

RESEARCH ARTICLE	The experience of a workshop of the student storyteller or the pedagogy of body-oral expression	
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Abstract		
<p>In the context of language teaching, such as theatre, learning does not only take place through words but through a number of aspects that include the body, the voice as well as the cultural and semiotic environment in which all action takes place. We place ourselves in a perspective that takes the practical object as a research theme and according to the proverb, a fixed method is not a method. Based on a personal experience, we found in the tale a material appropriate to the concrete context of teaching French to second-year students of the LMD degree in the department of French at the University of M'sila. A very interesting experience that resulted from a pedagogical approach to difficulties, failures, and research in the way of teaching oral French to a heterogeneous public. The result was rich, encouraging, even moving, that we propose to share the experience in the context of this contribution.</p>		
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## Introduction

In this workshop, the objective is oral expression put at the service of storytelling, i.e. oral expression taken as a whole, but in French. The objective is indeed to learn to tell, rather than to learn the language: in this work of oral expression, it is a question of telling stories, of explaining them, and not of talking about the text, of analyzing it, of debating it, of talking about its linguistic, grammatical, semantic content, etc. So we make the text speak, or rather, make the students make the text speak, tell it.

For it is not an exercise in reading, nor an exercise in recitation; but rather it is an exercise in incorporating the text, a tale that already exists in this case, and an exercise in re-presenting this tale in front of others. We have therefore not spoken of language or the French language, but of a spoken language, used, we have acted out, almost as in the theatre, the difference being that the incorporation of the tale involves the use of the words and the discursive style specific to the student storyteller (Even, 2008).

The issue addressed in this pedagogical workshop is based on the following question: *How does the shift from a language-teaching approach focused on linguistic correction to one centered on oral expression through storytelling help develop learners' spontaneity, creativity, and self-confidence in a foreign language, particularly in French?* This inquiry is part of an innovative didactic perspective in which language is no longer merely an object of study, but a living tool for expression and communication. Two hypotheses guide this experiment: **(1)** by placing learners in a dynamic of scenic oral storytelling, without initially focusing on linguistic correction, one encourages a gradual unblocking of speech and a spontaneous improvement in language mastery; **(2)** the integration of physical, emotional, and collaborative elements into oral language learning strengthens students' autonomy, motivation, and linguistic intuition, making them more capable of expressing themselves fluently and confidently in a foreign language.

## 1. Method and implementation

We have therefore made a radical shift in the objective. Indeed, we have moved from teaching the language to experiencing what oral expression includes and entails: the voice, the tone, but also the gesture, the position, the movement, the mimicry, the breathing, the silence, the relaxation, the thoughts. In all this, language, of course. But it is not put in the foreground to give a language course, and to comment and then correct linguistics. What is in the foreground is the development of oral expression through everything that can occur when expressing oneself orally, and in particular when telling a tale, and therefore when speaking in public and wanting to be heard.

This approach ensures that the student exercises in his or her own right, not from logic and the mere transmission of information, but from continuous interaction and speech, which allows the intuitive side of the learner storyteller to develop to a large extent.

Intuition goes hand in hand with creativity. Thus, the fact of moving from a metalinguistic discourse usually practiced in language classes, and of course in foreign languages, to a discourse whose function is fundamentally expressive, the fact of insisting on "doing rather than "speaking about", rarely practiced in the classroom format, this allows the development of intuition in the foreign language, which means unblocking the language, or even better the speech in the student.

Indeed, after a few sessions, you have the impression that it "flows by itself". The fact is that we have never insisted on the correction of the language, and that this has had very good results; and even if, at the beginning, my habits as a language teacher shouted inside me: "*Still, there should be corrected...*"! I abstained.

A corrective model would have sent us back to metalinguistics, whereas we tried to keep students on the ground of the free use of discourse. The result was that the students relaxed, unblocked, and little by little corrected themselves.

Creativity and spontaneity took place.

We do not pretend to question the metalinguistic and theoretical discourse. But the experience carried out in this workshop makes us answer questions that we have long asked ourselves: what would a fundamentally practical course be? Or, again: what if we started with practice, but to stay there? Staying in practice is different because it requires a relaxed involvement that involves abandoning the figure of the correcting teacher as well as creating a group dynamic in the classroom.

This refers to the distinction between the figures of teacher-teacher and facilitator, and it also refers to the need to give a central place to the learner. As advocated and practiced by the so-called unconventional methodologies of language teaching, with their holistic vision of the learner, the learner is located at the centre of the teaching system (Cuq, 2003). If the teacher disappears, and the facilitator of a group dynamic takes his place, the learner goes through experiences that make him or her more and more autonomous, and more and more intuitive, thanks to his or her continuous practice (Cuq, 2003).

