



Prologue

FOR FRENCH IMMERSION AND EXTENDED FRENCH EDUCATORS

A PUBLICATION FOR PROFESSIONAL CONVERSATIONS

The Action-oriented Approach

The focus of this publication is supporting educators in entry level French Immersion and Extended French classrooms in deepening their understanding of how the action-oriented approach described in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR)* can inform planning and teaching that meets the needs of their students. Throughout, there are opportunities for reflection on practices that promote the development of French-language skills.

In this publication you will read how an action-oriented approach to learning fosters French-language acquisition, supports the development social and affective strategies, and engages entry level students in interactive tasks to build their proficiency and confidence in using French.

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



The Action-oriented Approach

The Ontario Curriculum, French as a Second Language: Core French, Grades 4-8, Extended French, Grades 4-8, French Immersion, Grades 1-8 (2013) describes seven enduring ideas upon which the curriculum is founded. Several aspects of the action-oriented approach are linked to these fundamental concepts. For example, educators focus on engaging students in meaningful and authentic communication, making real-world connections, developing strategies, and connecting language and culture.

“While the communicative approach centres on communicating in the target language, the action-oriented approach requires students to perform a task in a wider social context.”

The Ontario Curriculum, French as a Second Language: Core French, Grades 4-8, Extended French, Grades 4-8, French Immersion, Grades 1-8 (2013), p. 31

REFLECTION In what ways does my current practice reflect an action-oriented approach? What would my next steps be in planning learning?

Resources on the *Transforming FSL* website, such as *From Communicative to Action-Oriented: Illuminating the Approaches* illustrate an evolving understanding of the action-oriented approach described in the CEFR and how it can inform planning, teaching, and assessment practices that contribute to improved student proficiency in French.

The action-oriented approach encompasses the communicative approach, extending it to include engagement of students in learning through purposeful action. Students learn French while focusing on solving a problem, fulfilling an obligation, or reaching a goal in the context of the meaningful task. Students are active participants in the learning process, as they are encouraged to make decisions, collaborate, and support each other. A realistic and relevant situation provides context for the task and establishes any social relationships between students and others who might be involved in their interactions. Students develop competencies in the French language through meaningful communicative activities that are connected to the task.

Embracing an action-oriented approach, educators draw upon student interests and make connections to curriculum expectations to develop learning cycles based on purposeful tasks. They provide their students with the language they need to communicate throughout the learning cycle. By doing so, students can use and practise the newly acquired French-language structures immediately as they communicate in meaningful situations.

Educators:

- encourage students' input and connect with their interests to inform planning
- involve students in making decisions throughout the learning process
- focus on real-world problem solving
- provide opportunities for students to learn with and from each other
- develop critical and creative thinking, and language skills through rich, open-ended questioning and discussions
- plan next steps in response to students' needs

Language Learning as a Social Act

Students learn with and from each other when engaged in tasks that are part of an action-oriented approach. It is critical to establish French as the language of communication in all learning situations, whether educator-led or during interactions with peers. The atmosphere and functioning of the entire class is largely dependent upon the willingness of each individual student to interact in French and to be supportive of their peers' attempts to use French.

It is important that students in entry level French Immersion and Extended French develop social and affective strategies as well as the knowledge and skills that will allow them to communicate in French with ever increasing frequency and confidence. **Social strategies** are those related to interacting successfully, including taking turns, seeking clarification, expressing needs, offering support, sharing knowledge and information, interacting appropriately, encouraging peers, responding to others' ideas and opinions politely and respectfully, showing empathy and compassion, and fulfilling specific roles as group members. It is also important that students develop **affective strategies**: increasing perseverance and concentration, taking risks in using French, cultivating a positive attitude towards learning French, building self-confidence, focusing on accomplishments, nurturing an optimistic approach to their ability to learn, regulating emotions, and reducing anxiety in order to perform effectively.

Social and affective strategies can be taught explicitly through think-alouds, demonstrations, individual, small group, and whole class discussions, and the use of checklists and journals. Providing students with frequent opportunities to reflect on and discuss their interactions in French class helps them develop a range of strategies and heightens their awareness of the importance of strategy use for successful learning.

“Communication is a social act. In order to learn French, therefore, students need to see themselves as social actors communicating for real purposes.”

The Ontario Curriculum, French as a Second Language: Core French, Grades 4-8, Extended French, Grades 4-8, French Immersion, Grades 1-8 (2013), p. 9

REFLECTION How can I support students in developing social and affective strategies?

