her idea—saving the money for retirement, renovating the apartment, going on a family vacation, giving the money to a good cause, etc.—makes the most sense for the family[9]. In groups of five, students make proposals based on the research they've previously done in preparation for the family meeting, they make hypotheses and redeploy the speech acts they have observed and practiced, but now with the aim of influencing the other "members of the their family" that their solution is the best. Inevitably, the family members must also listen to each other, concede points, and reach a compromise.

From role-plays to global simulation

Each of the four units follows the same pedagogical progression and pattern, with each unit focusing on mastering increasingly subtle or culturally specific speech acts and culminating in a extensive global simulation. Learners must embody a new persona, assume new cultural, gendered identities, and communicate declarative knowledge on an array of topics such as banking, real estate, travelling, philanthropy, ecology, sustainability, and using not only linguistically appropriate grammar and lexicon, but also demonstrating culturally appropriate pragmatic norms. Learner to learner collaboration helps to build rhetorical effectiveness in a more authentic environment. For example, the final global simulation calls upon students to debate the pros and cons of the extension of the TGV from Paris to Strasbourg, actualizing the array of speech acts and communicative behavior that they have practiced during the three weeks. As scaffolding for this elaborate role-play, students work on two shorter role-plays to introduce and practice appropriate thematic vocabulary, cultural context and cultural norms. One role-play stages a city council faced with the responsibility to vote on several land planning scenarios and the other one brings together advocates and critics of a Paris metro strike. For the final TGV simulation students take on the roles of mayor of Strasbourg, interested in increasing tourism and commerce to his city; members of the European Parliament, arguing for the need to link Strasbourg to Paris and the rest of Europe the most rapidly as possible; engineers from the TGV explaining the train's advanced technology, its safety, and its advantages over plane or automobile transportation;

farmers protesting that their land will be split by the track and their farms irreversibly damaged; ecologists fearing environmental disturbances and arguing for safe passageways for animals; and members of the Nancy town council trying to persuade the others that the TGV pass through their city. Given that this global simulation was originally based on the actual project of extending the TGV, there were, and still are, numerous and excellent resources online that students could consult to inform their position with facts and details of the debate. While the project was underway, the students felt that they really were participating in an actual and pertinent debate. Today, the project is completed, but the role-play still seems valid to our students, as it puts into play many of the same debates over transportation and sustainable resources that they are familiar and engaged with.

When we designed the course in 1993, role-plays were still relatively new and not yet as integrated in second language teaching and textbooks as they have become. Since then research has confirmed the positive effect of complex role-plays on language learners, as it encourages them to become agents actively involved in social interactions, to take on different personae, and as such to embody a different language and culture. Indeed, the CEFR specifically broadens the parameters of second-language learning by describing "users and learners of a language primarily as "social agents," i.e. members of society who have tasks (not exclusively language-related) to accomplish in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment and within a particular field of action" (18). In an article on interactional analysis based on a corpus of role-plays performed in a FL class of young Chinese adults in Hong Kong, Marie Cecile Leblanc affirms the

pedagogical value of role-play. According to her research, collective learning strategies such as explicit repetition requests, mutual assistance, corrective reformulations, mutual corrections, making others speak, helps effective learning to take place. As learners engage in social interactions the learning process becomes essentially and effectively self-guiding. "Students are effectively *training* for greater autonomy and responsibility in the learning of the foreign language"(33). The instructor is no longer the focal point and the classroom evolves from teacher-centered to learner-learner collaboration. As some studies on collaborative and task-oriented learning have shown, weaker learners are not the only ones to benefit from pair and group work. "Both the stronger and the weaker learner brought their interactional skills to bear on the activity and shifted expert-novice roles during interaction. It was not the case that only the weaker learner profited from the activity at the cost of the stronger partner. [...] there was no evidence of learners picking up each other's errors; rather, they assisted each other in reaching more advanced levels of communicative ability" (Rose and Kasper 38-39). Learners cooperate and assist each other to reach higher levels of communicative ability.

