

The French Review

From the Editor's Desk

In 2001 the *French Review* published the first special issue ever devoted to pedagogy. The issue was a resounding success, but teachers wanted more. Over the past eight years we have published many articles on pedagogy in both our rubric of the same name and in the column we introduced in October 2000, under the title "In Your Corner: Focus on the Classroom." At other times we have published clusters of articles on pedagogy when possible and other articles on linguistics, film, and contemporary French and francophone society that were presented in ways useful to classroom teachers.

Now it is time to publish a second volume devoted entirely to pedagogy, one I believe that you will enjoy and use. The very first article is one of great interest to all of us, "Thirty Years of French 101: *Plus ça change...*," by Sharon Shelly. Sharon is known to all of you as a former Managing Editor of the *French Review* and an Assistant Editor for Linguistics. She has also published pedagogical and linguistic articles in the *French Review*. As a former member of the Executive Council of the AATF Sharon penned the "TOP TEN LIST of reasons why you should read the *French Review*. You can find the list (in case you have forgotten its contents!) in the January 2009 issue of the *National Bulletin*. Sharon's article takes us through many of the trends and debates about language teaching of the past thirty years, including the Carter Commission report of 1979, the communicative approach, how to teach culture, varieties of French, Krashen's Monitor Model, Terrell's Natural Approach and the *querelle* between "Krashenists" and "grammarians"; use of media, and the return to eclecticism. She also tells how she personally incorporated different approaches and methods in her own classes.

After Sharon's fine overview we are treated to "Promoting Programs through Performance," an inspiring piece on how to enhance language skills through producing short plays in French presented by students. This "Practical Guide" suggests how to select a play, how to organize rehearsals, how to bring off a winning performance, how to prepare a press release, describes elements of a sample play program, and offers two other appendices that you can use in your classroom. John Greene, the author, guarantees this approach as a way to increase enrollments.

"On Being Heard: A Study of Listening Behavior in French Conversation," by Elizabeth Knutson, analyzes informal conversations between ten different native speakers of French and their use of verbal and non-verbal backchannel cues (signals by a listener showing his or her attention and other reactions to the person speaking). The study provides insights into sometimes neglected elements of communication among speakers of French and discusses the pedagogical implications of these verbal and non-verbal aspects. It also presents the reactions African men and women, European women, and French men to what constitutes communication in conversation. An appendix furnishes a list of generic verbal backchannel responses that can be used in a class when students create dialogues with or without non-verbal elements.

Our fourth offering, "Singing from the Edges: Tété's Brand of French Musical Métissage," presents an update on the increasing hybridization of the French urban scene in recent years, an interview with Tété, and a sample lesson plan for teaching the music video, "La

Relance." Nancy Virtue, the author, demonstrates that, as Molière said, *plaire et instruire* are not mutually exclusive, but rather the goal of our teaching.

Martine Boumtje's "L'Impact du film en cours de littérature francophone" is yet another in a series of articles we have published on the use of image and text in the classroom. This initiative began in earnest with the publication of our special issue on French and francophone cinema in 2005.

"An Intercultural Approach to Teaching and Learning" by Lara L. Lomicka, describes a project involving the pairing of American students with their peers in France. They communicate by e-mail, chat with Webcams and microphones, and blogs. By the end of the year a trip to France enables them to meet their interlocutors and explore how they have increased their mutual understanding of the differences and similarities between the two countries and themselves. The French students then visit the American students. Samples of student communications are included.

Virginie Cassidy's "Le Wiki: collaboration et simulation pour le cours de français des affaires" is a hands-on introduction to the creation and use of a wiki to develop written and oral competence through a variety of projects aimed at increasing intercultural understanding. One of the projects involves the students in introducing a new product in France. The teacher of commercial French can use the appendices as a model for his or her own class.

"A Writing Design: Using Abstracts in the Writing Process," is Stacey Weber-Fèvre's answer to making shorter writing assignments a path to better compositions and self-expression in French. A series of appendices can serve as hand-outs for pre-writing assignments and in-class abstract partner feedback activity.

For those of us who have used Raymond Queneau's *Exercices de style* in our advanced grammar or stylistics classes, Kate Paesani's "Exploring the Stylistic Content of *Exercices de style*" is a reminder of how effective the use of this classic can be at the advanced level. Paesani includes ready-to-use instructions and questions for our students in the pre-writing and pre-reading phases as well as for the "while-reading" phase. Activities are also included for the post-reading and writing phases.

