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Verb Conjugation in My Classroom

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Newsletter of the Additional Languages
and Intercultural Council

President's Message

Megan Sénéchal

Hello and bonjour to all my fellow language teacher colleagues!

I am delighted to share our latest newsletter with you. In this issue, we highlight engaging initiatives that energize students and meaningfully align with curriculum outcomes: Verbathon and Manie Musicale. These dynamic activities build language skills and foster enthusiasm and community in our classrooms.

You will also read about how the Additional Languages and Intercultural Council (ALIC) continues to promote and celebrate the outstanding work of language educators across Alberta

through our presence at teacher conventions.

The final article emphasizes the importance of taking language learning outside the classroom.

I wish you all a successful and inspiring few months ahead. If you have an innovative activity or idea you would like to share with language teachers across Alberta, please don't hesitate to reach out. We would love to feature it!

Dr Megan Sénéchal is the French program coordinator for the Edmonton School Division in addition to being the president of the Additional Languages and Intercultural Council.

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Do you know an amazing language teacher?

Nominate them for an ALIC teacher award! See the guidelines posted on our new website: <https://www.alic-ata.ca/>.



**Additional Languages
and Intercultural Council**

THE ALBERTA TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION



**The Alberta
Teachers' Association**

Message from the Editor

Jean-Pierre Decorby

Hi everyone, I would like to take a moment to introduce myself as the newest *Zephyr* editor. I have been working in education for 37 years, most of that time at the elementary level. Throughout my career, I have had the opportunity to work closely with students and colleagues in a variety of roles, always with a strong focus on supporting meaningful learning experiences in the classroom.

Currently, I work as a mathematics consultant with the Edmonton School

Division, where I provide support primarily to French immersion schools. In this role, I work with teachers to strengthen mathematics instruction, exploring effective teaching strategies and helping students develop confidence and curiosity in their mathematical thinking.

I am very excited to share with you my first *Zephyr* issue as editor. It is a privilege to contribute to a space that highlights ideas, reflections and practices from educators. I hope you find the

articles engaging, inspiring and useful in your own work and that they spark new conversations and ideas within your school communities.

Thank you for taking the time to read, and I hope you enjoy this issue.

Jean-Pierre Decorby is a French immersion mathematics consultant with the Edmonton School Division.

Racing Toward Fluency: How Verbathon Energized Verb Conjugation in My Classroom

Kara Weis

As teachers, we are always looking for ways to make foundational skills both meaningful and memorable. This year, introducing Verbathon into my classroom transformed how my students approached verb conjugation. In many ways, it was a full-circle moment in my own learning journey.

Verbathon is a fast-paced racing game designed to foster rote memorization of verb forms. What could easily feel repetitive or dry to students becomes energetic and exciting. The racing format immediately hooks students: they are eager to participate, quick to respond and motivated to improve. Conjugating verbs suddenly feels less like a worksheet task and more like a team sport.

For me, Verbathon is deeply personal. I played this game when I was in elementary school, and it quickly became one of my most vivid school memories. I proudly worked my way up to becoming a judge of the tournament when I reached high school, a role I took very seriously. The tournaments were led by Emmanuel Escueta, the creator of the game and a teacher in my school district while I was growing up. Participating in tournaments under his leadership left a lasting impression on me. The excitement, the camaraderie and the sense of pride we felt as language learners have stayed with me in my adult life and teaching career.

One of the most rewarding shifts I have observed in my own classroom has

been in my quieter students. Those who are often shy or reserved about sharing their learning have found confidence through the structure of the game. The fast pace and team dynamic create a safe, supportive space where students can enthusiastically express their knowledge. I have seen students light up with pride when they realize how much they know.

Verbathon also meets the needs of our kinesthetic learners. The hands-on, movement-based design allows students to engage physically while learning. For students who thrive when they can move, manipulate materials and actively participate, this program is a natural fit.

Beyond memorization, the resource includes several extras that extend learning into practical application.

