



**The Canadian Association of
Second Language Teachers**

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Present the:

LINKING SECOND LANGUAGES RESEARCH AND PRACTICE SERIES

In this Issue:

*Scaffolding Inclusion in a Grade 8 Core French Classroom:
An Exploratory Case Study*

Research study by Katy Arnett*

*An Examination of the French as second
language strategies used to meet curriculum
expectations and students' needs*

(*) Arnett, K. (2010). Scaffolding Inclusion in a Grade 8 Core French Classroom: An Exploratory Case Study. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 66 (4), 557-582.

Reflect - What experiences do I bring to reading the research?

1. How do I support students with learning difficulties in my teaching?
2. How do I create an inclusive classroom?
3. To what extent do I believe all students are capable of learning a second language?
4. To what extent do I use the target language in my classroom? Does the extent of my use depend on my students?

What experience does the researcher bring to conducting the research?

Introducing Katy Arnett

As a middle and high school teacher of French in the U.S., Katy Arnett always had students with special education and diverse learning needs in her classroom. Those experiences have inspired her work now as a teacher educator and researcher, as she focuses on how FSL teachers can facilitate and support inclusive environments and the political elements that impact inclusion. She holds an M.A. and Ph.D. in Second Language Education from the University of Toronto and remains a certified teacher of French in the U.S.

A conversation with Katy Arnett, author of

Scaffolding Inclusion in a Grade 8 Core French Classroom: An Exploratory Case Study

Where did you conduct your research? With whom?

This case study was implemented in an Ontario school board. With the permission of the school board, I contacted various intermediate school sites to ask permission to contact classroom teachers about the study. Initially, I had three teachers indicate interest, but in the end, only one agreed to open her classroom to me. This Grade 8 core French teacher had about fifteen years of classroom experience, in a variety of FSL

contexts. I also interviewed about ¼ of her class during the study.

What were you trying to find out?

Simply stated, I wanted to see how she accommodated learner needs/diversity in the classroom, but also why she did some of the things she did to support students. In seeking the student perspectives, I wanted to see the extent to which her pedagogical actions were understood by the students.

A conversation with Katy Arnett, author of

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How did you gather your information?

I conducted observations of the classroom, using an observation checklist that I had designed and refined through prior research. The checklist helped me describe the context of the classroom environment and then the various strategies that I saw embedded into the lesson.

I also conducted interviews with her before and after the observation period, as well as individual interviews with 7 students in her classroom. The seven students represented a wide range of needs/interests/abilities in the classroom. At the end of the observation period, I also conducted a focus group interview with them.

What did you do with the data?

With the observation checklist, I conducted frequency analyses to determine how common certain strategies were in her teaching. At the conclusion of each observation period, I calculated the time (in minutes) devoted to each activity or episode in the lesson and to the various descriptors. I determined the percentage of time devoted to each descriptor in relation to the total time observed for each class period. For example, if a particular activity lasted 7 minutes and a strategy was evident during that activity, that strategy was attributed as being present for 7 minutes of class time. If the class period lasted 45 minutes, it meant that for 15.5% of the observed class time ($7/45 \times 100$), this strategy was present.

With the interviews, I first transcribed the audio recordings. After that, I read through the transcripts multiple times, looking for broad themes that appeared in the answers. Using the content of some of the questions, I then created labels for the themes. I classified responses into the themes. Sometimes, the response to a

single question could actually touch on multiple themes, so I would “chop” up the answer to put the relevant quotes with the themes. However, for the write-up, sometimes, I would use the answer to a single question to help illustrate a point raised by the observation data. Essentially, the interviews were used as a way to give context to many of the actions I saw in the classroom.

How would you summarize what you found?

This teacher actually did the opposite of what I was expecting. Initially, because the model of inclusive teaching championed in Ontario at the time had largely focused on retroactive strategies that are added to lessons post-design/ during implementation to help a student who is struggling, I was expecting that. However, she used an approach that was more consistent with what is known as “universal design,” where the strategies that are used to support learner need are built into the lesson from the start. To the students, these strategies appear to be “normal” for the teacher’s style.

The students were pretty astute about the impact of the teacher’s pedagogy on their learning. Many directly credited her for their increased positive attitudes about French and a confidence about using French in the classroom. Overall, the students held positive attitudes of the diversity of the needs in the classroom, and about how they felt she worked to meet all needs. They liked the fact that her teaching was varied from day to day, but that there was a consistent effort to make sure everyone had a chance to succeed.

What practical messages come from this study?

1. Inclusive lesson design is compatible with the FSL (or any other second language) classroom.

Though there has been an undercurrent of concern about the appropriateness of FSL classrooms for students with special needs for many years, this case study showed that it was possible to meet the needs of a diverse range of learners and remain true to the tenets of good FSL instruction. In fact, many of the suggested strategies for the included students are the same ones found in the literature for good strategies for FSL teaching.

2. Our students are capable of articulating what works for them as learners and what does not.

The precise assessments by the students of their teacher's pedagogy pointed out just how much students can recognize the impact of instructional decisions and approaches on their learning. The students respected the effort of their teacher to make French learning meaningful and accessible. The students in the classroom should definitely be asked about the activities and strategies we use, and consequently, viewed as partners in the learning experience.

3. Describing an experience can be a powerful learning tool.

As this study was largely designed, the focus was on the "how" and "why" a teacher did what she did to support learner needs and "what" the students in the class thought of those efforts. Sometimes, we just really need to know/ understand what is happening in our classes to be able to make better decisions about how to help our students because our perceptions may not be the reality.

What next?

1. What do I want to learn more about? How can I do that?
2. Are there any teaching practices in the study I could incorporate into my own teaching? How?
3. How can I judge if what I am doing is meeting the diverse needs of my students?

Additional Research Articles

- Bournot-Trites, M., Lee, E., and Séror, J. (2003). Tutorat par les pairs en lecture : une collaboration parents-école en milieu d'immersion française. *La Revue des Sciences de l'Éducation*, 29(1), 195-210. This research project measured the success of a peer-tutoring program to improve Grade 2 and 3 French immersion students' reading levels. Grade 2 and 3 students with reading difficulties were paired with students from Grades 6, 7 or 8. Reading tests were used to compare the Grade 2 and 3 students' skills to students of similar reading level who did not participate in the program. The results showed the peer-tutoring to have positive results with students with minor reading difficulties.
- Genesee, F. (2007). French immersion and at-risk students: A review of research evidence. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 63, 655-687. This article reviews research studies on the topics of: (a) outcomes of French immersion students with learning challenges, (b) outcomes of French immersion students with reading challenges, and (c) the effectiveness of interventions to meet their needs.
- Gersten, R., and Baker, S. (2000). What we know about effective instructional practices for English language learners. *Exceptional Children*, 66, 454-470. Gersten and Baker offer a review of 9 intervention and 15 descriptive studies to offer an array of effective instruction techniques for English language learners in elementary and middle school.