What our data shows

The data that we collected from 206 student evaluations over 13 years corroborate the above findings and provide specific feedback from students on what they considered to have contributed the most to their learning, their improvement in understanding native speakers, and their own greater comfort in ability to act, speak and participate in culturally appropriate ways[10]. The evaluation form we developed was originally intended

to get specific feedback on the computer-aided exercises, the reading materials, and the overall effect and affect of the intensive pace in order to revise or adjust the course accordingly. It asks specific questions and invites reflective feedback from the students and as such differs from the end-of-semester evaluations administered for every course at our institution[11]. While we expected useful feedback from the student responses, we were surprised by the consensus over the years about some aspects of the course. In particular, they provide useful information regarding the pedagogical benefit of role-plays and the students' self-perception of the amount of learning achieved in an immersion program compared to a semester-long course.

The most consistent response highlights the importance of the role-plays, including the end-of-unit global simulations, and our students' perception of their progress. Charts 1 and 2 provide a snapshot of the data collected in 2007 and again in 2010:
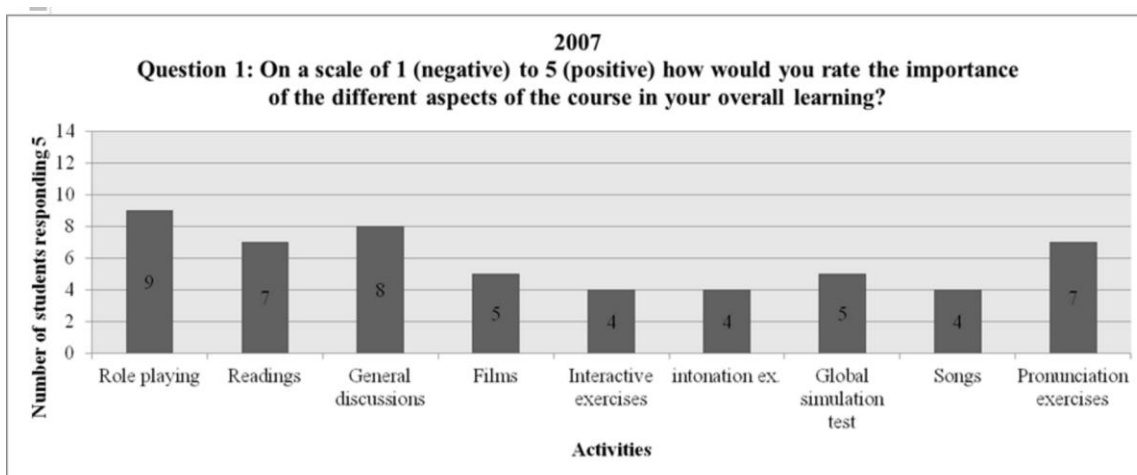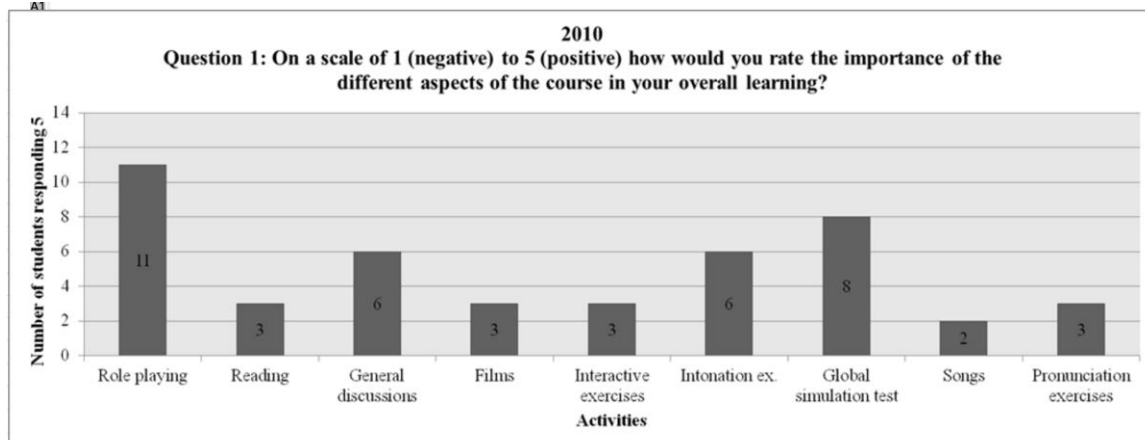

Chart 1- 2007

Chart 2 - 2010

Nine years out of the thirteen years, role-plays and global simulations together, lead as the aspect having the most importance in the students' overall learning. It comes as the second best in the other three years of the evaluations. In their explanatory comments, students remark that they enjoyed creating a French personae and adjusting to the socio-pragmatics of French encounters to strive to achieve native-like utterances and behaviors. As a sample of their responses suggest, students recognize role-plays as one of the best tools to increase their communicative competence:

> 1998: "The role playing really helped not only with a growth of vocabulary and expressions but also increased my confidence and willingness to talk out loud in French."

