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Language Experience

by

Lisa Gruber

The language experience that I chose to do was to attend a 410 French literature class at North Dakota State University. The professor who taught this class was Dr. Paul Homan. There were seven female students at this class.

The class began with Dr. Homan speaking fluently in French. So, I began writing down some thoughts about this class. After a couple of minutes it was quiet, and when I looked up the class and professor were looking at me. I just sat there wondering why they were looking at me. Finally, a student beside me whispered, "That means 'welcome'." During this whole time they had been welcoming me to the class and I didn't even know it!

Next a student began giving a speech in French while standing in front of the room. Since I didn't know any French, I didn't understand what she was saying. I understood a few words since they must be the same in French and English. These words are "music," "professor," "university," and "educate." A student raised her hand during the speech and said "Pardon," so I knew this meant pardon me or excuse me. The speaker's gestures helped since she would shake her head for "no" or "yes." She also made the gesture for money by rubbing her fingers together. Now I'm assuming the speech is about a queen from France since the speaker held up a photo of a woman with a crown and a map of France. She pointed to various spots on the map, so the queen may have moved around during her life. This speech was humorous for the audience since they would chuckle occasionally. I enjoyed listening to her talk because her words flowed rather smoothly. However, I didn't really understand what she was saying. I wished I could have interpreted this speech because it sounded like an interesting, humorous story. Since I was so curious I asked the student sitting beside me, "Who was this queen?" She replied that it was Eleanor d'Aquitaine.

The second and third speech presenters used no visuals and made little use of gestures, so I understood even less. I'm assuming their speeches were about other French people, but I really have no idea. Once again, there were a couple of chuckles from the audience, so the characters may have led a comical life.

The fourth spokesperson talked about music instruments. She showed the class pictures of various instruments such as the flute, harp, guitar, and bells. Next, she brought out the tape player and played a short piece of instrumental music. Then she played a French tape of men and women singing a soothing, calming song. I was unable to understand the words due to the fact that it was all sung in French. During this speech I understood these words: "France," "popular," and "vocabulary," which probably means "vocabulary." After her speech, the professor discussed the student's speech with the class. I was able to recognize a few English words. One of these words was "Hildegard Von Bingen." This woman may have been one of the singers or musicians on the cassette tape. Another word which I recognized was "Barnes and Noble." This may have been the bookstore where the speaker obtained the cassette tapes. Another word that I heard was "New Age." This may have meant the style of music or song that was on the cassette.

The professor spoke very fast. I felt that there was no way I was going to understand him when he spoke that quickly. He sat on the other side of the room so that he could judge his students. However, this hindered my interpretation of words that he was speaking. I felt fine at the beginning

of the first presenter's speech. It was interesting trying to figure out what she was saying. She used gestures, visuals, and spoke more slowly than the professor. Since the second and third speakers didn't use any gestures, visuals, or handouts, I didn't understand their speeches. Their speeches seemed long and boring.

I learned that "oui" means "yes" and "merci bien" means "very good." The students would say "oui" and shake their heads up and down in a yes motion. The professor stated "merci bien" and smiled after each speech, so I'm assuming this means "very good."

I realized that when I teach English as a second language there needs to be visuals such as maps, charts, photos, outlines, and other handouts. Also, I found the use of gestures to be quite helpful in learning a language. Speaking at a slow to moderate pace can also be very helpful to bilingual children. Of the speeches that I heard, ones that started with motivational activities were most interesting. These activities helped to spark and keep my interest during the speeches. Asking if the students have questions during and after the lessons helps to clarify any misunderstandings, misconceptions, or vocabulary words. Vocabulary words should be discussed before children read a story or chapter in their social studies or science textbooks. The ESL child will feel more comfortable and at ease when welcomed to the room and spoken to politely, slowly, and patiently.