



Year 3 students (front) Natasha, Krystal and Odin in Jenny Carlaw's French class show the gesture for the word mets, which means put or put on.

Nous parlons français (we speak French)

By Adam Joyce

Students crossing the threshold into "Madame Carlaw's" classroom gesture as if taking the English out of their head ... because within the four walls of Jenny Carlaw's Reynella Primary School classroom they only speak French.

Like their peers at eight other public schools in South Australia, the Reynella students have started learning French through a program based on gestures and speaking only in the target language.

The program is called the Accelerative Integrated Method, or AIM, and originated in Canada about 10 years ago.

Words are presented non-verbally through gestures and movement (kinesthetically), which students learn as they say the corresponding word aloud.

Reynella PS teacher Jenny Carlaw said there were hand and body gestures for about 700 commonly used words.

Once students have mastered sufficient vocabulary they then move onto learning and re-telling stories and plays in French using gesture, movement and language. The idea is to associate words with an "emotional hook".

Jenny said she began using the method at the start of term 2 and her students had progressed at a "phenomenal rate".

"It works because they're talking in French all the time and the gestures kinesthetically help them to remember the words," she said.

The DECS schools using the Accelerative Integrated Method of teaching French:

Cummins Area School
Edwardstown PS
Kadina PS
Linden Park Junior Primary and Primary
Morphett Vale East PS

Mundulla PS
Mount Barker PS
Paringa Park PS
Reynella PS

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"For example, the year 3s have learnt 120 gestures and words in seven weeks ... whereas using the traditional method they would normally learn 20 words a term."

A group of DECS language teachers was introduced to the Accelerative Integrated Method in a workshop earlier this year, run by a teacher from Melbourne.

"I was fortunate enough to visit Canada in April and visited two schools where I saw the program in action," Jenny said.

"I went into the classrooms and the children were spontaneously asking me questions in French."

Jenny said gestures were no longer needed once students grasped the language.

There is also a DVD containing support material which helps students learn and revise the words and gestures.

"By talking to a class using the gesture method they (the students) are able to carry on a conversation, they can communicate with each other in French using complete sentences and verbs, whereas previously they were learning individual words," Jenny said.

Students learn useful sentences in French, such as asking to go to the toilet.

The method focuses equally on reading, writing, listening and speaking.

"You use mime to get the meaning of words across and these gestures help embed the words," Jenny said.

Jenny has added a couple of extra features to AIM, including a "magic line" at the entry to her classroom. Once the line is crossed, students are touched with a magic wand and may only speak in French. There is also a "magic hat" (pictured) which allows the wearer to speak English in emergencies.

Year 3 student Natasha said it was easier to remember French using the new method because they spoke it all the time in class.

"You know words more because you're focusing on French, not English," Natasha said.

"And the gestures make it a lot easier to remember."

"It's fun speaking French when you do the gestures - some of them are funny."

AIM is currently available only for French, however resources are being developed for Spanish and English as a second language.

Teachers should note that the Accelerative Integrated Method fits best within the "communication" strand of the SACS Framework. However it does not explicitly cover the "understanding culture" and "understanding language" strands.

Jenny said progress achieved with AIM meant there was plenty of time in the school year to cover the additional strands of the SACS Framework.

"Further down the track, according to video footage from Canada, students will be able to discuss how the French language works, in French," she said.