Finally, Linda Quinn Allen's "Designing Curricula for Student Language Performance" shows us how to create foreign language instructional units "in which planning, assessment, and teaching are guided by student performance." The author uses the "Language Performance Curriculum Design" to achieve her objectives and shows that the LPCD can help us to integrate a variety of national standards at the secondary and post-secondary levels. A graded task in French is included in Appendix A as well as unit calendars.

As always, I have many people to thank for making this volume a reality. First are Geoffrey Hope and Sharon Shelly, who served as readers with me. Geoffrey also contributed the thoughtful preface that is placed at the beginning of the volume. Marc Grosvalet, the town photographer for Villejuif, France (a suburb of Paris on the route to Orly on the Nationale 7), and the creator of our normal cover, furnished the cover for this issue. It was taken in a primary school in Villejuif and attests to the ethnic diversity that characterizes France in the twenty-first century. Children are the hope for the world and demonstrate every day that racial harmony can become a reality everywhere. Good and conscientious teaching, especially of language and culture, are an essential part of the equation. Wynne Wong, our intrepid Managing Editor and pedagogical scholar in her own right, copyedited the entire volume in a pleasing way. Kristen Drumheller, a fine graphic artist at Montana State University, Bozeman and a former student of mine, made Marc Grosvalet's photo into our eye-catching cover. Our longtime, faithful, and hawkeyed typesetter, Ronnie Moore, put everything together and struck infelicitous errors from the text.

I hope that you will enjoy and use this volume and that you will attend our annual meeting in San Jose from 2–5 July. Perhaps you will have a chance to meet one of our authors and discuss your own classroom practices and ideas.

Christopher P. Pinet, Editor in Chief

Preface

It is not surprising to learn that most readers of the *French Review* pay special attention to the articles on teaching (Ronald Tobin "The French Review Yesterday and Today" 58.5 [1985]: 629). There is for one thing the concern about "what to do on Monday" and an article on Colette's style no matter how interesting is only going to be of use to me on Monday if that is when I am going to teach something about Colette's style. But our interest in the pedagogical article goes beyond its immediate application. This special edition of the *French Review* on pedagogy encourages me to reflect on what this kind of article has meant for me over the years. I have kept something in my memory from what must have been the very first such article I read. Before I was a member of the AATF I found a copy of the journal in the office where I was teaching high school. For years, I could only recall one example from it but its significance remains to this day: "Faute de tôves, on mange des mômerades." The phrase has an *Alice in Wonderland* quality to it so I like to quote it sometimes to confuse dinner guests but the meaning goes far beyond a gentle tease. The point of the example, and of the article itself, is to show how easy it is for our students to create meanings by themselves, good, useful meanings, when they encounter an unfamiliar French text. Don't know what a *tôve* is? Of course you do. Furthermore, having read the sentence you have a pretty good idea what kinds of things *mômerades* are too. I have never made a list of the most useful skills in learning a foreign language but the principle of using context to derive meanings would certainly be on it if I did.

At that time, I was teaching French mostly through short dialogues which I hated and oral exercises that I liked a lot. My goal was to teach students to speak French without making mistakes and it seemed to me that manipulating sentences following a cue (*Je vais en France (Marie): Marie va en France* etc.) was a good way to go about the task and it was kind of fun. What the *tôves* and the *mômerades* brought home to me was a different kind of excitement: the liveliness of meaning. Words do not just have meanings but as we encounter them they help us find and activate their meanings by giving us clues. What I learned, slowly, was not only that helping students make meanings in class can be at least as fun as making new sentences from old ones but also that classroom activities based on what French means, on our own involvement in creating those meanings, point to a more satisfying model of what it is to know French.

I recently found the article in question, called "Useful Quotations to Encourage Careful Reading" by Richard Donati (43.4 [1970]: 630–33), and was surprised at how short it is and particularly by the lack of any reference: no footnotes, no bibliography. In today's *French Review*, it would be featured in the *In Your Corner: Focus on the Classroom* section of the journal where articles do not typically demonstrate a theoretical basis but illustrate successful classroom teaching experiences. Common to this kind of article, the author includes some narrative (for example "a simple technique which our students found both diverting and instructive") but the presentation keeps the reader's use in mind, presenting examples that illustrate the objective given in the title.

