

Oral Language Development



Introduction

The vision of [*The Ontario Curriculum: French as a Second Language: Core French, Grades 4-8; Extended French, Grades 4-8; French Immersion, Grades 1-8, \(revised\) 2013*](#) and [*The Ontario Curriculum: French as a Second Language: Core French, Extended French and French Immersion, Grades 9-12, \(revised\) 2014*](#), hereafter referred to as the Revised 2013-2014 FSL Curricula, states that: “Students will communicate and interact with growing confidence in French, one of Canada’s official languages, while developing the knowledge, skills, and perspectives they need to participate fully as citizens in Canada and in the world.” (p. 6) [*The Revised FSL Curriculum, 2013*](#) goes on further to assert that “Interaction in French is pivotal [... and that] It is therefore recommended that teachers and students use French both inside the classroom and when feasible, beyond it.” (p. 9) As FSL teachers, we want to support and enrich students’ ability to communicate proficiently in authentic, spontaneous situations. Oral interaction in the FSL classroom will help students gain confidence and proficiency in order to communicate successfully in these situations. Effective instructional strategies, a positive classroom atmosphere and an abundance of purposeful talk will enhance the students’ ability to communicate orally in a wide variety of situations and feel comfortable in their oral interactions with both teacher and fellow students. This in turn will lead to students being able to apply their well-scaffolded language skills in real-life situations beyond the classroom. Receptive and productive communication (listening and speaking) are inextricably linked to learners’ ability to learn to read and write in their second language. [*The Revised 2013-2014 FSL Curricula*](#) state that, “... oral communication – listening and speaking – is paramount for second-language acquisition. If students hear it, they can say it. If students can say it, they can read it. And if students can read it, they can write it.” (p. 9)

Creating a Safe and Caring Learning Environment

Essential to promoting any learning is a safe, positive learning environment. In order to foster active participation, belief in oneself, risk taking and engagement, it is necessary to have a classroom atmosphere where everyone feels valued, cared for, respected and included. Students who understand that their teacher believes in their abilities and where expectations are clear and attainable will make efforts to succeed. For our FSL students these conditions are fundamental to encouraging oral interaction.

Emphasizing proficiency rather than perfection allows students to make mistakes and concentrate on getting their message across along with understanding the messages of others in the classroom.

When we ask students to consider what they **can** do (rather than what isn’t yet perfect), they are encouraged to look towards their own progress . A positive and caring classroom culture will provide fertile ground for a growth mindset where everyone tries their best, acknowledges that errors are part of the learning process, and confidently takes risks as part of the learning process.

An FSL program based on student interest, needs and abilities increases the sense of ownership as well as creative and critical thinking. The building of intercultural awareness and celebration results in a

classroom community sensitive to and appreciative of diversity in the school, local, provincial, national and global communities. The FSL classroom provides an inclusive environment for all learners, and “should reflect diversity of the student population, including students with special education needs and English Language Learners.” A Framework for [French as a Second Language in Ontario Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12, 2013](#) (p. 10), hereafter referred to as A Framework for FSL, K-12.

- **Consider the student as a unique individual.**
- **Put student needs first.**
- **Hold high expectations for your learners.**
- **Trust the universal human capacity for language learning.**

A Framework for FSL, K-12 (p. 36)

We, as FSL educators, may wish to:

- provide multiple opportunities for building and maintaining a caring classroom community through oral interactive activities and cooperative learning activities;
- use student interest, background and expertise to inform planning and practice as illustrated in **Le Français sans frontières**, pp. 17 – 23, Natasha E. Feghali, ETFO VOICE. Volume 15, No. 4, Summer 2013;
- celebrate all successes frequently and give students the tools to do the same. Encourage praise and celebration on an ongoing basis, e.g. start the year off by co-creating an ‘encouraging word wall’ and referring to it continuously throughout the year;
- incorporate guests into the classroom from diverse backgrounds, cultures and learning abilities;
- integrate literature and other authentic texts that celebrate diversity in all ways such as cultural, academic and interests.

More information about creating a safe and caring learning environment can be found in [Instructional Strategies](#) module and [A Guide to Reflective Practice for Core French Teachers, Module 2, Positive Learning Environment](#).

Strategies to Promote Oral Interaction

“To reach their potential, students need to hear, see, use and reuse French in meaningful yet developmentally appropriate contexts.”

The Revised FSL Curriculum, 2013 (p. 9)

Essential to promoting oral interaction in French are explicitly taught second language learning strategies. Co-creating these with students, modelling, practice and reinforcement are valuable steps for all learning in the second language classroom. Well-supported students feel safer, more ready to take risks and comfortable in their ability to tackle oral interaction in their second language. Teachers need to model a love of language, learning and culture to foster the same in their students. Outside speakers and visitors can be valuable assets as they model strategies that they have used to develop a love of learning language and culture as well as a facility with communicating in a second language.

