

Exploring the CEFR Viewer's Guide



EXPLORING THE CEFR: BIG IDEAS

This resource was developed for elementary and secondary FSL educators in Core French, Extended French and French Immersion programs in their ongoing work to strengthen student proficiency in French. The purpose is to increase awareness and deepen understanding of how the CEFR can support instruction and assessment practices.

This viewer's guide provides a brief synopsis of 10 big ideas from the *Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)*, practical applications and reflection questions. This enables educators to quickly locate information in the CEFR and engage in rich discussion. The ideas in this project are not presented in any particular order, and indeed, many of them are interrelated. As each idea warrants in-depth study, educators may find it beneficial to explore them thoroughly one at a time.

This viewing guide accompanies video presentations on FSL made by Denis Cousineau (Curriculum Coach at Ottawa-Carleton District School Board) and other Ontario FSL educators who speak about big ideas in the CEFR. These video presentations were filmed at a provincial CEFR session held in Toronto in February 2013.

Denis' presentation has been divided into eight short segments, each of which may be viewed separately.

Part One: Introduction

Part Two: A Brief Historical Perspective on Linguistic Duality in Canada

Part Three: A Look at Statistics

Part Four: Why it Matters

Part Five: Confidence, Competence, and Coherence

Part Six: Benefits of the CEFR

Part Seven: Reflecting on the Continuum of Language Learning

Part Eight: Courage, Creativity and Perseverance

Questions for Reflection

How do I contribute to promoting a culture that places a high value on learning FSL?

How do I help my students understand the benefits of learning languages?

How do I instil confidence in all my FSL students?

How does my understanding of the CEFR inform my instructional and assessment practices?

How do I create conditions for success?

INTRODUCTION

The pedagogical practices supported in Ontario, such as engaging students through rich tasks, providing descriptive feedback, and differentiating instruction, are similarly supported in the CEFR. FSL educators who have been involved in the provincial CEFR initiative over the last few years have identified 10 big ideas as a starting point for discussion on good instructional and assessment practice. They felt that

these ideas could contribute significantly to developing student competence and confidence in FSL.

The CEFR promotes reflective practice and provides educators with common language to discuss second language education. Educators are encouraged to read further about the big ideas presented in this resource and many other topics found within the CEFR.

The following overarching questions guide initial reflection and discussion on each of the big ideas:

What are the implications of this big idea for me in my role?

How does this big idea connect with what is already happening in FSL in my board?

What changes in practice might this big idea initiate?

THE ACTION-ORIENTED APPROACH

In Ontario, FSL teachers:

- present students with classroom tasks that reflect or involve real-life interactions outside the classroom
- begin their planning with the end task in mind, as with the “design-down model,” creating for students a genuine need to communicate and providing direction and purpose for all sub-tasks
- provide explicit instruction to support the development of linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences
- present increasingly complex tasks in order for students to apply these competences
- provide explicit instruction in strategy development and use

Connecting with the CEFR

A fundamental aspect of the CEFR is the action-oriented approach in which students are seen as users of language, learning to communicate in French in various situations (pp. 46-49). The CEFR uses the term “*social agents*” to describe language learners, as they are viewed as “members of society who have tasks (not exclusively language-related) to accomplish in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment and within a particular field of action.” Section 5.2 elaborates on the

various aspects of linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences.

One aspect of the action-oriented approach is that “Language activities are contextualised within domains” (p. 14). The CEFR invites educators to consider four domains in which students may need to communicate.

Domain	Related Examples of Areas of Action
Personal	Self, interests, hobbies, home, family, friends
Public	Transactions (e.g., shopping, banking, travelling)
Occupational	Work
Educational	Learning at school and in other situations

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[The action-oriented approach] is centred on the relationship between, on the one hand, the agents’ use of strategies linked to their competences and how they perceive or imagine the situation to be and on the other, the task or tasks to be accomplished in a specific context under particular conditions.

CEFR, p. 15

Pragmatic competences are concerned with the functional use of linguistic resources...

CEFR, p. 13

The action-oriented approach emphasizes developing the ability to use language skills and strategies in real-life situations. The focus shifts from learning isolated grammar points or vocabulary lists to learning how to carry out communicative acts, either orally or through written texts.

Students who are engaged in the action-oriented approach could be asked to articulate what they are learning to do. This might involve, for example, learning how to interact when making a purchase, apologizing, requesting information, or defending a point of view. Grammar and vocabulary is taught in context, as required, to support students in communicating with ever-increasing fluency and accuracy.

Questions for Reflection

How do I ensure that my students are active users and not passive absorbers of the language?

How do I help my students develop sociolinguistic competence?

How do I help my students develop pragmatic competence?