A completely different kind of article that gave me great encouragement was "The Training of Graduate Teaching Assistants in Foreign Languages: A Review of Literature and Description of Contemporary Programs" by Anne Nerenz, Carol Herron, and Constance Knop (*French Review* 52.6, 1979: 873–88). It presents lots of information from surveys of teaching assistants showing what they felt was important both in front of the classroom and behind the scenes. I was just beginning a position as director of a first-year university French program and reading the article gave me two things. First of all, it gave me a sense of experience. I was beginning something completely new but this information allowed me to perceive what was relevant as I started. This article also simply gave me the reassurance that I was among colleagues, that what I was doing had a context, a history, a base of knowledge. In a word, the article opened the door to my profession.

These are just two articles that have helped shape my approach to teaching French and, it is not the same thing, to being a French teacher. And in a sense they are not special. Keeping up with the literature, I have learned such things as to do the questions on the reading passage before the reading, not afterwards, to teach grammar indirectly sometimes but not as a replacement for direct instruction, and to consider the difference between the *passé composé* and the *imparfait* not so much as one of tense as of aspect. What we learn from any article in our profession helps us interrogate and conceptualize our role in that profession. What we find in the literature we discover in ourselves. Nothing about teaching seems irrelevant to me. And the more I investigate teaching, the more I learn that nothing is irrelevant to its concerns. When I first saw an article about using the computer to teach foreign languages I thought computers had about as much relevance to learning French as dentistry might. A few years later, I wrote an article about using computers to teach French. Even dentistry is not entirely distant: what other profession engages such close work to make adjustments in the mouth as ours?

We also work with ears. In a previous special issue of the *French Review* devoted to articles on pedagogy, Sally Magnan and François Torchon reported on a study Magnan had done: "the greatest number of Magnan's students claimed to study French because they 'like the sound of the language': 82-85% over the years 1993, 1995, and 1999" ("Reconsidering French Pedagogy: The Crucial Role of the Teacher and Teaching" 74.6 [2001]: 1095). This bit of knowledge brought me no new technique; did not help me figure out what to do on Monday and is certainly not the kind of information I would be comfortable bringing to a Dean to help secure funding for the program. But this data thrills me. It represents what I think of as the very best kind of discovery: something I somehow already knew. Finding that many students like the sounds of French has altered (or at least confirmed) my approach to the classroom. Yes, my goal is to get them to use the lesson vocabulary to answer questions but I can try, without too much emphasis or exaggeration, to make my voice pleasing, fun to listen to, with intonations and accents, speeding up or slowing down, bringing out alliterations and assonance, playing a role. When they respond in kind, which they sometimes do, I think we have added something valuable to the exercise.

While popular with the readership, pedagogy articles account for far fewer submissions to the *French Review* than other subjects. This fact has disturbed the editors since the foundation of the Association. One explanation has been that these submissions are likely to come from secondary school teachers who "with their heavy teaching schedules and homework to be corrected every night, rarely find time to write articles for their colleagues. Moreover, their access to research materials is often limited, and the reward system places little (if any) premium on publication" (Stirling Haig qtd.in Tobin "Yesterday and Today," 625). I would add that if there are fewer pedagogy than cultural or literary articles I think it is because they are harder to write. It is easier to refer with a greater degree of clarity and focus to aspects of Colette's writing than it is to aspects of your third-year French unit (pre-teaching, visuals, tests etc.) on transportation vocabulary and the imperative.

Low submissions in pedagogy will presumably continue to be the rule but at the same time readers will continue to focus attention on them. At any rate, the best way to overcome difficulties in conceptualizing and writing articles about teaching and learning is by reading more of them. For those of us who may wish there were more of them available in each issue, I can recommend, with the help of some articles by Joseph A. Murphy,¹ browsing past issues. *Faute de têtes*, as they say.

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¹Joseph A. Murphy and John P. Prystupa, Jr "French Review index of non-literary subjects, 1960-79" 53.4 (1980): 568-91 and Joseph A. Murphy "French Review index of non-literary subjects: 1980-89" 63.6 (1990): 1014-28.