

Podcast transcript: Marc Strazel

<intro music>

Phil Tietjen: Okay. Welcome to the next episode of the Learning Conversations podcast. Uh, this is a podcast where we're featuring people involved with teaching and learning here at Davidson-Davie Community College. And today I have the pleasure of interviewing one of our newest Fulbright Foreign Language teaching assistants, uh, Marc Strazel <laugh>. Help me out.

Marc Strazel: Mark. That's, Stra-zel.

Phil Tietjen: Okay. Thank you. Uh, one of these days. I'll get that right, <laugh>. Okay. So anyways, so I'm, I'm talking to Marc here, and, um, I'd like to go ahead and, uh, hear about your, some of your experiences, uh, teaching here at the college. But I thought, uh, since you're from France, let's go ahead and start with, uh, some of your, um, experiences and thoughts and that kind of thing on, uh, France. So, um, what part of France are you from?

Marc Strazel: So, uh, thanks for having me. Mm-hmm. Um, I'm France. Paris. Yeah, I've was born and raised in Paris.

Phil Tietjen: Okay, Okay. And, uh, and when you think about, uh, your home there in Paris, what's like, uh, one of the favorite places you like to hang out and have fun in?

Marc Strazel: Um, I really like my apartment, actually. Okay. I have an ice park, very nice unit and ice park. I'm lucky enough to have that. Um, I really like my neighborhood. It's a working class, uh, slowly gentrifying neighborhood, but I really like it. And, um, um, yeah, that's it. Uh, I'm not a huge fan of the most touristic places in Paris, Obviously, as a local, that's not where Hangout mm-hmm. There are a few, uh, bars and pubs, uh, in the Center of Paris work every now and then. Um, and, um, yeah, that's, that's it.

Phil Tietjen: Okay. Okay. And, uh, when you think about like, um, people who are, don't know a whole lot about France. Yeah. Um, what's like one of the biggest stereotypes that you hear about France that's, um, true as well as a stereotype that isn't applicable or, or accurate about, uh, French culture?

Marc Strazel: Okay. Uh, so like one stereotype that I was sort of confronted with, uh, uh, here is about wine. So obviously there is a strong wine culture in France, but not everybody knows wine. And my supervisor expected me to be able to talk about wine, but I simply cannot do that. I have no knowledge whatsoever about wine. Mm-hmm. So that's one stereotype, but it's not too bad as a stereotype. Um, and plus, anyway, I like drinking wine every now and then, so it's not entirely false, I would say. Mm-hmm. uh, how it's for, uh, stereotypes that can be true. I would say. Let's, let's, uh, it's also about food. Um, I do miss, uh, cheese <laugh> and baguette. I do miss that. Mm-hmm, uh, you can find some good red herring, but not baguette as for cheese, it's a bit complicated. So yeah. That's, uh, that's that in this is case is true for me personally mm-hmm.

Phil Tietjen: And, um, other stereotypes, maybe other things, other, uh, specificities, like about friends or that I have, or that, that I've heard other people say or yeah. For example, if you have some, some in mind. I can't think of any that, that come to mind. Uh, but, uh, yeah, I can't, I can't think of any that that come to mind. Cause

actually I've never been to France. Okay. And I've always wanted to go, of course, and I do wanna see some of the tourist sites and that kind of thing.

Marc Strazel: It's good to see them once.

Phil Tietjen: Yeah. Right, right. I'm a big NBA fan, and so, uh, Tony Parker is like, you know, pretty well known, uh, to me in the NBA world. And he's originally from France. Yeah. Uh, so, uh, I've learned a little bit about France from him.

Marc Strazel: Okay. Oh, interesting.

Phil Tietjen: Yeah. Yeah. So, and of course, just reading, you know, books, articles, that kind of thing. Uh, so yeah. When you think about like, um, I don't know, artists or politicians or public, you know, popular figures that you like in France, I mean, who are some of your like, favorites? I mean, if you wanted to kind of identify artists or writer, whomever, what would be some ones that come to mind?

Marc Strazel: Okay. So I have to think a bit about it. Uh, can that person be dead? <laugh>?

Phil Tietjen: Absolutely. Yeah. Dead or alive?