Students practice conjugating verbs within sentences and explore more functional ways to apply verbs in daily writing and speaking. This balance between automatic recall and authentic usage strengthens both fluency and understanding.

The competitive element is another powerful motivator. For many students, friendly competition encourages high levels of teamwork and focus. Verbathon fosters collaboration as peers support one another, offer encouragement and celebrate shared successes. The classroom energy during a game is electric. Students are not just competing, they are learning together.

The kits are fabulous for whole-group instruction, and they are flexible enough that students can create their own smaller Verbathon kits for independent or small-group practice. This adaptability makes it easy to integrate the game into daily routines.

Most importantly, I am thrilled to be passing this experience on to my students. I hope to build the same sense of community among our language learners that I felt as a child. Learning French can sometimes feel intimidating, but Verbathon creates a shared identity: a team of learners working toward a common goal. It gives students a sense of excitement and belonging within our French language community.

Verbathon has reminded me that when learning feels active, social and purposeful, students rise to its challenges. In my classroom, verb conjugation is no longer just a grammar objective ... it is a race toward confidence, collaboration, community and lasting mastery.

Kara Weis is a French immersion teacher with the Edmonton School Division. She loves finding engaging ways to make learning come alive for her students and is passionate about public education.

ALIC presents at PDTC!

Megan Sénéchal

I recently had the pleasure of presenting at the Palliser District Teachers' Convention (PDTC) in Calgary, Alberta, on behalf of ALIC. It was my first opportunity to present at PDTC and to connect with educators from the ten school boards it represents.

The session, entitled "Connecting and Supporting Additional Language Teachers in Alberta," began with an overview of specialist councils within the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA). Of the approximately 20 participants in attendance, only about one-third had taken advantage of their complimentary specialist council membership. This provided a valuable opportunity to explain the purpose of specialist councils and the important role they play in connecting educators across the province. Many additional language teachers are the sole specialists in their schools, so the idea of building professional networks with like-minded colleagues resonated with participants.

The session highlighted the three primary pillars of support that ALIC offers its members:

- The ALIC Language Teacher Bursary: Funding to support professional learning that directly impacts language teaching practice
- The ALIC Teacher Collaboration Program: Up to two days of release time for teachers to collaborate with a colleague on a language-related initiative
- The ALIC Professional Learning Community of Practice: A sustained, research-informed community of practice focused on a shared area of interest

These programs have received overwhelmingly positive feedback.

Teachers value the flexibility built into each initiative and appreciate having dedicated time to strengthen their language programming in ways that align with their specific contexts. Just as importantly, they value the opportunity to connect and collaborate with other language educators.

Session participants were highly engaged and asked thoughtful, insightful questions about the programs. We also explored some practical ways in which schools can better support additional language teachers at the local level.

In what ways have you benefited from our programs? Consider writing an article about how the programs supported excellence in your language program!

Dr Megan Sénéchal is the French program coordinator for the Edmonton School Division in addition to being the president of the Additional Languages and Intercultural Council.



Manie Musicale: March Madness for Francophone Music

Cynthia Campbell

Manie Musicale is the annual program that takes the wild excitement of a sports bracket (think March Madness in the NCAA basketball world) and brings it directly into the French language classroom. First organized in 2017 in Maine, US, the program has exploded into a massive international event, engaging thousands of French as a Second Language (FSL) and French immersion students.

How the Competition Works

Every year, a team of volunteer teachers carefully curates a bracket of 16 popular and contemporary songs in French. These tracks feature artists from all corners of the Francophone world and are chosen because they are current, catchy and excellent linguistic teaching tools, often containing a social justice message. For weeks, students listen to the songs, learn about the artists and vote for their favourite songs in head-to-head “matches.” Teachers can choose to use the music as a springboard for lessons on Francophone culture, grammar and vocabulary. To up the ante, just like in a true championship, schools can choose to offer prizes to students with the closest brackets!

The whole purpose is simple: make learning French cool and expose kids to modern, authentic French culture. When students genuinely love the music and feel passionate enough to argue for their favourite track, it transforms the learning experience. Language learning becomes engaging, authentic, fun and competitive; it becomes a culturally rich part of their school day. This experience

also seeps into their lives outside the school as they download the songs at home and engage with the activities without being asked to do so!

