

• A TOOLKIT OF STRATEGIES •

Building Literacy in the World Languages Classroom

by Rosanne Zeppieri and Priscilla Russel

When I walked into the third grade French class, the children were seated in pairs on the carpet in front of their teacher who was reading aloud from the story “Une Sorcière dans le cartable” by Laurence Kleinberger and Roser Capdevila and engaging the children in a conversation about the story.

Regardez la photo. Nous voyons une fille, une sorcière, et beaucoup d’articles. J’imagine que la fille va aller à l’école. Mais, que veut dire «le cartable»? Tournez à votre partenaire et partagez vos idées. Si vous portez un cartable à l’école, qu’est-ce qu’il y a la dedans?

(Look at the picture. We see a girl, a witch and many things. I imagine that the girl is going to go to school. But, what does «le cartable» mean? Turn to your partner and share your ideas. If you bring a book bag to school, what is inside?)

The next stop on my walk-through was another third grade class. Here again the children were seated in pairs on the carpet and the teacher was reading aloud. This time the book was entitled, *Sacagawea* by Liselotte Erdrich.

Let’s take a look at the journey of Lewis and Clark and ways that *Sacagawea* helped the explorers. She found edible plants for the explorers; she interpreted for them when

they tried to buy horses from the Shoshone. I wonder what that word “interpret” means? Turn to your shoulder partner and talk about what an interpreter might do.

The two lessons were indistinguishable. In both cases, students listened actively, predicted, made connections with their own lives and talked about unfamiliar vocabulary expressions while they learned content and cultural information. Their teachers were focused on building literacy in intentional ways as they explored interesting texts together.

In elementary schools around the United States, these scenarios play out daily. Chil-

dren learn in text-rich environments with literacy a primary goal of instruction, and this is true, whether the instruction is in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian or Spanish. Nonetheless, second language instruction is often overlooked as a vehicle for building students’ reading, writing, speaking, listening and viewing skills.

One of the distinct differences in the world languages classroom is the focus on interpretive listening and interpersonal speaking before students begin to read and write formally in the language. Being able to discern the main ideas of messages, responding to questions and directions using movement and signals, drawing what is heard, matching and categorizing ideas orally before producing them in writing, referencing ideas in the text to support answers—all examples of skill building tasks that lead to literacy in a second language and strengthen literacy in the learners’ first language.

In order for children to be able to accomplish these goals, the world language teacher first establishes a meaningful context that connects with children’s interests and experiences; then, she surfaces prior knowledge so they might draw connections with this knowledge. Using texts written by and for native speakers of the target language aids in setting a cultural backdrop for learning. These stories, folktales, articles, paintings and video clips portray native speakers’ attitudes and customs in authentic ways.

Let’s examine an elementary thematic unit designed around the story by Klein-

FIGURE 1

LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS	CONTENT	CULTURE	SUPPORTING GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURES	ASSESSMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Name school supplies and their uses (<i>I read a book; I write with a pencil</i>) Identify and describe physical and personality characteristics of school friends and personnel Describe typical clothes students wear Compare and contrast school schedules in the United States and in French-speaking countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School supplies Color of hair and eyes, height, personality traits Clothing typically worn by students School subjects Time (24 hour clock) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School subjects taught in French schools Typical school schedules in French-speaking countries Role of sports in schools in the United States and in French-speaking schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identification Description and narration Verbs “to have” and “to wear” Adjective agreement and placement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fill in a Venn diagram to show the similarities and differences that exist between American and French school subjects and schedules. Re-tell a story about a French student with a “witch” in her school bag who steals her books and homework using visuals and props as support for oral language production.

berger and Capdevila. The teacher introduces the theme of school life playing a PhotoStory presentation spotlighting the children in her class, their school supplies and a typical school day. She describes the scene depicted in each slide, names the items pictured and a typical school day schedule. As she provides comprehensible input, the teacher intentionally highlights vocabulary expressions the children will encounter in the storybook.

At this point, she and the children examine the book cover. She guides the class to describe the girl, define “cartable,” talk about what one might find inside a student’s book bag and discuss the difference between a book bag and a backpack. Why is there a witch pictured? What items does the girl bring to school in her book bag? Children turn and talk with a partner to share ideas and to predict what the book might be about. Who might be the main character, the girl or the witch? The teacher and the class then collect all ideas and record them on a chart as a reference during and after the reading.

Now it’s time to “walk” through the major scenes of the story. The teacher and the children “read” together, meet the main characters, and begin to understand that the book is about a girl who does not like to do her homework. Further, they examine the text structures—bolded print, dialog markers, picture captions and the organization of the text. These activities build students’ confidence, interest, and engagement.

As the unit progresses, the teacher balances language, content and culture introducing children to a typical school day in a French-speaking country, the similarities and differences between their own school schedules and those of French-speaking children, all the while building vocabulary, practicing functional language, making predictions, and narrating. Figure 1 shows the delicate balance that exists in a unit of this type.

The world language teacher, as do her colleagues who teach English language arts, employs pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading strategies that make texts accessible to learners so that they might accomplish the targeted learning outcomes. An internet search will bring up tools and tasks that teachers are able to implement.

PRE-READING STRATEGIES

(adapted from <http://www.studygs.net/pre-read.htm>)

- Brainstorming:** Examine the title and cover of the book/article you are about to read. Guide students to work together to recall all the vocabulary/ideas/information that comes to mind about this title. Use this information to set a context for the story.
- Concept or mind mapping:** The teacher places the title/subject as the main idea and then, with student input, develops a “mind map” around it. This can be effective either as a group task or as a whole group.
- Vocabulary Previews:** The teacher

presents key words needed to access the text. New words, background information and comprehension improve their comprehension and ability to manipulate the language.