Marc Strazel: Um, oh, well, one who died quite recently, he was a actor. Jean-Louis Trintignant. He died, it was very old. He died, uh, just a few months ago. Mm-hmm Uh, I haven't seen, uh, all of his movies, but I can just say that the movies I've seen, uh, where he acted were just, uh, just amazing. I love his acting. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, he about few, Yeah. But 10 years ago, I think he, it was one of his last movies. He, he played, um, in, um, Michael Haneke's film "Amour," - I can't remember the English title. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. It was, uh, a love story between two, two, uh, two old people mm-hmm. <affirmative>, so, yeah. And all the movies I've seen, it was, uh, within, it was very popular in the seventies, sixties, seventies. I just love his acting. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, that's mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And he also has a personal tragic story with his daughter was killed.

Phil Tietjen: Oh, wow.

Marc Strazel: Yeah. So it's, it is quite a figure in, uh, in the, the history of French cinema.

Phil Tietjen: Mm-hmm. Okay. And I remember when we were talking earlier, um, that, uh, you mentioned, uh, there's a Netflix series, "Lupin."

Marc Strazel: Yeah.

Phil Tietjen: "Lupin?"

Marc Strazel: Lupin.

Phil Tietjen: Uh, that you liked, uh, quite a bit, right?

Marc Strazel: Yeah. Uh, I just started it. I think it's great, uh, for language learning. This is also why I'm interested in it. mm-hmm. Uh, the actor in it, Omar Sy, is really famous, has been very famous in France for 10 or 15 years. Uh, and it's great to see a French TV show on Netflix. Mm-hmm. I mean, a few years ago, it simply did not exist. And it's really, so it's about Arsène Lupin. Uh, it was a series of book books. Uh, there were written like Century, actually. It was, it was called, um, I'm trying to say that in English, like the, the, the Gentleman's Thief. That's how you would translate it.

Phil Tietjen: Okay.

Marc Strazel: And was the story, it is the story of someone, uh, who steals, but in a very, let's say, a gentle, uh, way in a very, uh, in a very, uh, cunning. Mm-hmm. Is that a word? Cunning?

Phil Tietjen: Cunning, sure. Yeah.

Marc Strazel: Uh, and so they made an adaptation, a contemporary adaptation. Mm-hmm. and Omar Sy is the lead actor. And it's really good to show, I would recommend it for people who want to learn French, because I think it can actually follow it without, uh, without knowing the words, without understanding the words, because it's very visual. So yeah. That's the kind of TV show that I would recommend.

Phil Tietjen: So does he play the role of a thief then? And is he like a jewelry thief, or what's, what's the, what's the kind of main storyline?

Marc Strazel: So he's a thief. Uh, he, it does tell jewelries, uh, that it was, uh, it was at the heart of the original series of books mm-hmm. And uh, in the show, I haven't watched it all yet. There are, I think two seasons so far mm-hmm. And so he's trying to, so he steals, but he's, at the same time, he's trying to investigate, uh, the, the, the, the conviction and death of his own father. Cause his father was, uh, I think 20 years before, uh, the events, um, he was convicted, uh, falsely, and he committed suicide.

Phil Tietjen: Oh, wow.

Marc Strazel: He is investigating that, trying to figure out, uh, what really happened. Mm.

Phil Tietjen: Yeah. So you have kind of like, uh, two storylines going on. You've got like the one story line of him, uh, as a thief but then also this other story line of where he's investigating the wrongful conviction of his father.

Marc Strazel: Absolutely. And there are, uh, linked because he uses theft and, uh, deceit to investigate, to know what's going on.

Phil Tietjen: Yeah. Oh, wow.

Marc Strazel: But I've only watched two episodes so far, so, Okay. <laugh>. So I cannot spoil, at least.

Phil Tietjen: Well, you've got me intrigued. I definitely want to add it to my list of things to watch. That's great. Great. Um, yeah. Well, while we're on the topic of like Netflix streaming shows, any other streaming shows or videos or movies that you, uh, would suggest to people such as myself, who don't really know much about France? Yeah. Or wanna learn more about the language?