From Input to Interaction

In entry level French Immersion and Extended French classes, it would be unrealistic to expect students with little or no previous learning of French to interact with each other in French to accomplish tasks. Initially, interaction involves the educators speaking French to students who express their own ideas in English. Educators' use of oral French is an important source of input for students, especially in entry level French Immersion and Extended French classes. Educators provide oral input that is comprehensible for students by adapting a number of variables such as word choice, sentence length and structure, and pace of delivery.

Researcher Stephen Krashen coined the term “comprehensible input” to refer to second language input that is just slightly beyond the learners' current level. One of the characteristics of comprehensible input is that students can understand the message even though they themselves would not have been able to produce it.

The curriculum refers to “comprehensible input” as a key aspect of language learning. Educators use a variety of strategies, such as reducing the amount of print, highlighting important terms, and using diagrams, demonstrations, or other visual cues to help students comprehend texts that are too advanced linguistically but would be of interest to them and related to the task.

Learning cycles begin with a significant amount of input that includes a wide range of oral, visual, audio-visual, graphic and written French texts. Educators take into consideration their students' abilities and the level of support they will need when determining whether to use authentic texts, texts they create, or texts from other sources specifically for beginning French-language learners.

REFLECTION How can I provide input at the right time that is comprehensible, relevant, and cognitively appropriate for all students?

Students in entry level French Immersion and Extended French classes require French-language input related to the tasks they are undertaking and to the learning processes they will use, such as selecting and evaluating information, sharing opinions, reaching consensus, and deciding on roles and steps for task completion. Educators think aloud and model language necessary for students to be able to interact and learn together. By doing so, they offer meaningful opportunities for students to use French to communicate.

Students use the input they are exposed to as a basis for production of their own messages. A number of factors impact students' ability to transform input into output, such as readiness, interest, and motivation. Educators differentiate instruction to meet the needs of their students by providing French-language input in a variety of ways that reflect a range of levels of complexity. They also focus on the development of strategies, (e.g., organizing ideas, rehearsing mentally, experimenting, and self-assessing) to help students use the French-language input for meaningful communication and interactions.

Students make connections between French and their other languages to make sense of input. For example, they may find similarities between words or sentence structures they are learning in French and the languages they know. Knowledge and skills learned in another language or subject, such as logical steps in a typical interaction, basic elements of a story, or features of an information text, can help students understand and create texts in French.

REFLECTION How can I help students from a variety of linguistic backgrounds make connections between French and their other languages?

When providing input, educators can support students in developing intercultural awareness, (e.g., by drawing attention to language that is culturally acceptable for the specific situation). From the beginning of the year in entry level French Immersion and Extended French classes, students are encouraged to use culturally appropriate French language, including when interacting with classroom visitors and other adults at school and in the community.

An Iterative Learning Process

Input that is comprehensible and relevant for students is the starting point in an iterative learning process. A relevant task prompts students to take action, input in the form of various texts provides basic information and ideas, and the students learn while embarking on the task, using the French-language skills and strategies they have. Additional linguistic input is provided, as required, for students to continue interacting as they progress towards accomplishment of the task.

REFLECTION What factors do I consider when determining what explicit teaching of French language is required?

Although initially the amount of French input provided by educators may be much greater than the amount of student output of French, educators are careful not to overwhelm students, and they provide numerous opportunities for students to use and re-use language in meaningful situations. One way of accomplishing this is to engage students in tasks that are purposeful and relevant for them, but that are structured and presented in such a way that the language necessary to complete the task is provided along with the input. Through these types of tasks, students, even those with limited French-language skills, use French to do something purposeful. The complexity of the task can be adapted to suit the cognitive and linguistic abilities of the students.

Examples of Action-oriented Tasks

The following detailed examples demonstrate aspects of an action-oriented task.

Example 1

The Full-Day Early Learning – Kindergarten Program

Big Idea: Children are effective communicators.

Overall Expectation 1: communicate by talking and by listening and speaking to others for a variety of purposes and in a variety of contexts

Specific Expectation 1.6: use language to talk about their thinking, to reflect, and to solve problems

Learning Goal: interact orally to help each other solve a problem

1 A realistic and relevant situation provides a context for the task.

3, 5 Students interact and help each other.