FSL educators may wish to co-create strategies for success in oral interaction with students and use as classroom anchor charts and/or individual reference sheets. Strategies could include:

- questioning (for clarity, comprehension checks, logical follow up questions);
- repetition and/or paraphrasing especially as comprehension checks;
- use of gestures, actions, visual supports (images, posters, personal anchor charts);
- circumlocution (talking around a word when the word is forgotten or not known);
- modelling and encouraging risk taking;
- use of words that appear in a question when responding;

Furthermore, we can model the effectiveness of the above strategies by:

- referring to the strategies regularly as a means of monitoring reflective practice amongst students;
- encouraging think-aloud practice;
- ongoing varied activities in which students use oral communication (e.g. drama, dance, music, role-playing, dialogues, conversations, making videos/films);
- referring to these strategies as entry or exit cards (e.g. What strategy did you use today? What will you try tomorrow? How many people, by show of hands or thumbs up/down, took risks/asked questions today?);
- providing “comprehensible input” wherein a teacher ensures that the messages given to students are understandable, relevant and slightly challenging; further information may be found in [The Revised 2013-2014 FSL Curriculum](#) (p. 9); using three part strategies: purposeful introduction of language (minds-on) , on-going modelling and practice of language (action) and application of language (consolidation). Examples of authentic tasks organized in three-part lessons may be found in the [Financial Literacy Lessons \(2011\)](#), developed by the Ontario Modern Language Teachers’ Association.

French as the Language of Instruction, Communication, and Interaction

There is much documented support for the value of having French as the language of all interaction in FSL classrooms. As explained in [The Revised 2013-2014 FSL Curricula, elementary](#) (p. 33) and [secondary](#) (p. 37) “It is essential that French be the language of communication in class so that students have constant exposure to correct models of the language and many opportunities to speak in French.”



Teaching and Learning in the Core French Classroom (June 2013) Capacity Building Series:

AIM FOR A DIALOGIC STANCE IN THE CLASSROOM ...

Dialogue

achieving common understanding through listening to one another’s ideas and thinking about them before accepting or rejecting them

Discussion

exchanging ideas, sharing information, solving problems, often with a focus on having the right answer

Instruction

direct teaching and modelling by teachers to explain concepts

Recitation

regurgitation of knowledge, usually prompted by teacher questioning

Rote Expression

drilling of facts and routines through constant use and reuse.

(Leaders in Educational Thought, Lucy West, 2012)

If we model interest in French language and culture while using the second language, we establish a tone of love of language and learning. The FSL classroom should always be a model of mixing second language acquisition and content simultaneously. Using authentic, practical French in real-life situations and speaking about what students already love to talk about will increase participation and engagement in the FSL classroom.

To establish French as the language of communication in our classes, we may:

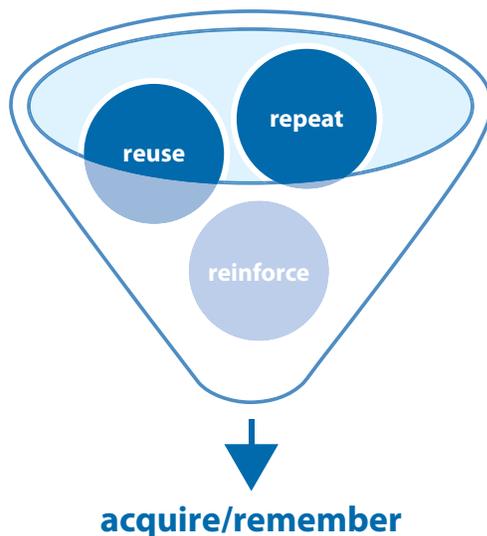
- set and maintain the expectation of French as language of all communication in the classroom;
- provide lots of support, encouragement and modelling to foster communication in French;
- use all newly learned vocabulary and structures in repeated authentic contexts: practice, practice, practice and praise often and sincerely;
- check for and ensure comprehension with gestures, visual supports, prompts, offering choice of two options (e.g. *c’est une fille ou un garçon?*);

- incorporate wait time for students to think before they respond;
- use frequent and clear comprehension checks with diverse strategies that may include but are not restricted to: exit/entry cards, show of thumbs, number of fingers representing level of understanding (e.g. 5 indicates full understanding, 1 almost no understanding), paraphrasing what the teacher or partner has said or transfer of language modelled and learned to new authentic situations.