Marc Strazel: Oh, well, uh, also to movies that I've, two movies and TV shows that I've used or I'm considering using full my, for my class. Uh, there's one was, I think it's the, the, the biggest success in the history of French cinema, actually. The movie is called, "Intouchables" and it's with the same actor as in Lupin.

Phil Tietjen: Okay.

Marc Strazel: And it's the story of the handicapped man, uh, is, uh, paraplegic, so he can only move his head. And, uh, he, he has a, like a life assistant, and that life assistant is the actor of Lupin. Mm-hmm. And so it's, uh, it doesn't sound like it, but it's a comedy ands, a very good comedy, very funny. Uh, again, I was able to use it for my class, uh, because it's very visual. I think this actor has something very communicative about the way he acts very, even when you don't understand what he says, you can, the way he laughs, the way he moves around,

that's very, like all, you know, like these old, uh, actors and Chaplin, uh, Laurel and Hardy, uh, you know, very sort of, kind of slapstick humor mm-hmm. So I would recommend that in a different style. Um, and I haven't used it yet. It's a bit, it's very different. Uh, it's, uh, there's a show called "The Returned." It's actually available in the U.S. mm-hmm there are English captions available mm-hmm. on different platforms. And it's about the story of people who return from the dead. And again, I, I recommend, recommend it for learners because it is slow, uh, slow pace, uh, very quite visual too. You have to like gloomy stories. mm-hmm it's a very, it was very successful about 10 years ago.

Phil Tietjen: So. Okay. Yeah. Okay. Great. Great. Um, yeah. And by the way, uh, we'll put links to, uh, these movies and shows in the blog posts that we write for the video. So for those people out there listening and wanna follow up on this, uh, you'll definitely have the links to do that. Perfect. Great. Great, great. Um, so let's, uh, kind of, uh, shift a little bit to, uh, teaching Yeah. And teaching foreign language, stuff like that. Uh, so here at Davidson-Davie, you're teaching currently one class, correct?

Marc Strazel: Yeah, one class, and another one is starting next week.

Phil Tietjen: Okay.

Marc Strazel: I have one curricular class, uh, three classes a week with the same group of students. Mm-hmm. Eight students, which is a nice number. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, Uh, and another class, a non-curricular class called French for Fun will start next week, next Friday at noon.

Phil Tietjen: Okay. Okay. Let's talk about the first class a little bit. Um, what are some of the things, uh, that you've done so far, uh, in that class in terms of learning activities that you sense like students really kind of enjoy?

Marc Strazel: Uh, so we've been working on, on videos, uh, we've been using that movie, "Intouchables." mm-hmm. <affirmative>, uh, very, very fun scene. Very hilarious. I was really glad that it really worked with students. So it was, you know, when you use a video in class, you're always like, are they going to like it? And yeah, they did. So That's great. It's very nice.

Phil Tietjen: That's good. It's mostly high school students, is it? Or?

Marc Strazel: Yeah, they're, It goes from 15 to 20 15, 20 some early college. Some early college.

Phil Tietjen: Early college, yeah. that's what I was thinking.

Marc Strazel: And some, some just regular, uh, college, college age students. Um, and, uh, yeah, we've been using, uh, "Ratatouille."

Phil Tietjen: Oh, yes. That's the little, that's a animated.

Marc Strazel: Exactly.

Phil Tietjen: About the mice or rats. Exactly. Who are cooks, I guess.

Marc Strazel: Exactly, Exactly. Yeah. They're red cook. Absolutely. Exactly. Um, and, uh, I hadn't actually not watched it before. I had watched it for the class because the student, the students asked for it.

Phil Tietjen: Oh, did, yeah. Okay.

Marc Strazel: And it's always good when the students, uh, you know, make suggestions when they, they're motivated enough to say, Right. Oh, I would like to use that. And that's great, because you know, they're going to enjoy it.

Phil Tietjen: Mm-hmm.