Manie Musicale Statistics

The growth of Manie Musicale since it began in 2017, with just two schools, is phenomenal. It is now a truly global music championship:

- Over 7,000 schools participated last year
- More than 800,000 students cast votes in the competition
- The program has connected classrooms in over 35 countries, including every US state and all 12 Canadian provinces and territories

École Camille J Lerouge: Red Deer participation

As a vice principal at the K-9 French immersion school École Camille J Lerouge in Red Deer, Alberta, I have had a front-row seat to the program’s success. I first heard about Manie Musicale from a colleague who shared the perfect story: her FSL students were so obsessed with the songs that they were begging their English PE teacher to play the Manie Musicale tracks during gym class. When French spills out of the language room and into the gym, you know you’ve got something special!

This enthusiasm inspired me to spend my Christmas break figuring out how to work Manie Musicale into my Grade 6 French Immersion Language Arts (FILAL) curriculum. While the official website is initially très complet and can

look a little daunting, I quickly realized the program’s flexibility is its secret weapon: you can take a “small, medium or large bite” of the content to fit your class perfectly.

The excitement at our school was amazing. A total of five FILAL teachers across Grades 4 to 9 participated, bringing the fun to 12 classes of French immersion students. A large bracket was created on a bulletin board in a high-traffic hallway to track the Manie stats throughout the competition. Even the most reluctant French speakers found their voices when asked to debate their favourite Manie songs! I found it simple to tie Manie Musicale directly to my curriculum goals, particularly in reading comprehension, oral and written activities. Student engagement was immediate and constant: every day, my Grade 6 students would eagerly ask, “Madame, est-ce qu’on va faire Manie Musicale aujourd’hui?”

The Ultimate Validation

The best part was the incredible feedback from parents. I received emails from many parents saying that their kids had literally begged them to download the playlist to listen to the songs in the car! Parents were genuinely impressed that music had inspired their kids to feel excited and proud about their French learning. One parent wrote, “I wanted to let you know that Manie Musicale is a HUGE hit with both my kids. Sydney comes home and recaps ... who was eliminated and who moved on, who she voted for and how she feels about the songs moving forward. She also

insists on playing all the songs on all the devices around the house. Will loves music and enjoys listening to the songs and [discussing] who is winning. Thanks for taking the time and effort you all have put into making it happen!”

And here’s the ultimate proof of Manie Musicale’s power: a colleague who traveled to France last summer shared that her kids, all students at our school, instantly recognized a song by the 2025 winner, Gims, while they were out and immediately started dancing and singing along!

When classroom learning creates this kind of spontaneous joy and cultural recognition abroad, you know this program is a genuine powerhouse. I am already thinking about next year! Students are already asking, “Madame, quand est-ce que Manie commence?”

To learn more about Manie Musicale, visit <https://www.maniemusicale.info/bienvenue>.

1. Manie Musicale, “Manie Musicale Official Stats (Carbonneau/Fournier),” https://docs.google.com/document/d/1_Bn9jEYVTzoLy3nbtEuxRKzx6sJIrOi_heK3oHuiI58/edit?tab=t.o#heading=h.98ge6fvtaub6.

Cynthia Campbell is a vice principal at École Camille J Lerouge in Red Deer and serves as vice president for the Alberta and NWT branch of Canadian Parents for French.

Taking French Beyond the Classroom: What Happened When I Took My Students to a Local Francophone Art Gallery

Melanie Liles

As language teachers, we are always trying to create moments where students forget that they are learning a language and simply start using it. One of the most meaningful experiences I have had with my French IB students came from doing exactly that, stepping outside the classroom and into a local Francophone art space.

We visited CAVA (Le Centre d’Arts Visuels de l’Alberta), where students explored a gallery featuring local Francophone artists. The shift in energy was immediate. Students were not worried about getting the “right” answer, and instead they were able to move around the gallery, observing, interpreting and, most importantly, speaking.

