

Part 1:  
My Language Learning Experience

I was brought up in a multilingual household and from an early age, I was exposed to English and French. One moment I had my mother speaking to me in English and then before I realized it, I was mid-conversation with either my dad or grand-parents in French. There were days I was sure my brain was going to explode from the constant changes. Early grade school was a challenge for me in several respects. Most notably, I would be in the middle of a sentence in English and I would end up finishing it in French. My friends had no idea what was wrong with me and it caused me a fair bit of anxiety because I was so young. In addition, not only was I learning two languages at once, I also had a lisp and suffered from apraxia of speech (something I still very much struggle with to this day).

In elementary school, I was placed in speech therapy and I spend a great deal of time in the LAC room with wonderful teachers. With time, I learned how to control the apraxia (at least to a point where I was able to get through a sentence without major dilemmas, but I still experience problems with this everyday of my life) and my lisp gradually faded away (it still occurs every once in a while, but it's no where near the degree it was when I was a child). By the time I was in high school, I started to sound "normal" and I was able to finally converse in English and French with relatively seamless transitions.

I am a native English speaker, I'm fluent in the French language (Quebecois), and I have been studying Spanish for the past six years (my Spanish accent is terrible though). My minor is in English literature, which is a passion of mine, and I have also studied languages such as Italian, German, and Latin as part of my choral pedagogy classes in my B. Mus and B. Ed degrees.

As a child, I spent a lot of time listening to people talk and I was absolutely fascinated and jealous of not only the sounds they were able to make, but being able to get through a conversation with fluidity and ease, which was something I was unable to do. For that reason, I very much understand the trial and hardships of many ELL and ESL learners and the challenges they face while trying to learn a new language in addition to adapting to a brand new culture.

Canada is an incredibly diverse country with people from all over the world. I personally believe that engaging with as many languages as possible opens far more doors than we even realize are possible. For

example, I am currently the manager at the Michaels Arts and Crafts Store at the downtown location in the heart of Vancouver. Every shift, I walk around the sales floor helping people with their projects. Many of the people I meet are tourists that have come to visit the city, others are brand new immigrants that got off at the train station a block away from my store, and many people from various cultures and countries happen to live downtown. I use at least two of my three main languages at least two or three times per shift, whether I'm conversing with someone or translating for one of my employees. I find being able to speak more than one language incredibly useful and it's opened so many opportunities for me as well.

In addition, my practicum school is in East Vancouver. The feeder schools are mostly English based, however, there are also two French Immersion schools that "feed" into the high school. While on practicum, I was conversing with parents in English and French depending on the situation (it was an eye opening experience). Furthermore, there are many cultures represented in my classroom as well, including a large population of Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Punjabi, French, Russian, and Polish speaking families. With this in mind, I do plan to learn as many of these languages as I can to better help my students and get to know their families. I am fortunate that I have a lot of professional language development training from music to fall back on in addition to personally being in the LAC stream as a student.

I have also noticed in my personal experience that the formality of my language changes depending on the situation I find myself in. For instance, when I'm at home with my parents, I'm generally more conservative with the topics I choose to discuss with them and I'm more aware of making sure I don't use slang or offensive language around them. I find this is also the same while I'm teaching. I try to be as formal, clear and concise as possible, with the addition of speaking a little slower to make sure I give the students a chance to think about what I've said, give them an opportunity to ask questions and voice their concerns. In contrast, when I'm with my friends, all bets are off. I use far more simplistic phrases (such as "that's cool", and "dude, that was amazing") and I'm more likely to curse or swear occasionally (terrible habit, yes I know). I also know that I can insinuate information without having to be explicit about which words I use because my friends know my idiosyncrasies in addition to having the "inside scoop" to my life and interests.

With all of that in mind, it's clear that language has so much to do with everyday life and it's influenced by a variety of factors from home, school and the community around you. What we need to take

away from this is that language is a vital part of who we are as individuals and we should embrace it. As future teachers, learning to converse with our students is of the utmost importance and sincerely can make a difference in the lives of our students.