FL2 Articles

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S'enrichir pour bâtir.

By Larissa Robyn Johnston

Virtual learning: Easy as Cake

Glenn Cake's students learn without pen and paper. They get to watch Youtube videos and make digital storytelling photo slideshows. And they get to "speed date." All this without their teacher standing at the front of the classroom. Cake, who recently won the Teacher of the Year award from the Canadian Parents for French, teaches out of St. John's but his students are spread across the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

"It doesn't matter where you're located as long as the student can log into the virtual classroom," said Cake as he presented the program from Newfoundland to Ottawa. "Whatever French teachers can do in the classroom face-to-face, I can do online."It's all part of education through the Centre of Distance Learning and Innovation in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The students work from their school computers but can take Cake's course through a virtual classroom because French is not offered at their school. One of his many favourite activities is speed dating. He virtually splits the class into breakout rooms of groups of two where each pair can meet and ask each other questions in French. He can pop into each chat – where writing, audio and video are available – and check how the students are progressing.

"There's nothing better than to see all the microphones lit up and the students conversing in the target language," says Cake. Cake gets to see some of his students in person when they come to the big city from their rural locations for sports games or big events. He also makes an effort to visit their schools two or three times a year. But even in the virtual classroom, they still can interact by virtually raising their hand, clapping and using emoticons. "If I say something funny – and that happens one or two times per class," he laughed, "they can clap or make a funny face using the emoticon feature in Elluminate Live."

A former student, now aged 27, of Cake's 1991fourth grade French class nominated him for the award.
"I really appreciate you nominating me, but it's been 20 years. What took so long?'" the award recipient joked.

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