Scaffolded Learning to Support Spontaneous Conversations

Modelled talk is essential to second language acquisition and provides the necessary scaffolding to promote student confidence. The 3 Rs of language acquisition, “Repeat, Reuse, Reinforce”, lead to increased working memory in the second language or “embedded” language acquisition. The Revised Curriculum advises us that “A well-planned instructional program should always be at the student’s level, but it should also push the student towards his or her optimal level of challenge for learning, while providing the support and anticipating and directly teaching the skills that are required for success.” [The Revised 2013-2014 FSL Curricula, elementary](#) (p. 30) and [secondary](#) (p. 34)

DEVELOPING ORAL LANGUAGE



With the gradual release of responsibility model, hereafter referred to as GRR, teachers model, share and guide their students in the use of the target language, allowing for confidence at the independent stage of speaking French. The GRR can be used for introducing new vocabulary, language structures and even conversations. Teachers can effectively model and help students refine a variety of types of talk necessary to effective communication in French.

Talk (both teacher and student) is critical to effective communication and to building understanding and trust amongst people. When provided with multiple, authentic opportunities to converse in the target language, FSL learners are able to express their opinions and ideas and to appreciate others’ opinions and ideas as well. “Talk thus enables students to express themselves, develop healthy relationships with peers, and define their thoughts about themselves, others, and the world.” [The Revised 2013-2014 FSL Curricula, elementary](#) (p. 31) and [secondary](#) (p. 36)

Different strategies we may use to support spontaneous conversations include:

- ensure a good variety of purposeful and accountable talk. Talking to inform, to collaborate or to socialize are just some of the ways we can promote confidence and the ability to speak effectively in our students;
- incorporate vocabulary and expressions to articulate and support opinions, to disagree appropriately, to collaborate, to inform or to interpret;
- ask for talk/listening that is just a bit more challenging than the current level of ability when vocabulary is learned and embedded in the students’ repertoire, but always offer support when necessary;
- include more than one way to express the same idea so that students are able to manage outside the classroom e.g. ***Comment t’appelles-tu? Quel est ton nom? C’est quoi ton nom? Où vas-tu? Où est-ce que tu vas? Que veux-tu? Qu’est-ce que tu désires? Qu’est-ce que tu voudrais?***

More information about strategies to encourage the use of French as the language of communication in the FSL classroom can be found in [The Revised 2013-2014 FSL Curricula, elementary](#) (p. 33) and [secondary](#) (p. 37).

Strategies to Support Active, Purposeful Listening

Integral to effective oral communication and making sense of a second language is active listening. Listening is now one of the four strands in the FSL Curriculum as we consider “Well-developed listening skills in French are essential for students’ development of language proficiency.” [The Revised FSL Curriculum, 2013](#) (p. 19) Language that is heard and understood becomes part of the students’ working knowledge and memory and impacts not only their oral production (and interaction) but also their reading and writing. We are reminded in [Let’s Talk about Listening](#) that, “it is listening – the “least explicit of the four language skills”– that is perhaps the most essential for academic learning (Chand, 2007). And yet it is the least taught (Tindall & Nisbet, 2008).” (p. 1)



Teachers can model and reinforce specific strategies to encourage active listening and the value of listening as part of their communication skills. Students improve their metacognitive and social skills when engaged in purposeful, active listening. Teachers can teach and model listening skills and promote a collaborative, respectful environment through activities to enhance students’ ability to listen effectively. As stated in [The Revised 2013-2014 FSL Curricula, elementary](#) (p. 19) and [secondary](#) (p. 23) “French programs should provide many cognitively challenging opportunities for students to engage in listening activities.”

To encourage active listening in the FSL classroom, we may:

- include activities to support purposeful listening such as raising fingers to indicate when students hear a targeted expression or opinion;
- model and practice social listening skills such as summarizing, paraphrasing, asking questions,

appropriate eye contact and body language, making connections between speaker and listener or demonstrating curiosity;

- use strategies such as graffiti or tableaux for students to demonstrate understanding of what they have heard;
- make explicit what skills and strategies students are using/can use to enhance listening skills e.g. what is the difference between LOOKING like a good listener and actually BEING one;
- before listening, think of what I know and set a goal; while listening, focus on key words and ideas; after listening, summarize, then personalize (connect it to yourself, make it your own).
(Adapted from Lend Me an Ear Teaching Listening Strategies for World Language Learning, p. 3)

Please see [The Revised 2013-2014 FSL Curricula, elementary](#) (p. 19) and [secondary](#) (p. 21) for further discussion about listening strategies and opportunities valuable to students’ ability to communicate effectively in French.