A Springboard for Engagement

At the gallery, students worked in small groups with a vocabulary list, model sentence starters and a set of guiding questions. They chose a piece that resonated with them and discussed the following in French:

- Quelle est l’œuvre que vous préférez et pourquoi?
- À votre avis, est-ce que certaines formes artistiques sont plus marquantes que d’autres? Pourquoi?
- Quel est le but de l’art? À votre avis, qu’est-ce que l’art doit faire?

Because these questions were open-ended and opinion-based, students felt more comfortable taking risks. There

was no correct answer, which allowed for more natural conversation. Even students with little or no experience in fine art or galleries were able to participate meaningfully. The focus was not on analyzing art “correctly” but on reacting to it and sharing personal interpretations and experiences about its purpose.

This shift made the task more accessible and emphasized communication, using French to express ideas, ask questions, agree or disagree and build on others’ thinking. The art gallery became a springboard for authentic language use, allowing every student to engage at their level while still being challenged.

As students spoke in their groups, I was able to circulate, join conversations and support them more individually. What stood out was how naturally discussions developed. Students were building on each other’s ideas, reflecting on their own experiences and sustaining conversations longer than they typically would in class.

Being in a Francophone environment made a noticeable difference. French stopped feeling like a classroom task and became a tool for interaction.

Even students who are usually hesitant began using familiar structures more confidently:

- À mon avis...
- Selon moi...
- Je crois que...
- Personnellement...

Their language felt more authentic and less rehearsed because they were responding to something personal within a real context; they were being included in the community.

Outcomes Beyond Speaking

This experience supported much more than speaking skills. Students were making connections, justifying their opinions, debating ideas and considering multiple perspectives, all in French.

It also created space for students to learn more about each other. Discussing art naturally opened up conversations about personal experiences and viewpoints, strengthening both communication and classroom community.

Connecting to the Local Francophone Community

An equally important aspect was the connection to the local Francophone community. Visiting CAVA helped students see that French is not just something studied in school, it is alive in their own neighborhood.

The CAVA staff were welcoming and supportive of all language levels, and students had the opportunity to interact with a local Francophone artist who introduced her work and led an activity in French. This made the experience even more meaningful. Students were not only practicing French but also engaging with real people, hearing authentic language and seeing how it connects to creative expression and lived experiences.

Back in the Classroom

The biggest takeaway for me is simple: when students have something meaningful to say, and a context that invites interpretation rather than perfection, their language grows naturally.

Experiences like this do not require elaborate planning, but they do require a willingness to step outside traditional classroom structures. In return, they offer something incredibly valuable: authentic communication, increased confidence and a reminder to students that language is meant to be lived, not just learned.

Melanie Liles is an educator with the Edmonton School Division, as well as a multidisciplinary artist. Her dual role as artist and teacher has helped ground her practice in creativity, collaboration and lifelong learning.

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More information about ALIC can be found at <https://www.alic-ata.ca/>.

ALIC goes to SWATCA

Gwendolyn Shone

ALIC attended the 2026 South Western Alberta Teachers' Convention Association (SWATCA) from February 19–20 in Lethbridge, Alberta. Braving the snow-covered highways and the wintry cold, we set up a table in the display hall, located around the track in the First Choice Savings Centre for Sport and Wellness at the University of Lethbridge, alongside other ATA specialist council tables. The goal was to encourage and promote teacher membership in all the corners of our beautiful province.

Among the additional languages ALIC represents, teachers of French, Spanish and Blackfoot were interested in the support ALIC provides. We drew names for branded merchandise, and four lucky winners left with ALIC logo cups to help spread our message to their colleagues at school.

Gwendolyn Shone is an educator specializing in French education. She is also currently a doctoral student at Campus Saint-Jean, University of Alberta, and is the editor of ALIC's academic publication Notos.



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Maggie Shane, the ATA's privacy officer, is your resource for privacy compliance support:

780-447-9429 (direct)

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The Alberta
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