Marc Strazel: And, uh, so yeah, what I do with movies, uh, I just take very short scenes, like two or three minutes. I, my, my, my students are just beginning, so I cannot, I couldn't possibly, uh, use a longer, uh, uh, like longer scenes but I take very short, short scenes, uh, short scene. We will listen to it once, uh, and then we listen to it many times. And like we, um, sort of split it, and I build a worksheet that, uh, that helps them in understanding, uh, how, how what is said, what happens. So basically I will, uh, show them the transcript, and next to the transcript I will ask questions. And at first it might seem, it might seem a bit, uh, hard because there's a lot of content, like a few hundred words that the teacher, the, the, the students don't know. I know them uh, but what I do, what I do is I use pictures. I use, I, I find great website where I can find, uh, icons, uh, of all sorts to illustrate everything, uh, from, uh, beard to, uh, anger and, uh, cheese and what, what have you.

Phil Tietjen: Mum-hmm.

Marc Strazel: And so, yeah, I build questions, but I make sure they can understand them because I use, I use, I use, uh, images and it's, it's quite interesting, uh, how much, uh, complete beginners can understand if you just give them pictures, that's quite amazing.

Phil Tietjen: Mm-hmm.

Marc Strazel: And then obviously, although French and English are quite different, they have some links. So they're are some common words, some words that kinda look alike, and they can sort of get some of the words.

Phil Tietjen: Mm-hmm.

Marc Strazel: And I work on that to, my goal is really to make them they content meaningful.

Phil Tietjen: Mm-hmm.

Marc Strazel: And I work on that to, to, to, to learn vocabulary, to learn how to make a sentence. And my goal is that, uh, the students will bring that home, will say, Well, I want to watch this movie. I want to watch the complete movie on the complete TV series, and go home with that, that if they did that, I would be so happy.

Phil Tietjen: <Laugh>. Yeah. I like your point about the visuals, uh, because that's a way to, that's another access point for them. That's another way for them to access the language, and it gives them another way to kind of use as a tool for understanding context of how, uh, language is used. So that makes a lot of sense to me. That's great.

Marc Strazel: I do a lot of mimes too.

Phil Tietjen: Oh, really? <Laughter>

Marc Strazel: Yeah. Okay. So that way, you know, they, they, they can read French, they can hear it when I speak, uh, they can see it when I use pictures. And they can, uh, they can also sort of feel it. And, uh, and that's,

that's the, that's where miming is useful. So typically, I, I mime vocabulary, Well, I cannot do it here. People won't see it.

Phil Tietjen: <Laughter>

Marc Strazel: But yeah, I did that this week actually was the first time I tried this. I did myself, and then a student did it, so it was great fun.

Phil Tietjen: Yeah.

Marc Strazel: So, yeah, it's, uh, it's like what we call kinesthetic.

Phil Tietjen: Right. I was thinking of that too. Yeah. Because it's like becomes kind of like a full sensory learning experience because they're using all five senses, you know, at different points in time.

Marc Strazel: But I, I think it's something that, uh, we've all done as young kids.

Phil Tietjen: Mm-hmm.

Marc Strazel: Uh, people who work with young kids always do that because kids naturally do it. And we tend to think that as we become adults, or even just teenagers, we're too old for this.

Phil Tietjen: Right.

Marc Strazel: And some people don't like this because they feel like they're being treated like kids. But I think it's, I mean, I've taken, I've taken drama classes in English two years ago and we did that all the time. Sometimes we even had to play without speaking. So we had to make, we had to be understood just by our gestures and we would be like just mumbling gibberish, basically.

Phil Tietjen: Right. Right. Yeah. I really like your point about play and learning, you know, that intersection between the two and that how oftentimes, you know, especially if you're working with older students, like, oh, you know, that's, you know, that's not, um, serious enough of an approach. And actually, I've read, read research that kind of really validates the value of doing kind of more of a play-based approach to learning. Um, because I think partly it encourages risk taking in the best sense of the word. It encourages creativity, it encourages people to think about different ways that they can, um, you know, approach a learning task.

Marc Strazel: So, and it's good, again, against anxiety too.

Phil Tietjen:

Marc Strazel: I have a student who's quite, quite anxious and, and I think it helps her to sort of unwind a bit and just, Okay. But, you know, I mean, language learning should not be taken too seriously.

Phil Tietjen: Mm-hmm.