> 2007: "The role playing games and the 4 *épreuves* [global simulations] helped me most in my assimilation of French, continued use of vocabulary and sentence structures. I got used to speaking French without thinking."

The immersion experience

Chart 3 traces from 1994 to 2011 how students are aware that the immersion model contributed significantly to their achievements. To the question, "Did you learn more than in a regular semester?" students overwhelmingly responded yes throughout the years.
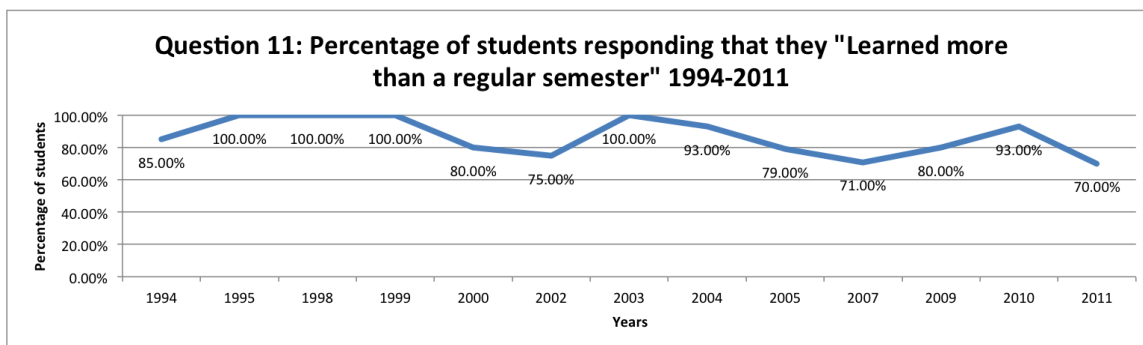

Chart 3

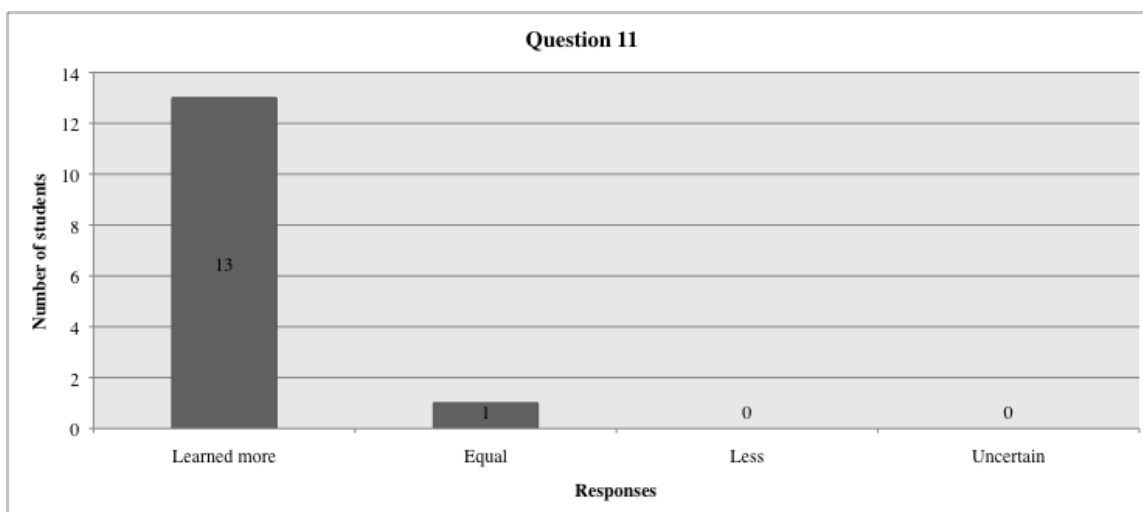Chart 4 focuses on the question for the year 2010:

Chart 4

The student comments bring the data to life, reflecting their enthusiasm and providing a perspective onto their affective engagement and their learning process.

