



French Heritage Language Program

972 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10075



www.facecouncil.org/fhlp

About the Coordinator: Benoît Le Dévédec



Born in France, Benoît Le Dévédec graduated from the Université de Bretagne Sud, Lorient (France), and the Université de Rennes 2 (France), specializing in the English speaking world, teaching, and promotion of the French language. Benoît taught French and English for several years from primary school to higher education levels (in France, England, and Belgium) and developed education partnerships with India, Africa, and the United States. He recently worked as a cultural attaché in Belgium, where he was in charge of setting up bilingual streams of education.

Benoît has taken over the program from David Lasserre, who was the coordinator for five years and a regular presenter about the program at regional and national language conferences.

Since its inauguration, the program coordinators have worked hard with teachers, parents, donors, and students to ensure its success. Behind this work lies the conviction that immigrant students need to keep strong ties with their cultural heritage and language in order to better integrate with the new society in which they. To quote former coordinator David Lasserre: "Beyond the teaching of French, this culture-based language program is really about making young immigrant students feel comfortable with who they are. We are convinced that strengthening the cultural and linguistic skills they already possess will help them thrive wherever they go as fully bilingual/bicultural individuals. By the time they leave the program, we want our students to be able to speak and write French well, know what they can do with it, and be aware that they carry with them valuable skills and unique outlooks."

A Student in the Program: Mandognin Bamba



Mandognin Bamba moved to the United States with her family in 2005 from the Ivory Coast. She attended the International High School at Lafayette in Brooklyn, New York, and was among the first to enroll in the French heritage class when it was founded.

In 2009, she won a ten-day summer trip to France by ranking #1 in a school contest through a program of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Mandognin is an example of a student who is fully aware of the need to maintain her cultural identity and native language ability.

About the Program

The French Heritage Language Program is a program of the French American Cultural Exchange (FACE), a 501(c)(3) foundation, and a shared initiative of the Cultural Services of the French Embassy in the U.S. and the Alfred & Jane Ross Foundation. The program's mission is to support and develop the teaching and learning of the French language and the French-speaking cultures of newly immigrated students of Francophone background enrolled in U.S. public schools. More specifically, the program aims to help students develop proficiency in French, build a strong connection to their respective cultures and identities, and increase opportunities for them to succeed in their new environments.

The students are immigrants living in the United States with familial and cultural networks in Africa, the Caribbean, and Europe. The program seeks to develop their proficiency in English and French at high levels, so that they can live and work effectively in the contemporary world as proficient bilinguals.

Diversity is Richness

The program is offered to students from many different countries, including Algeria, Congo, France, Gabon, Guinea, Haiti, Ivory Coast, and Senegal. These countries are culturally diverse, but in all of them French is the dominant language. Cultural diversity brings richness that makes learning at the French Heritage Language Program unique and enjoyable.



Classroom activities are based on cultural materials from the countries represented in the program. Examples of these activities include the study of African and Caribbean tales; stories and news from Haitian, French, and African Web sites; and oral and written presentations about traditions and customs. Every July the program offers a two-week set of workshops and field trips to students, in which they engage in a variety of culturally enriching activities run by professional artists from Francophone countries. These activities help students master communication skills in French and maintain powerful connections with their cultures.

Dedication and Diligence

The instructors, administrative staff, and parents work hard to make the program succeed. One example is the way that the teachers carry out differentiated instruction. Although their classes include students with different proficiency levels, the activities that teachers prepare are carefully tailored to meet every student's needs. Differentiated instruction is not easy to implement, but with patience, dedication, and the strong motivation and diligence that the teachers have instilled in their students, challenges are turned into strengths. Students of different ages are learning in a collaborative way, and the classroom has become a unique learning setting where differences in linguistic abilities do not hinder communication.

The Dream is Growing

The program was founded in 2005 and is developing rapidly, operating in New York, Florida, and Maine. From public elementary schools to high schools, as well as community-based centers like the Malian Cultural Center in the Bronx and the Little Haiti Cultural Center in Miami, the French Heritage Language Program has already served about 1,000 students in after-school classes and summer camps. This growth has been achieved in a relatively short period of time, which is explained by the strong demand for French instruction among the various underserved French-speaking communities in the United States. The spread of the program would improve with more financial support, which the program is soliciting from public and private groups. Financial support remains one of the most critical concerns of program staff in this expanding phase of the program's development.

To learn more about the French Heritage Language Program, [read the program profile in the Heritage Languages Program Database.](#)

[Read an article](#) about the French Heritage Language Program.

About the Author: Ezzeddine Saidi

Ezzeddine Saidi teaches general and applied linguistics at the University of Gabes, Tunisia. In the summer of 2009, he spent two months at the Center for Applied Linguistics working as a resident scholar for the Alliance for the Advancement of Heritage Languages. At CAL, Mr. Saidi also worked on a research project, "Toward an integrative approach to EFL teacher education." Ezzeddine is also a Ph.D. candidate in the Applied Linguistics Program at the Higher Institute of Languages, University of Tunis, Tunisia. His Ph.D. research project is on "Evaluation of Tunisian pre- and in-service EFL teacher training: Exploring the form and content of teacher development and its impact on classroom practice."



The Heritage Voices Program Profile on the French Heritage Language Program was prepared by Ezzeddine Saidi for the Alliance for the Advancement of Heritage Languages, Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), Washington DC. This Heritage Program Voice was revised in October 2011 by Joy Kreeft Peyton and Benoît Le Dévédec from the original version published in September 2009.

The Heritage Voices Collection is designed to spotlight individual heritage language speakers and programs. The information presented does not necessarily represent the views of the Alliance for the Advancement of Heritage Languages or the Center for Applied Linguistics.



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