6 Students have choices.

The class left the gym equipment room in a mess.¹ They have to find a way to clean up the gym equipment they used and put it back in the right places quickly.²

In small groups, students share ideas for solving the problem.³ Each group must settle on one plan⁴ to present to the whole class. Once everyone in the group understands how the plan will work,⁵ they decide how to present the plan.⁶ The teacher guides their thinking with questions such as: What can you use to demonstrate your plan? How can you show how your plan will be carried out? After trying out the plans, the class chooses the one that works the best.⁷

2 There is a “problem to be solved, an obligation to fulfil or an objective to be achieved.” (CEFR, p. 10)

4 Tasks can include constraints.

7 There is a tangible result.

Example 2

Extended French – Grade 4

Big Idea: A region shares a similar set of characteristics. (Social Studies curriculum, p. 97)

Overall Expectation B2: speaking to interact: participate in spoken interactions in French for a variety of purposes with diverse audiences (FSL curriculum)

Specific Expectation B2.2: interacting: engage in rehearsed and spontaneous spoken interactions, in structured and guided social and academic contexts, on familiar topics related to matters of personal interest and academic topics (FSL curriculum)

Learning Goal: interact orally to deepen understanding of the connection between the physical characteristics and the climate of various regions of Canada (FSL curriculum; Social Studies curriculum)

1 A realistic and relevant situation provides a context for the task.

3 Students have choices.

5, 6 Students interact and help each other.

During a study of climate, the students recorded the temperature and the precipitation in their community. When they exchanged this information with a class in another region of Canada, they identified surprising differences.¹ The classes discussed why the climate is so different in various regions across Canada and expressed a variety of reasons.² Both classes decided to investigate this further.

Working in small groups, the students choose a region in Canada³ to learn about its physical characteristics and the climate. The group works together to interpret temperature and precipitation graphs as well as a relief map of the region⁴ to make connections between the physical characteristics and the climate of the region.⁵ Two groups share their ideas, comparing the climate and physical characteristics of the two regions.⁶ They communicate their conclusions to the students they correspond with in another region, and ask them to share their ideas about the connections between climate and physical characteristics of a region.⁷

2 There is a “problem to be solved, an obligation to fulfil or an objective to be achieved” (CEFR, p. 10)

4 Tasks can include constraints.

7 There is a tangible result.

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



“Well-designed lessons include a variety of instructional strategies, such as structured simulations, guided inquiry, cooperative learning, and open-ended questions.”

The Ontario Curriculum, French as a Second Language: Core French, Grades 4-8, Extended French, Grades 4-8, French Immersion, Grades 1-8 (2013), p. 33

REFLECTION How can I plan learning cycles and sub-tasks in advance without knowing exactly what my students' French-language needs will be?

REFLECTION How can I develop my students' compensation strategies?

A Model for Learning

This model is presented as a possible option for planning in entry level French Immersion and Extended French classes, recognizing that the steps that follow are not strictly linear.

Educators launch the learning cycle by presenting and discussing the task using a variety of visual supports. Through teacher-led reading, viewing, and discussion of carefully selected texts, students develop the necessary language skills to start working on the task. Educators begin building a foundation of oral language by modeling and providing numerous opportunities for students to interact using their newly acquired French-language skills.

Learning is presented as manageable sub-tasks, each directly linked to the task, with the French-language structures that students need being taught and practised throughout the learning cycle. Through assessment for learning, educators plan next steps in the development of students' French-language skills, providing instruction based on needs and readiness to learn.

In addition to supporting students in developing linguistic and social skills necessary to interact in French, educators demonstrate how to use compensation strategies, such as guessing, using actions, or describing, so students are able to communicate without resorting to English. Students are encouraged to use contextual cues to infer meaning in the texts they read, view, and hear, and to take risks using French to communicate meaningful messages.

To help students learn to use French accurately and with precision, educators engage them in meaningful communicative activities that are connected across the strands of listening, speaking, reading and writing, as well as to the task. Educators balance development of fluency and accuracy in French through explicit teaching, use of the gradual release of responsibility, and timely descriptive feedback provided to students as they work in French towards completion of the task.

Professional Resources

EduGAINS FSL <http://edugains.ca/newsite/fsl/index.html>

Encouraging Self-Regulated Learning in the Classroom: A Review of the Literature http://www.academia.edu/2527080/Encouraging_Self-Regulated_Learning_in_the_Classroom_A_Review_of_the_Literature

From Communicative to Action-Oriented: Illuminating the Approaches <http://www.curriculum.org/fsl/projects/from-communicative-to-action-oriented-illuminating-the-approaches>

Full-Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/kindergarten_english_june3.pdf

Inquiry-based learning, Capacity Building Series. 2013. http://www.edugains.ca/newsite/literacy/professional_learning/capacity_building_series.html

Lightbown and Spada. How Languages are Learned. 4th edition. Oxford University Press, 2013.

Stratégies socio-affectives, cognitives et métacognitives en lecture et en écriture pour le milieu linguistique minoritaire. Conseil des ministres de l'Éducation (Canada), 2008. <http://www.cmec.ca/docs/phasell/doc-fondement.pdf>