1994: "In this class, there was never a chance to stop thinking about, or in, French. I think because of this each class hour was worth more because it built on the hours before it."

1998: "I have improved my French in 3 weeks in a way I never did in the many years I've been studying French."

2002: "I feel that I learned more practical information that I'm not likely to forget as soon as the course ends. It's more a question of quality of learning rather than quantity. I had to apply what I learned every day and it was because of that that it will stay with me."

2005: "This course was more French immersion than going abroad!"

2009: "Absolutely, I spoke more French in the first two days of class than I did in my other three semesters of French."

2010: "Absolutely, I believe that the intensive aspect was key to overcoming any insecurities about practicing the language out loud."

2011: "YES! Speaking French all day is probably the most beneficial thing."

Intensive courses in the French curriculum landscape

When suggesting ways to help develop high-level speakers, Malone and al. have emphasized the beneficial outcomes of intensive programs: "Language gained in an immersion setting is an excellent preparation for the study abroad experience, with all its cultural and psychological challenges, because the immersion program provides students language skills needed to make the most of the cultural challenges experienced on study

abroad" (12). Our experience and a second set of data comparing the course selection of 1134 students who enrolled in an equivalent, semester long, intermediate French course (FRN 230), with the 206 students who enrolled in the short-term immersion FRN235j, also suggest that a domestic immersion course can hold a crucial place in the curriculum of foreign language learning, more specifically in a subsequent engagement with the language and culture[12]. The case group was the original 206 students who took the immersion class "Speaking (like the) French" (FRN235j) and whose evaluations of the course we've analyzed above. We compared this case group with a control group of all 1134 students from the same years who took one of the sections of a non-intensive intermediate course (FRN230) during a regular semester.

Our first question was whether the immersion course played a role in the decision of our students to major in French Studies.

	Case Group (Students Who Took FRN235j)		Control Group (Students Who Took FRN230 But Not FRN235j)	
	Number of Students	Percentage of Students	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
French Major	93	45%	133	12%
Non-French Major	113	55%	1001	88%
Total	206	100%	1134	100%

Table 1: Proportion of French Majors in the case and the control groups

We can see from the data collected that 45% of the students who took the immersion course became French majors in contrast to only 12% of the students who

took the equivalent intermediate-level course. Clearly, the difference of percentage of French majors between the case and the control groups is significant, suggesting that students who took FRN235j were more likely to major in French. We can interpret the statistics two ways. Students who take the immersion course are more serious about studying French (even before registering for the course) or/and the course encourages students to reach another level of ease and competence with the language, which then motivates them to become majors. In either case, the course plays a crucial role in our curriculum, whether to serve our most dedicated students or to convert dilettantes into passionate Francophiles.

Our second inquiry was to compare the likelihood that a student who had taken "Speaking (like the) French" (FRN235j) would enroll in a study abroad program in a French-speaking locale with the students in the control group who had not taken the course.

	Case Group (Students Who Took FRN235j)		Control Group (Students Who Took FRN230 But Not FRN235j)	
	Number of Students	Percentage of Students	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
Study abroad	114	55%	334	29%
No study abroad	92	45%	800	71%
Total	206	100%	1134	100%

Table 2: Proportion of students who went to a study program to a Francophone country in the case and the control groups

Not surprisingly the findings corroborate the role of the course for students who chose to major in French. As in the first comparison, we cannot discern whether the

higher percentage of students enrolling in a study abroad program from those students who had taken "Speaking (like the) French" means that those students took the course *because* they were already planning to study abroad and thus wanted to better their linguistic competence or whether the course *inspired* them to continue French by studying in a French-speaking country. We can, however, state that the course provides an important preparation for 55% of those students who pursue studying French abroad.

It is interesting to note that for students who could not study abroad, the course functioned as an alternative immersion experience. As one student remarked in her evaluation: "It's a very good course for people who are not able to go Junior Year Abroad" (1999). Another student's reflections about whether she would renew the experience highlight both how the course gave her the confidence to advance in her language studies and to consider study abroad:

> 2005: "There were times when I thought, 'what have I gotten myself into? Where did my vacation go?' But in spite of the intensity and the time commitment, I would absolutely do it again. The overall payoff of the course made all the work worth it. I'm so looking forward to my courses this coming semester because I feel confident about my French now. I've also re-sparked my interest in going abroad, which is great!"