Cooperative Learning Structures to Support Authentic Conversations

Cooperative learning structures (also known as strategies and/or protocols) are invaluable for increasing purposeful student talk time, practicing and refining oral interaction in French and improving social skills. Cooperative learning activities promote accountability, increased independence and positive, respectful social interaction among students who often don’t realize that while having fun participating in these activities they are also involved in valuable working and learning in and about their second language. [A Guide to Reflective Practice for Core French Teachers, Module 4, Cooperative Learning](#) explains that, “Collaborative [cooperative] learning invites students to make choices, derive pleasure from their learning, take risks, practice and refine their literacy and learning strategies, and develop independence. It provides a safe and positive environment for students to engage in the social interactions that are so important ... and to explore the social nature of language and literacy.” (p. 2) (the quotation is originally from Literacy and Learning, 2004, p. 28, according to the Cooperative Learning module) Cooperative learning structures also help meet the

diverse needs, strengths and interests of all students as they allow for entry at multiple levels, ensuring inclusion of and enjoyment for all.

We could consider using the following cooperative learning structures:

- **Paraphrase Passport:** students take turns discussing an idea, paraphrasing what the previous student said before adding their own comment;
- **Agreement Circles or Opinion Corridors:** students try to convince each other of their opinion after having decided on a topic;
- **Surveys/Find Someone Who:** students circulate around the room asking each other questions about any topic and noting responses;
- **Four Corners:** students choose a corner of classroom according to prompts or images provided by teacher to further discussion/opinion sharing/connections;
- **Think/Pair/Share:** to discuss or practice language and ideas, students work first in partners, then groups of four, then perhaps in a large group. Students can either describe what they have said or summarize what their partner has shared.

“The key to student learning is rich talk – opportunities to talk, opportunities to hear, opportunities to listen ... choral chanting, repetitive talk, structured talk – talk, talk, talk.”

(Leaders in Educational Thought, Allan Luke, 2012) from Teaching and Learning in the Core French Classroom (June 2012)

As we are reminded in [The Revised FSL Curriculum, 2013](#), “Interaction in French is pivotal in this curriculum.” (p. 9) With the support of the revised curriculum, and its emphasis on the four interconnected strands of listening, speaking, reading and writing, our students will learn their second language using the natural stages of language acquisition and thus, increase their ability to communicate orally in French and to enjoy doing so. “The ability to speak both of Canada’s official languages helps

prepare student for their role as active and engaged citizens in today’s bilingual and multicultural Canada ... [and] Such abilities benefit the individual; but Canadian society-as well as the global community.” [The Revised 2013-2014 FSL Curricula for elementary](#) and [secondary](#) (p. 7)



Resources

Curriculum Services Canada. Guides to Reflective Practice for Core French Teachers, Modules 1 through 6

<http://www.curriculum.org/fsl/projects/a-guide-to-reflective-practice-for-core-french-teachers>

Curriculum Services Canada (April 2012). Prologue, Acquisition of Oral Language as a Foundation for Literacy

<http://www.curriculum.org/fsl/projects/prologue-a-publication-for-professional-conversations>

Curriculum Services Canada (November 2012). Prologue, Building Language Skills through a Cross-Curricular Approach

<http://www.curriculum.org/fsl/projects/prologue-a-publication-for-professional-conversations>

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<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/amenagement/frameworkFLS.pdf>

Ontario Ministry of Education (2013). The Ontario Curriculum: French as a Second Language: Core, Grades 4 – 8; Extended, Grades 4 – 9; Immersion Grades 1 – 8, (revised)

www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/fsl.html

Ontario Ministry of Education, The Ontario Curriculum: French as a Second Language: Core French, Extended French and French Immersion, Grades 9-12, (revised) 2014

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/fsl.html>

Ontario Ministry of Education (2011). Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, Capacity Building Series. French Immersion in Ontario

http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/CBS_FrenchImmersion.pdf

Ontario Ministry of Education (2011). Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, Capacity Building Series. Grand Conversations in the Junior Classroom

http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/CBS_Grand_Conversations_Junior.pdf

Ontario Ministry of Education (2011). Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, Capacity Building Series. Grand Conversations in the Primary Classroom

http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/CBS_Grand_Conversations.pdf

Ontario Ministry of Education (2009). Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, Capacity Building Series. Let's Talk about Listening

http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/Talk_about_listening.pdf

Ontario Ministry of Education (2012). Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, Capacity Building Series. Teaching and Learning in the Core French Classroom

http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/CBS_Core_French.pdf

Robbins, Jill. Lend Me an Ear-Teaching Listening Strategies for World Language Learning. National Capital Language Resource Center

http://www.nclrc.org/about_teaching/topics/PDFs/0711_lend%20me%20and%20ear.pdf