



Prologue

FOR FRENCH IMMERSION AND EXTENDED FRENCH EDUCATORS

A PUBLICATION FOR PROFESSIONAL CONVERSATIONS

Acquisition of Oral Language as a Foundation for Literacy

The focus of this publication is on preparing a language-rich, accepting classroom environment in entry-level grades that supports students' acquisition of the French language, as well as their confidence in using French across the curriculum. Throughout, there are opportunities for teachers to reflect individually or in professional learning communities on practices that create positive classroom environments to support the acquisition of French language and literacy development.

In this publication, you will read about: strategies for encouraging students to take risks and develop confidence in speaking French; the importance of teacher modelling of French for students; the provision of a variety of literacy experiences; and the developmental process of students' French language learning.

Prologue is a professional learning publication for educators working in entry level French Immersion and Extended French programs. It includes an element of research, questions for reflection, translations of key educational terms and teacher voice, which are intended to inspire professional conversations. *Prologue* is available electronically in English and French on Curriculum Services Canada's website (<http://curriculum.org/content/home>).



A Positive Classroom Environment

Early language acquisition is a subconscious process: students are not usually aware of the fact that they are acquiring language, but are only aware of the fact that they are using the language for communication. (Krashen, 1981)

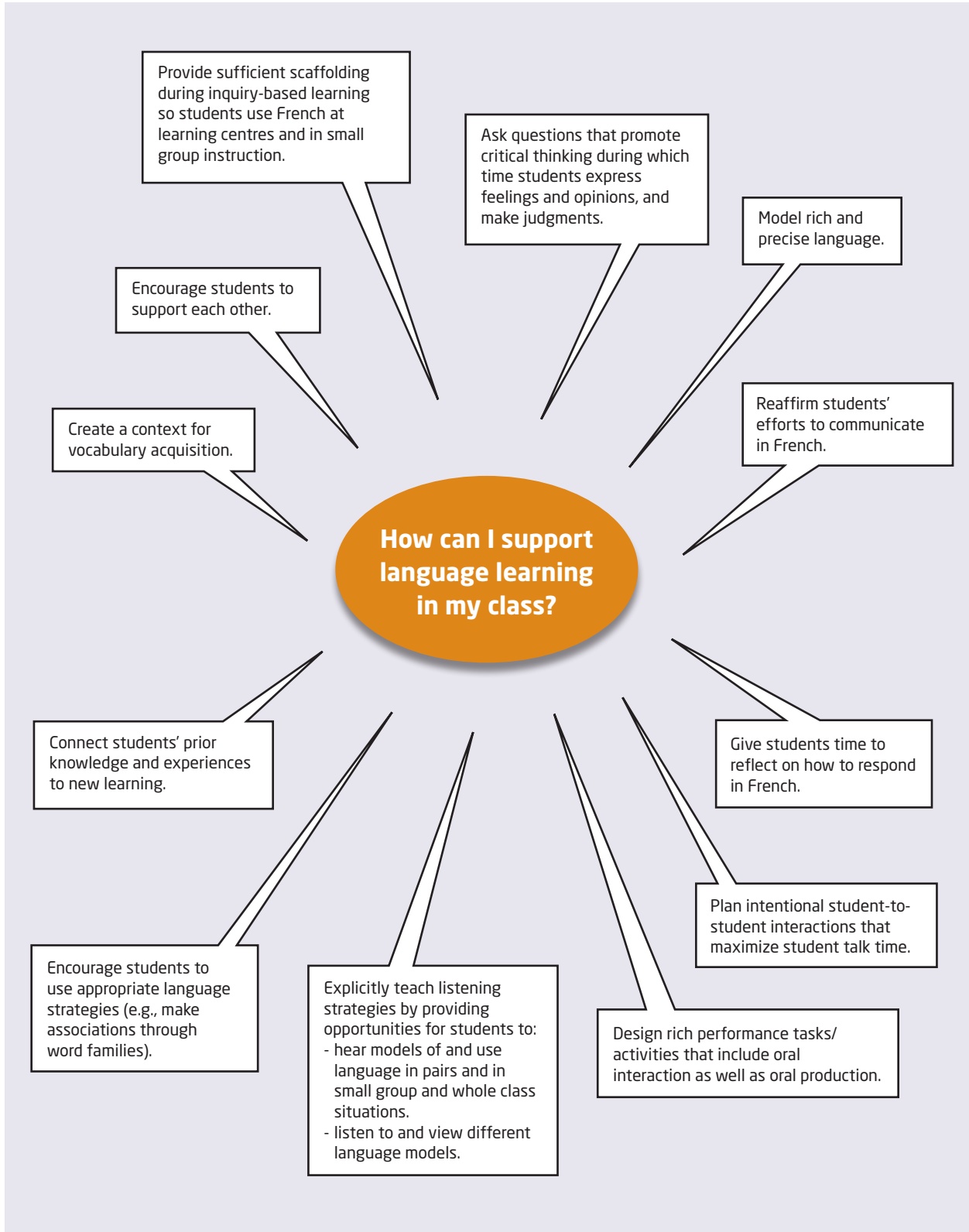
French Immersion and Extended French programs are designed for students who do not speak French at home, therefore the main opportunity that they have to develop French language skills occurs in the classroom setting. Teachers are aware of the first language competencies students have developed prior to all entry level classes. It is through modelling the French language that teachers lead students to realize that French is a language of everyday situations and not simply a series of words and expressions learned to complete classroom activities. Because the goal of developing oral language skills is effective communication, teachers create a classroom environment where students participate in everyday communication, authentic activities, and meaningful tasks that promote oral language rather than placing an emphasis on recall of vocabulary and language structures. It is important, therefore, that teachers create a language-rich classroom experience from the first day. That means that French Immersion and Extended French classrooms are environments in which risk-taking is valued and promoted. Students are encouraged to listen and talk, share ideas, and become problem solvers even though they have not yet attained linguistic accuracy. Teachers make an effort to ensure that their students see that making errors is part of the process.