Marc Strazel: It, it should be commitment, but because I think you need to commit yourself to, to it and to, to be consistent about it. But it doesn't have to be serious. It doesn't have to be only about studying. It can be also about just having fun, enjoying, uh, uh, whatever you like, uh, but in your target language. And that's in that, in

that, in that way, uh, movies and TV shows are also a form of play. I mean, something, uh, like something creative and, uh, entertaining at least.

Phil Tietjen: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Okay. Yeah. Cool. Let's shift to your other class that you're teaching the French for Fun. Is that what it's called?

Marc Strazel: Yeah.

Phil Tietjen: Um, when's that going to start? Um, how are you gonna set that up? How often does it happen?

Marc Strazel: So it's still in preparation, <laugh>.

Phil Tietjen: Okay.

Marc Strazel: Alright. You know, you, I mean, it's, I, I've, I've worked in education now for, for three or four years, and I realized that before, you know, your students, you cannot redesign the class.

Phil Tietjen: Mm-hmm.

Marc Strazel: Maybe I will think differently in 20 years.

Phil Tietjen: Mm-hmm.

Marc Strazel: I have a lot of experience, and then I'll, I'll know perfectly what I can do, but I think I need to meet my students first and see what they want, uh, what they want to learn, what kind of vocab, uh, do they want to use video do, do they want to play games? Uh, but as French for fun with mostly, uh, adults. I think they, they, they, I don't, I won't have many teenagers. I think it'll be between 20 and 40 probably. And so, um, it'll be based on, Yeah, I think games and videos most likely, but again, I still have to figure it out. And it starts this, uh, this Friday. So next Friday, Friday the ninth, I. Think.

Phil Tietjen: Yeah, I think that sounds right. Yeah. Yeah. The ninth.

Marc Strazel: And it's, uh, from 12 to one, uh, PM obviously.

Phil Tietjen: So people can just pop over during their lunch hour.

Marc Strazel: Absolutely. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, that's the idea. That's why we, we, Yeah, exactly. It's for people who work or not necessarily students, people from the community who want to come.

Phil Tietjen: Exactly. And which, uh, building is it in? Is it here in North Gee or is it in another building?

Marc Strazel: It is North Gee uh, N 1 0 6.

Phil Tietjen: 1 0 6, Okay. North Gee 1 0 6.

Marc Strazel: It's not too far from the International Education Department.

Phil Tietjen: Okay.

Marc Strazel: Where all the flags are. It's quite possible. That's how I, I find my way usually

Phil Tietjen: Look for the flags and then, you know, be a little bit past that. Okay, great. North Gee 1 0 6. And, uh, you said in terms of the content right now, you're thinking mostly games and videos?

Marc Strazel: Yeah, I, I, uh, again, it's, it's, uh, yeah, a bit more nice status. Um, technically I'm a foreign language teaching assistant.

Phil Tietjen: Mm-hmm.

Marc Strazel: well, I'm not an assistant because they're.

Phil Tietjen: You're gonna be teaching the class?

Marc Strazel: Yeah, I'm just teaching. Exactly. I mean, there are no French teachers here, so I'm the teacher. But, uh, it's my first year, uh, teaching, teaching French. I've done some volunteer work with migrants in France. But it's my first year as a like, uh, uh, sort of, not full time, but it's the first time I really fully dedicated to it. Uh, and so I'm at a stage where I'm thinking of many things I could do. And right now what I like to do is I've thought about games, typically, card games or mines, because these games, um, are a way to use French only. The idea is that when you make students active, physically active

Phil Tietjen: Mm-hmm.

Marc Strazel: And you give them, uh, stuff to do, they can actually just, uh, uh, do what you tell 'em to do because it's just about using the body more than understanding what is going on.

Phil Tietjen: Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Marc Strazel: But while they're doing that, you can use French nonstop. And, and I guess that's really what I try at best to do. Uh, it's not that easy, but I really want, I only have 50 minutes, maybe an hour with my students and I really want them to hear as much French as possible from me.

Phil Tietjen: Mm-hmm.

Marc Strazel: And you just have to make yourself understood, mime write, use pictures. And I think games can be another way to, to, uh, to, to make that happen. It's something that I've done with kids, uh, when I was giving, uh, like private classes of English and kids love it.

Phil Tietjen: Mm-hmm.