In the workshop, the students experienced several exchanges between them; Then, they did research on the stories to be told and on the language outside the workshop. In fact, the group dynamic established little by little led them to relax on the one hand, in class, and on the other hand to refine their personal requirements in their work outside the classroom because each one responded to the challenge of having to speak in a foreign language in front of the others.

All workshop participants go through an experience they are not used to. Each student finds himself in the same situation, which is to speak in front of the others and to go on stage to explain his story, and in principle in a language that is not his own. If the class situation is necessarily a situation where the speech is public, in the workshop, we make both the scene and the audience explicit.

## 2. The experience of the student storyteller

Two challenges are present: one, that of speaking in a foreign language; and the other, that of speaking in one's own language in front of an audience. This practice therefore allows something very important from a pedagogical point of view: it makes it possible to make the starting point homogeneous for all the learners attending the workshop, as well as to make the objective of the course and the progression of the experience homogeneous.

It's probably because this challenging situation is the same for us and because we focused on the work of going on stage, that this workshop had a few surprises in store. We took into consideration what can be triggered by going on stage: we focused our attention on the emotions that appear such as fear, shame, stage fright. We also focused on the storyteller's uncontrolled behaviors, such as nervous laughter, hands in pockets, crossed arms and legs, loss of balance, in general all parasitic gestures that do not necessarily accompany the story being explained. This attention and work on emotional and bodily experiences added to the experience of the speech itself brought the student a relaxation that allowed him not only to go on stage with more ease but also to correct the level of language on his own! Fluency has been acquired, fluency in the use of the foreign language with an improvement in all other

linguistic aspects. Thus the acquired ease makes it much easier for the receiver to understand. This is in line with what we often read in phonetics textbooks, namely that adequate prosody makes it easier to convey the message, even if the pronunciation is not quite correct. But this experience of the storytelling workshop is not limited to the incorporation of adequate prosody. Speaking on stage and in public develops self-awareness, and therefore an incorporation of interpersonal skills; This starting point will necessarily achieve more specific objectives, such as improving linguistics, and especially the learner's motivation.

Once he feels that he is in the right way and voice (Wilfart, 2009), he wants to dress his speech better, with all the necessary linguistic corrections.

## 2.1 Expression corporelle

Many practices carried out in class involve a work of disinhibition, in general. On the whole, these are exercises far removed from linguistics, such as the explanation of grammatical and logical rules. These are exercises of the body that involve the whole person, put at the service of oral expression, and which we will call corporal expression. Doing, for example, a physical exercise of stretching or a relaxation exercise that involves the whole body, that is to say the complete presence of the student himself, and not only of his intellectual attention, this automatically triggers the desire to talk, to talk about the experience. The instruction is to speak in French, of course (Mato, 1987). They all get together after the exercise, and become loquacious in French. This is an advantage compared to a text explanation, where only one student reads and everyone listens to the teacher's explanations and/or the comments of a single student at a time, according to a learning modality that remains rather passive (Pezin, 2002).

Another undeniable advantage, pedagogical this time, is that all levels are welcome in the course. We are indeed increasingly confronted with a diversity of origins and levels in courses, with a growing heterogeneity. This can represent a real handicap from a pedagogical point of view. But with such an approach, heterogeneity has almost become the indispensable point that enriches interactions, levels, registers. And the disinhibition of all, little by little. In fact, this experience of everyone taking the step forward that corresponds to their stage of training.

The advanced helps the beginner, the beginner learns from the advanced, the timid advanced unlocks, the beginner hears a diversity of voices. Thus, everyone helps each other, on know-how and on the ability to say, since the stage that all students go through is to go on stage. And this on several occasions. All of them have the experience of having to speak in public, all of them go through a certain stage fright.

This is what puts them on the same level, and what allows them to move from a situation of fear to a situation of trust. This is also what allows us to feel that the group is experiencing a homogeneous progression.

Facing the same challenge, taking into account emotional and physical experiences, doing body-oral expression exercises, working all at once in class, creating a group dynamic, doing rather than theorizing, moving the objective of "language" French to that of "telling" in French, all this leads the student to take the initiative, even if his level is not the best. He has uninhibited himself in exercises in oral expression of French, such as reading, storytelling, theater games; He has also, and above all, uninhibited himself from a life that goes beyond intellectual experience, in his search for global experience. It is a change that is being made gradually. The shame, the shyness, those feelings of embarrassment of having to speak in a language you don't master, especially in public.

