

## **ABBOTSFORD TIMES**

Tuesday, May 15, 2007 11:51 AM

### **Award-winning teacher takes French lessons to new level**

Paul Fontaine - Staff reporter

An Abbotsford teacher is using technology to bring language learning home.

Julie Rousseau, Abbotsford School District's modern languages co-ordinator, was recently honoured with the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers [CASLT] 2007 H.H. Stern Award.

Only four teachers in Canada were given the award for their efforts in second-language teaching.

Rousseau works with teachers and students to make classroom websites and audio podcasts.

The podcasts are accessible from students' homes - sort of a take-home lesson.

At home, students can practise reading, vocabulary, expressions and songs, with the benefit of listening to their own teacher.

Rousseau says her innovative approach toward French teaching came about by talking.

"Last year, when I started out as a helping teacher, I would get French immersion teachers together and we had sharing sessions after school," she says. "One of the concerns that came out was, how do we extend French-language learning outside of our classroom into the homes of parents?"

Most French immersion parents don't speak French and feel the affects of not being able to help their children learn, says Rousseau.

"It becomes quite a challenge for parents to support their children in second-language learning."

With the help of Gary Toews, a technology helping teacher for the district, Rousseau came up with the idea for the creating classroom websites and uploading audio podcasts.

"Students could have access to their teacher's voice - in French - and that would support their learning at home," says Rousseau.

After Rousseau decided in October 2006 that this was an idea worth pursuing, she submitted a grant proposal and eventually received a one-time federal fund.

Nine French immersion teachers from kindergarten to Grade 3 were gathered as part of the project.

Sandy Hill, Margaret Stenerson, Clearbrook and Centennial Park were all represented as Rousseau laid out her two-year plan.

Armed with refurbished laptops, the computer novices set about learning how to create their websites, recording their voices and creating audio files.

"It was a true professional learning community," Rousseau says.

Along with holding full-time teaching duties, the hard-working group met twice a month to work on the project.

"They were all excited about what it meant. It meant that it would impact student learning."

The feedback they have gotten from parents has been nothing but positive.

"It made it really fun for kids to go home and practise," says Rousseau, adding now that they have the model for such a project, there are many different ways it can be used.

She says the program can be used by the families of ESL students in Abbotsford's diverse community.

"Technology has advanced language education, not only in Abbotsford, but throughout Canada and throughout the world."

published on 05/15/2007