Marc Strazel: And I say there a reason why, uh, uh, um, adults would not love it too.

Phil Tietjen: Yeah. Absolutely. Absolutely. Sounds great. Yeah. All right. So 12 to one North Gee 1 0 6.

Marc Strazel: 1 0 6.

Phil Tietjen: All right. Excellent. Starts on the 9th of September.

Marc Strazel: Exactly.

Phil Tietjen: Fantastic. Great. Great. And is it happening, um, like Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays. Or.

Marc Strazel: No, it's just Friday. Just. Friday. Okay. So just one day a week.

Phil Tietjen: Okay. All right. So not a huge time commitment.

Marc Strazel: No.

Phil Tietjen: Yeah. That's. Uh, at least in terms of actual class time.

Marc Strazel: Exactly. Exactly.

Phil Tietjen: Outside, you know, to your heart's content, you know, whatever.

Marc Strazel: Yeah. Well, I will, It's non-curricular, so, I mean, I won't be giving them a lot of homework. I mean, I think it would not be like, I don't think it would make sense. Yeah. But I do, I do encourage my students, uh, curricular and non-curricular students, uh, to bring some of what we do home in terms of the movies. Uh, we, we used the music we might use to, uh, because I think, well, clearly, even for my students who take the curricular class three hours a week, well, a bit less actually, because it's, uh, 50 minute class.

Phil Tietjen: Mm-hmm.

Marc Strazel: Um, well, I've, I've calculated that, uh, throughout the semester, we'll have only forty hours together.

Phil Tietjen: Mm. Okay.

Marc Strazel: And it's more than many classes, uh, especially eight-week classes. But still, when it comes to language learning, it's not much. And so I really want my students to go home and, and use, uh, the, the, the videos, the, the audio video content that we've used, uh, in class. That's homework. And it's, it can be very fun.

Phil Tietjen: Mm-hmm.

Marc Strazel: As homework.

Phil Tietjen: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yeah. Fantastic. Great. Um, okay, so I don't wanna take up too much of your time cause I really appreciate you, you know, spending time, you know, taking time out of your busy schedule for us. um, but is there anything else you'd like to add?

Marc Strazel: Um, yeah, maybe about my, my impressions, uh, about the, here being here.

Phil Tietjen: Yeah. I'd love to hear that. How's it been going so far?

Marc Strazel: Uh, it, it's going great. I mean, everybody's so nice.

Phil Tietjen: Mm-hmm.

Marc Strazel: Uh, I, I, I, it's not my first in the US. I was in New York in 2017.

Phil Tietjen: Oh, okay.

Marc Strazel: And, well, New York is different.

Phil Tietjen: Uh, people, people don't have time.

Marc Strazel: They not all, they don't have a minute. Uh, you don't, they don't take time for you. They just don't. I don't know if they don't want to or just, just don't have the time to. Um, but here, people have time. Uh, they

help you. They, they want to get to know you. They, uh, I mean, my supervisor, Suzanne LaVenture, I can see that she's very busy, but whenever I need some help, uh, she will be, she will be there for, for me and for the other international students and scholars. And, um, yeah. It's, uh, it's also very, uh, the area is very international, and we, like half an hour ago, we just, were talking with the women and her niece from Uruguay.

Phil Tietjen: Oh, really?

Marc Strazel: And so, yeah, I mean, I keep meeting people from, uh, yeah, different countries, uh, Latin America, but also, uh, there's one former student who's from Tunisia. There's, uh, there, there's Irish teacher, German student. Like, I keep meeting lots of, of people from everywhere, and I did not expect that. I did not expect to find such, uh, international diversity in, uh, rural North Carolina. That's very good surprise.

Phil Tietjen: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Very cool. Yeah. Yeah. I mean, mean Suzanne, it's just been fantastic, uh, in, in, you know, promoting international education and she does so many things of the program and yeah. Yeah. That's great.

Marc Strazel: Absolutely.

Phil Tietjen: Very cool. Well, again, um, thanks so much for your time and, uh, I look forward to, you know, getting to know you a little bit more as other semester goes on and hearing more about, uh, your, uh, teaching experiences here and Yeah. Sure. Um, thanks a lot. <music>.