## 2.2 Disinhibition processes:

Two processes have contributed to this unblocking. One is the way of commenting on the passage on stage of the student storyteller. After he had told his story, we gave him a review in return, a review that contained three positive aspects of his way of telling, and one aspect to be improved. It was important at that time to encourage the storyteller, but also to give him something to think about and work on his own practice, on some aspects that he could change and integrate into his next tale. At that time, the discursive space was left to the audience made up of the other students.

The other procedure was to offer each person assessments at different times of the year on the approach, on the different exercises, on the workshop and the various activities that were carried out there. This allows us to hear everyone's words and experiences.

It is a reflective process thanks to which the students gained confidence when speaking, because they could rely on their own experience. This work thus takes into account the right cerebral hemisphere, the seat of emotions, creativity, and the left hemisphere, the seat of emotions and creativity, and the left hemisphere, the seat of analytical capacities.

From a concrete and material point of view, and no longer conceptual, the experience consisted of also making other trips for the smooth running of the workshop.

We certainly moved the analysis, the correction of errors, but to begin we simply moved the chairs and the blackboard, the notebooks, and we rolled out a carpet on the floor, which, from the outset, contributed to deceiving the mind, the expectations, the rigidity of the class situation. As the body position is no longer the same, this also changes the mental position, expectations, the teacher-student relationship, or even student-student.

Indeed, this one element, rather innocuous and almost trivial, the carpet, has caused upheavals on several levels: the students help to prepare the room, as well as to restore it to its initial state; which promotes group dynamics. Since the relationship with the body is different, one is no longer sitting waiting for the teacher's diktat; The relationship with the language, in this case French, is also different. The oral language takes its place in its entirety, the student is stimulated to body-oral expression, his interest grows in relation to the language used in class.

Finally, what strongly motivated us was the organization of a morning of storytelling in front of another class (Halle, 2000). Indeed, at the end of the year, we invited a class from another French course, so that the students who participated in the workshop could tell tales in front of a new audience. This added a new challenge, since the audience was no longer going to be exclusively the participants with whom the laboratory had been experienced, those who were already trusted (Blasco, 2003) .

Finally, we will now give space to some testimonies of students who attended the first and second editions of the storytelling workshop:

*"The course has exceeded my expectations! I learned a lot about my strengths and weaknesses when I tell stories: what I need to focus on and improve. And I learned all this in a very relaxed way, but very solid and sustainable at the same time"* (Nadia, group 2).

*"Memory is a useful tool, but what matters is the fact of experiencing and internalizing the feelings, the emotions that the tale offers us (...). Personally, I really appreciated the remarks of my friends and I took them into consideration every time I got up to tell a new tale"* (Samir, group 3).

*"It seems to me that the idea of doing a morning of storytelling was very good. We had the opportunity to tell stories in front of a larger audience, in front of people we didn't know and it was a real ordeal. I think everyone told the story in a different way, and even better"* (Sabrina group 4).

"It's a form of entertainment that I didn't know yet, a way of learning and sharing our knowledge and I admit that I'm happy to have participated. I learned to overcome a little shame, shyness, to appear on stage, and also to trust the other members of the course, who were in the same situation as me" (Nafissa, group 4 ).

"I liked this simple approach to theatre and storytelling, without pretensions, without having precise objectives to achieve in the technicality of the tale, but rather work on expression, in letting go of things where they must give time to each person without rushing them (...) to learn things that are not theoretical" (Nabil, group 3).

"I noticed that everyone has improved their French as well as their way of telling stories [... and] that everyone, not just me, is nervous. This is very important to me, because it has given me a lot of self-confidence; we often think that we are the only person in the world who is nervous, who trembles, who sweats, and this is not true" (Yasmine, Group 1).

## Conclusion

In the workshop, the foreign language student becomes an apprentice storyteller in a foreign language, which makes him or her become above all a communication learner. The student develops personal qualities and this makes him become a true seeker of "himself".

On the other hand, tales and their oral dimension offer the possibility of this work on oneself that goes beyond theorization.

The story, represented and oralized, directly allows the student to progress in his oral French, and at the same time, to become aware of his level of language and also of his way of communicating with others, in particular of making himself understood in front of an audience. Also, it seems that the work with the tale can constitute a previous stage to a work of the language through theatre, given that with the tale to be told and re-presented, the student works on his text alone, outside the classroom and alone in front of the group in class.

The advantages of this type of text are numerous: the tale is short, it has a generally conflicting structure that is easily memorized, it contains a learning message, sometimes playful, it arouses the attention of the audience and the storyteller himself.

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