

Article on Business French class

By Mollie Monaco, excerpted from the AATF Bulletin, Fall 2015

In general, French as a choice for language study in north Texas is suffering. Middle school French programs in nearby independent schools have closed up shop, and the number of students enrolled in the high schools is small. However, The Hockaday School still boasts a robust French program. One of the reasons for the continued interest in French at Hockaday is its class offerings. In particular, once students complete the AP French course, they sign up with great enthusiasm for the Business French course. If replicated, this course could help reinvigorate French programs in other schools and areas.

Français des Affaires is appealing on many levels. First and foremost, it offers a visible and practical area of application for learning French. Students are equipped with the expressions and vocabulary as well as the cultural know-how to participate successfully in various business situations. Secondly, students take a test at the end of the course which is administered by the *Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie de Paris*. The tests are sent to Paris for evaluation, and students receive a certificate officially recognizing their success on the exam and their competency in Professional French. And thirdly, in the article, "Translating into high-dollar jobs" by Patrick Gillespie published in the Dallas Morning News on August 31, 2014, translating is a profitable and growing industry, and one in which a specific vocabulary and cultural appreciation are essential. Students can see the potential for their language acumen and are attracted by courses that offer such purposeful learning.

The Business French course at Hockaday has as its objective to prepare students for the *Diplôme de Français Professionnel B1*. This test is designed for students whose native language is not French. It includes sections to test students' written and oral comprehension skills as well as their written and oral expression. Thus, students must be able to read, write, and speak. They must be able to understand and use the correct expressions and vocabulary in the proper context. These contexts are varied and include the office, restaurants, and hotels. Students learn the vocabulary to make travel arrangements. Over the course of a full school year, students recognize cultural differences and commonalities. They hone professional writing and translation skills and are exposed to résumés and cover letters as well as phone etiquette. A link to the exam is included here so that interested teachers and administrators can see sample exercises and prompts. <http://www.francais.cci-paris-idf.fr/dfp-b1/>

I recently had the pleasure of observing my colleague, Catherine Berryman, as she taught a Business French class. Students purchase the texts, Communication Progressive du Français des Affaires (Jean-Luc Penfornis, CLE), Vocabulaire Progressif du Français des Affaires (Jean-Luc Penfornis, CLE), and Francais.com – Cahier d'exercices (Jean-Luc Penfornis, CLE), and Catherine supplements with material she has collected over the years. In the class that I observed, students had studied some vocabulary for professional telephone conversations the night before. The vocabulary included very useful expressions such as "she is busy; can I take a message?" and "I would like to cancel/reschedule the meeting." Class activities included using the new vocabulary in dialogues with a partner, listening to phone conversations and filling in the missing expressions, and summarizing the gist of the conversation to simulate taking a message. Students then moved on to writing down the spelling of the names they heard, as well as how to ask someone to spell his name. This activity was repeated with telephone numbers. For homework, students received a new vocabulary list. This list focused on modern

technology. Students were very engaged and enthusiastic as the material was somewhat recycled from or studied in past years; however, they were using it in different and meaningful ways.

That, in a nutshell, is the essence of teaching and learning, especially of teaching and learning in the 21st century. Students need a purposeful way to use the material they learn. When studying a second language, students can look up a word with the touch of a button but will only commit it to memory if they apply it in a meaningful way. Teachers see the practicality of a second language easily, but courses like *Français des Affaires* help students to see its practicality, too. And seeing French as a practical, useful tool is a way to attract and retain students in a school's French program.