Finally, we also analyzed the number and level of French courses students in the case and control groups enrolled in after their regular semester or short-term immersion experience. Data from Table 3 show that students who took the short-term immersion

course did take more courses than students who had not. The difference is especially

significant with courses at the 200 and 300-level.

Course Level	Case Group (students took FRN235j)	Control Group (students took FRN230 but not FRN235j)
100-level	0.50	0.43
200-level	4.23	2.87
300-level	1.32	0.49
400-level	0.08	0.03
Total French Courses	8.46	5.08

Table 3**:** Comparison of number and level of courses taken by students after their
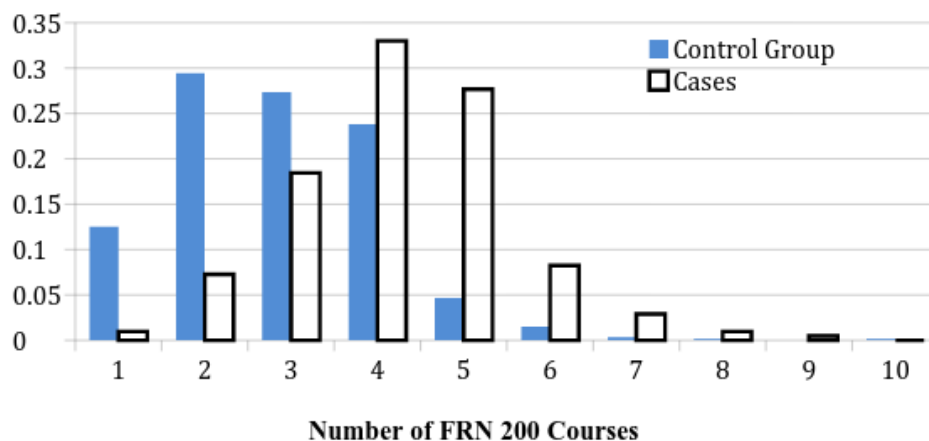
enrollment in either FRN 235j or FRN 230

Table 4: Proportion of students who took 200-level French courses

Table 4 provides a more focused comparison between the two groups for the 200-

level courses. Not only did students in the case group take more 200-level courses than

the students in the control group, but among students in the case group, the peak or

highest proportion of the distribution is four courses, while in contrast, the peak for the

control group is only two courses. Furthermore, the number of courses that students in the control group took declines rapidly after four courses. Only 4% of students enrolled in five courses in the control group whereas 28% of the case group enrolled in five courses. This significant difference implies strongly that students taking the short-term immersion course are much more committed French students.

Conclusions

More than twenty years after first offering the course in January 1994, the materials and design of the course continue to serve our students. Over the years we have changed and updated the readings, selected recent films, created new role-plays, made more use of the wealth of material accessible on the internet, and included new activities, but always with the same pedagogical goals in mind. Importantly, since 1994, research in the field of pragmatics and studies comparing student learning outcomes in study abroad programs with domestic immersion programs support and confirm the approach based on pragmatics and communicative competence that we took in designing this intensive immersion course. Our own research, presented here, corroborates the findings of others. An at-home immersion experience is definitely beneficial to learners. The immersion model allows for role-plays that become extended global simulation in which students learn pragmatic norms, struggle with linguistic skills, confront various discursive strategies, become aware of different socio-cultural environments, and begin to juggle multiple literacies. Our data suggests that the condensed time period creates a framework for more intense and continuous engagement, crucial for the acquisition of

communicative competence. Just as important, such a program is also a great strategy for departments of French studies to retain, motivate, and engage students. The initial goal of this study--to encourage students at the intermediate level to reenergize and pursue their study of a foreign language and understanding in greater depth and nuance of another culture--continues to be as urgent[13].

Notes

[1] See Margaret E. Malone, Benjamin Rifkin, Donna Christian and Dora E. Johnson, "Attaining High Levels of Proficiency: Challenges for Language Education in the United States," paper delivered at the Conference on Global Challenges and U.S Higher Education at Duke University, 2003. The authors argue that the way second language teaching is delivered in the majority of US schools and universities makes it difficult for students to experience the necessary contact hours to reach advanced and superior levels of competence. They offer an array of solutions, such as early immersion programs, study abroad as well as intensive immersion programs at home.