REFLECTION How does my classroom environment encourage students to take risks and make attempts to use French, even if the language is not correct?

According to James Britton, professor of education, University of London, “literacy floats on a sea of talk,” so the conditions that encourage students to develop oral communication skills (listening, oral interaction, and production) also assist them in developing or transferring reading and writing skills. It is important for students to use oral language to develop reasoning and observation, prediction, sequencing, and other skills connected with reading and writing.

Teachers present relevant linguistic elements as they help students develop French language skills across curriculum areas. For example, examining topics in science and solving problems in mathematics create opportunities for students to acquire subject-specific vocabulary and language structures associated with those subjects, and applicable to a broad range of situations, in a natural and authentic manner. Giving instructions and following directions in the French class or in the physical education class, for instance, provides opportunities for students to understand and use the imperative tense without a formal lesson.

Teachers use a variety of strategies to support French language learning. The suggestions in the diagram below serve as starting points for reflection and discussion.



REFLECTION How do I support my students as they progress through a continuum of learning to speak French?

which students absorb the language modelled by the teacher, which builds their skills in comprehension and expression. Teachers modify their oral language and adapt written texts to make meaning accessible. Initially, students respond partially in English and partially in French to questions and instructions given in French. They repeat models of language presented by the teacher and gradually attempt to incorporate more and more French words and phrases in their speech. They often communicate in French with the teacher and continue to speak in English with their peers. When students feel at ease with the language, they experiment and speak spontaneously, make generalizations about language rules and begin to self-correct.

REFLECTION How do I nurture the acquisition of oral language as a foundation for literacy skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing)?

Students progress at various rates. Teachers create an environment that encourages language development while recognizing that students' French language competencies and confidence to speak only in French develop at individual rates. Continuous encouragement, modeling, and support help students at all levels make gains in language acquisition.

“...children learn to do amazing things in oral language; all they need are opportunities to produce language in situations that are meaningful to them, to be understood, to be part of conversations, and to have a model of language to learn from.”
Marie Clay, 1998

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