List all words in the story that may be important for students to understand. Arrange words to show the relationships to the learning task. Add words students probably understand to connect relationships between what is known and unknown. Share information with students.

- A Purpose for Reading:** The teacher sets a purpose for the story or article in order to direct their reading towards a goal and to focus attention on key ideas. The teacher may pose questions, lead a brainstorming activity, or invite ideas from individual students. Along with the question, it is a good idea to pose predictions of the outcomes and problems, which need to be solved.

STRATEGIES DURING READING

(adapted from <http://www.slideshare.net/pilibarrera/before-during-and-after-reading-strategies>)

- Mini lessons that focus on specific reading strategies**
 - Making connections – personal connections with the text, connections to other texts that students have read, connections to the world



Key ideas and details		
1. ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.	1. Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.	1. Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
2. Determine the main idea of a text; recount the key details and explain how they support the main idea.	2. Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.	2. Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by the key details; summarize the text.
3. Describe the relationship between a series of historical events, scientific ideas or concepts, or steps in technical procedures in a text, using language that pertains to time, sequence, and cause/effect.	3. Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text.	3. Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific information in the text.
Craft and structure		
4. Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a grade 3 topic or subject area.	4. Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases in a text relevant to a grade 4 topic or subject area.	4. Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a grade 5 topic or subject area.
5. Use text features and search tools (e.g. key words, sidebars, hyperlinks) to locate information relevant to a given topic efficiently.	5. Describe the overall structure (e.g. chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in a text or part of a text.	5. Compare and contrast the overall structure (e.g. chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts or information in two or more texts.
6. Distinguish their own point of view from that of the author of a text.	6. Compare and contrast a firsthand account of the same event or topic; describe the differences in focus and the information provided.	6. Analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent.

- Using sticky notes to identify important sections of the book, unfamiliar vocabulary, ideas to share with a partner/class
- Focusing on strategies to use when the text is not comprehensible
- Using comprehension strategies
- Making inferences
- Recording personal responses to the text in a reader's notebook

2. **Re-reading** to unravel misconceptions
3. **Pause-Think-Retell** to keep the story line/events/characters in mind as the story progresses
4. **Story Maps** to organize characters, plot, events, problems, solutions and to use when retelling the story in one's own words
5. **Anticipation Guide:** The teacher makes general statements about the topic of the story/article. Students agree or disagree with the statements, encouraging critical thinking and building interest and content/cultural knowledge.
6. **Back-to-Back:** The teacher makes five to 10 statements about the story/article. Students standing back-to-back, agree or disagree with thumbs up and thumbs down. This can lead to a class discussion or a paired discussion in which students provide evidence from the text for their responses.
7. **Small-Group Work:** Students work in

small groups to describe picture scenes that depict the story. They identify, describe, and retell the story from these prompts. In their groups, they decide how to divide up the work and help one another develop a complete narration.

8. **World Splash:** The teacher presents five to eight important vocabulary expressions from the reading. Students work in pairs to use these expressions to summarize/note key information from the story/article.

POST-READING STRATEGIES

1. **Storyboards:** Students draw a series of scenes showing the setting, major events/information from a story/article. They use the pictures to retell the information in their own words.
2. **Photo Captions:** The teacher gives students four to eight visuals that capture the essence of the story/article. Working in pairs, students write "captions" to show their understanding. For elementary second language students, the teacher might provide a series of statements from which the students match to the appropriate visual. Or students might work in pairs or small groups to "say" the captions.
3. **Cinquain:** The teacher guides students to summarize the reading in a five line poem that follows the format listed below:

- Line 1: one work/subject
 Line 2: two adjectives that describe line one
 Line 3: three action verbs that relate to line one
 Line 4: four feelings or a four-word sentence that relates to line one
 Line 5: one word that is a synonym of line one

With early language learners, this is most successful as an oral activity, fostering children's abilities to express themselves in the language in a way that makes their messages comprehensible to others.

4. **"How-To" Guide:** Students create a series of directions (either using pictures, sentences provided by the teacher, or original sentences) to summarize the reading. i.e., "How to Break a Piñata" or "How to Invite Someone to Your Party."

Examining the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts, we find that the same skills are highlighted with a continuum of complexity and control over the targeted processes.

Adapted from <http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards>

It is imperative that world language teachers highlight the work they do to develop and expand students' literacy. They might consider the following ideas:



- Organize a "World Language Literacy Festival" where students and teachers demonstrate skill development and students' ability to listen, speak, read and write in a second language.
- Invite parents for "celebrations" following units of study. Students might tell and/or read their original stories to an audience of family members.
- Publish student work samples in an online site available to students, their families, and colleagues using wikispaces.com, ning.com and teacher web pages.
- Set up a Facebook page for students, parents and selected members of the school community as a "window" into the classroom and as a vehicle for sharing and celebrating student work.
- Host a "brown bag lunch" where parents and students discuss the work they are doing and demonstrate their progress in developing strong literacy

skills.

These ideas are starting points for emphasizing the overlap in first- and second-language instruction and bringing to light the role that second-language learning plays in supporting and expanding literacy. We are aware that children's language ability is a strong indicator of learning in all areas as well as a predictor of success in school and in life. The elementary world language teacher who has the tools in her cartable/book bag to focus on receptive language and productive language: identifying cognates, understanding the gist of messages, communicating appropriately in different contexts, understanding syntax and developing strong vocabulary knowledge also is developing literacy skills. Intentionally highlighting these ties to literacy, not only strengthens students' L2 literacy skills, but also draws attention to the role that world language instruction plays in the overall development of L1 literacy.

Qu'est-ce qu'il y a la dedans votre cartable ?



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