[2] The results of spending a summer in an immersion program at Middlebury are well known, though other than anecdotal testimonies, S. Freeman's 1975 history of the program, and Spielman and Radnofsky 's more recent article of 2001 on learning a language under tension, there is little research on the benefits of Middlebury's programs.

[3] The intensive seven-week summer program had an average of three to four hours a day of formal classroom study (17.5 hours, weekly average) and numerous learning activities outside of the classroom such as participation on a soccer team and a choir, painting classes, musical performances, films, cabaret as well as trips, parties and cultural events. The twelve students had to sign a "French only" language pledge.

In the semester study abroad program in Paris, eight students were enrolled in a twelve-week course of instruction, spending from two to five hours per day in classes (16.4 hours, weekly average). Students with stronger skills were able to take classes at French institutes and universities.

[4] The total hours students spend thus comes to between 141 and 156 hours. This number compares to the 156 hours per semester spent in a regular 13-week course (meeting 3 hours a weeks, with an expected 3 hours of preparation for each hour of class).

[5] The excellent interactive computer/video program, _A la rencontre de Philippe_, developed by Gilberte Furstenberg in 1992 at MIT with funds from the Annenberg Foundation served as inspiration for our own programs, but the hardware necessary for _A la rencontre de Philippe_ (computer, monitor and laser disc player) made it prohibitively expensive. Unfortunately a CD-ROM version reissued in 2006 through Clé International soon became outdated. For a detailed description of how the interactive features of the story and program worked, see Eugene F. Gray, "Interactive Language Learning: "A la rencontre de Philippe," _The French Review_, Vo. 65, No. 3 (Feb. 1992): 499-507.

[6] A generous grant from the Mellon Foundation funded the development of the materials and the technical support of Joanne Cannon.

[7] Rohmer's films offer ideal material for second language learning in that the conversations they consist of, though scripted, present enough spontaneity and genuine aspects of live conversation to serve as models for students. Moreover, the actors articulate their lines clearly at a pace that is both authentic yet slow enough for a non-native speaker to follow and Rohmer's camera lingers on the actor's facial expressions and gestures, allowing for careful analysis of gestural as well as verbal communication. In 1997 Laurette Barboni, Jean-Louis Maladain, Paola Nobili, and Anne Vicher published a set of excellent exercises,

L'Image et la parole des 4 aventures de Reinette et Mirabelle (Didier), based on one of Rohmer's films. Unfortunately, it's now out of print.

[8] In addition to Eric Rohmer's *L'ami de mon amie*, we have used Truffaut's, *L'Argent de poche* and *Au revoir, les enfants,* Cédric Klapish *L'Auberge espagnole,* Laurent Cantet *Entre les murs,* Julie Gavras *C'est la faute à Fidel,* Abdellatif Kechiche *L'Esquive,* Philippe Falardeau *Monsieur Lahzare,* Bernard Tavernier's *Ça commence aujourd'hui*, to name a few.

[9] This particular role-play and the final one were inspired by and adapted from "Le Loto" and "L'autoroute," from Jeanine Bruchet, *À mon avis: entraînement à l'expression orale: jeux de rôles*.

[10] From 1994 to 2011 the course was taught sixteen times and evaluations collected thirteen times. The student evaluations were administered on the last day of class by the instructor and were as anonymous as possible given the context.

[11] Because end-of-course evaluations were not formally administered by the institution for January interterm courses until 2016, the evaluations we administered were the only data we had for 13 years to assess student feedback.

[12] FRN 230, the basis of the French major and the first course after the grammar and language sequence, served as the control group. Students enrolled in FRN 235j are required to have taken it.

[13] We warmly thank Christianne Beasley, our student assistant who compiled the 13 years of evaluations and presented the data into readable charts; and Chi Gao, Jina Hua Lin and Ruobin Zhang, who undertook

the comparative analysis of the 1134 students who enrolled in an equivalent, regular semester-long, intermediate-level French course with the 206 students who enrolled in the three-week intensive immersion course as part of their special studies in Statistical Consulting.

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