

FSL for School Administrators

FROM AWARENESS to ACTION

From Awareness to Action is a professional learning publication written by the Provincial Principal Focus Group members to support school administrators in the strengthening of French as a Second Language.



ISSUE 5 Supporting Conversations about Student Learning in FSL

IN THIS ISSUE

The focus is to highlight strategies for principals and vice-principals to utilize when having conversations that support student learning in FSL.

Influenced by current educational researchers such as Richard Elmore and John Hattie, system leaders are rethinking how to move instruction forward in classrooms across Ontario through strategies such as inquiry models and instructional rounds. Occasionally, the FSL classroom may be forgotten in the discourse that is occurring about what constitutes good instruction. Non-French speaking principals and vice-principals may at times perceive that they have limited knowledge and experience to engage their Core, Extended and French Immersion teachers in meaningful dialogue about instruction.

In recent years, Ontario French as Second Language teachers have engaged in adapting and modifying instructional approaches in the French classroom. Inspired by the *Common European Framework of Reference*, or CEFR, (see [Issue #2](#)), FSL teachers have shifted their focus from a communicative approach concentrated on oral,

aural, and speaking skills towards an action-oriented approach and the creation of learning contexts in which language acquisition is a function of a real-life task.

As learning leaders include the FSL classroom teacher in targeted professional dialogue, they need pedagogical language that reflects the current thinking in second-language instruction. Henceforth, what might principals and vice-principals look for in the CEFR-inspired classroom?

CEFR Look-For Documents

There are many articles and documents that describe the features of a CEFR-inspired classroom approach, all of which are valid tools to inform FSL instruction. For example, during a January 2014 CEFR provincial meeting, FSL educators across Ontario collaboratively developed a resource providing insight for teachers and principals into the characteristics of the CEFR-inspired classroom. Regional networks in Ontario and second-language organizations have also worked to isolate the characteristics of an action-oriented classroom.

What are the commonalities of these look-for documents? Overall, the descriptors highlight the identity of the learner, the philosophical stance of the educator, the classroom environment, and assessment and evaluation practices.

As students engage in relevant, authentic and purposeful higher-order thinking tasks, effective communication, regardless of the language of instruction, becomes the goal in addition to language acquisition.

Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (2011), Capacity Building Series, *French Immersion in Ontario*, p. 3

For example, learning is focused on developing proficiency and confidence in reading, writing, oral production and interaction, and listening, which is reflective of the strands of the revised Ontario FSL curriculum. Educators recognize a continuum of language acquisition, with defined descriptors that assist students in self-assessing their level of proficiency. These descriptors reflect the need for authentic and relevant tasks, which generate the demand for grammar, vocabulary, and structures taught within a context. These tasks require a problem to be solved or an objective to be achieved, taking into consideration the students' cognitive and language abilities. As a result, the teacher talks less and less within the CEFR-inspired classroom, and students speak spontaneously in a highly interactive learning environment. Learners are social agents in a milieu in which their voice is prioritized.



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Principals can support students' learning in FSL by promoting the value of learning French. They can foster an atmosphere of collegiality among all staff members, and include FSL teachers/educators in school improvement planning and in professional learning communities concerning student learning and the use of evidence-based strategies.

The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 to 12: French As a Second Language – Core, Extended, and Immersion French, 2014 (revised), p. 14.

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Aligned with *Growing Success*, these documents also reflect learning goals and success criteria which are visible and co-created with students. Students are encouraged to reflect on their learning and to respond to meaningful feedback.

Alignment Across Subject Areas

As non-French speaking principals and vice-principals across Ontario explore the elements of a CEFR-inspired classroom, they quickly realize that second language instruction mirrors what is considered to be “good instruction” in literacy and numeracy. The previously identified look-fors focus on metacognition; assessment for, as, and of learning; differentiation; oracy; and inquiry-based learning. They describe how students are encouraged to own their learning by reflecting on their progression towards established learning goals. The look-fors also indicate that teachers utilize student and class profiles when determining activities that are

relevant and engaging, and which encourage students to use the target language to accomplish the defined task. All of these elements reflect a positive learning environment not only in a FSL classroom, but in any classroom setting regardless of the language of instruction.

WHAT'S MY ROLE?

The strategies and terminology that educators are utilizing in French instruction that is preparing students to do more than conjugate verbs and regurgitate memorized phrases echoes the same approaches and lexicon used

when discussing quality literacy and numeracy instruction such as inquiry, metacognition, and purposeful talk.

As a result, principals and vice-principals do not need to change the strategies and language used to engage in meaningful discussions with FSL educators about quality instruction and CEFR-inspired classrooms. The elements of this approach represent sound teaching practice in any language.

When it comes to supporting educators as they learn and work to improve student achievement, nothing a principal does “has a bigger payoff than learning visibly and publicly alongside staff in a school.

Katz & Dack (2013), Intentional Interruption: Breaking down learning barriers to transform professional practice, p. 46.



One article to read, one quote to consider, one link to click...

1. ***Ideas Into Action for School and System Leaders: Engaging in Courageous Conversations (Winter 2013-14).*** This document focuses on one of the five Core Leadership Capacities derived from Ontario's Leadership Framework. It contains many practical suggestions for principals and vice-principals to engage in conversations that focus on student learning. <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/leadership/IdeasIntoActionBulletin2.pdf>
2. **“If I'm the school leader, what I need to do is create opportunities where I can hear what teachers are talking about and what their issues are. I need to create an environment where teachers can say, ‘this is not working for me’ or ‘I'm struggling with this particular student,’ because acknowledging and addressing teachers' issues and questions is essential.”** John Hattie, in Know Thy Impact: Teaching, Learning and Leading, *In Conversation*, Volume IV, Issue 2 (Spring 2013).
3. ***From Awareness to Action – Video Segment 2, Part A: Building Courage:*** This segment highlights suggestions for principals and vice-principals. <https://transformingfsl.ca/en/components/part-a-building-courage/>