AUTHENTIC TASKS

In Ontario, FSL teachers:

- use the curriculum as a starting point for planning authentic tasks
- design tasks that
 - are purposeful and meaningful
 - provide realistic challenges and set attainable goals
 - are relevant, take into consideration students' interests and provide opportunities for student input
- present authentic tasks in the context of a potential real-life situation
- identify what students need to learn and support them in developing the necessary skills and strategies
- guide students in reflecting on their learning needs to be able to communicate in French
- plan explicit teaching, and provide opportunities for practice, of skills that will enable students to accomplish the goals of the task
- scaffold instruction using the gradual release of responsibility model
- use assessment for learning to inform planning of next steps
- integrate listening, speaking, reading and writing in the task and sub-tasks

Connecting with the CEFR

Task-based learning is an integral aspect of the action-oriented approach. Chapter 7 of the CEFR, “Tasks and their role in language teaching,” explores different types of tasks and factors to consider when determining whether the task is appropriate for the students.

Students engaged in an authentic task have a clear understanding of the purpose of the learning activity. There is “a problem to be resolved” (CEFR, p. 10) or a goal to accomplish that is related to a realistic situation. Students learn to be social agents who are able to collaborate, negotiate meaning, arrive at consensus, and communicate effectively in French both orally and through various text forms.

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Tasks are a feature of everyday life in the personal, public, educational or occupational domains. Task accomplishment by an individual involves the strategic activation of specific competences in order to carry out a set of purposeful actions in a particular domain with a clearly defined goal and a specific outcome.

CEFR, p. 157

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A changing balance needs to be established between attention to meaning and form, fluency and accuracy, in the overall selection and sequencing of tasks so that both task performance and language learning progress can be facilitated.

CEFR, p. 158

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Users of the Framework may wish to consider ... the criteria for selecting tasks which are purposeful and meaningful for the learner, and provide a challenging but realistic and attainable goal, involving the learner as fully as possible, and allowing for differing learner interpretations and outcomes.

CEFR, p. 168

Questions for Reflection

How do I ensure tasks are purposeful and meaningful?

How do I scaffold learning to enable students to carry out authentic tasks effectively?

How do I integrate listening, speaking, reading and writing?

INTERACTION

In Ontario, FSL teachers:

- design opportunities for interaction that are
 - meaningful
 - open-ended, without predictable outcomes
 - unrehearsed
- include listening, speaking, reading and writing to interact
- prepare students with the necessary sociolinguistic and pragmatic skills to interact appropriately and effectively in situations outside the classroom
- support students in developing skills in interaction from the earliest stages of language learning
- monitor the quality of student talk during oral interactions with peers
- provide opportunities for students to interact orally and in writing, through role-play and simulations, with various audiences that require adapting language for sociolinguistic appropriateness
- support students in developing the necessary cooperative learning skills and French language needed for interaction (e.g., turn-taking, asking for clarification)

Connecting with the CEFR

Meaningful oral interaction is much more than a series of questions and answers; students listen, react, question, clarify and respond to indicate their comprehension and express their point of view. This requires students to use not only reception and production strategies, but also “discourse strategies” and “co-operation strategies” as they negotiate meaning both orally and in writing (CEFR, p. 73).

Examples of interactive activities referenced in the CEFR (p. 73) include:

- transactions
- casual conversation
- informal discussion
- formal discussion
- debate
- interview
- negotiation
- co-planning
- practical goal-oriented co-operation

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High importance is generally attributed to interaction in language use and learning in view of its central role in communication.

CEFR, p. 14

Written interaction involves students in reading and responding in writing, such as through letters, e-mails and participation in computer conferences (CEFR, p. 82). In these cases, while the interaction is not simultaneous, students are still engaged in the following interdependent reception and production activities:

- requesting and providing information
- extending and accepting or refusing an invitation
- reading a text and writing a response

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[I]n an interaction task, the introduction of an unexpected element (event, circumstances, information, participant) obliges the learner to activate relevant strategies to cope with the dynamics of the new and more complex situation.

CEFR, p. 164

Questions for Reflection

How do I plan opportunities for meaningful interaction (oral and written)?

How do I instil confidence in my students to interact in French?

How do I use the gradual release model and scaffold learning opportunities to prepare students for meaningful oral interactions that are not rehearsed?

How do I infuse unexpected elements in my students' interactions?

DIFFERENTIATION: THE NEEDS OF THE LEARNER

In Ontario, FSL teachers:

- plan instruction that is relevant, engaging and appropriately challenging
- instil in all students confidence in their ability to communicate in French
- respond to students' areas of greatest need, while helping them recognize and use their strengths
- explicitly teach strategies to support all students in becoming more efficient language learners
- support self-assessment by providing guidance, time and tools for students to track their progress
- consider students' diverse interests and learning styles when planning
- differentiate instruction and adjust tasks to support success
- select texts with care, considering the relevance and the needs of the learner

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No two users of a language, whether native speakers or foreign learners, have exactly the same competences or develop them in the same way.

CEFR, p. 17

Connecting with the CEFR

Meeting students' needs is critical to motivation and success. As they reflect on their practice and the needs of the learner, teachers consider "factors such as linguistic complexity, text type, discourse structure, physical presentation, length of the text and its relevance for the learner(s)" (CEFR, p. 165).

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Certain tasks may require the reader/listener to show understanding of the main information clearly stated in a text, while others may require the use of inferencing skills.

CEFR, p. 166

Successful task performance is more likely where the learner is fully involved; a high level of intrinsic motivation to carry out the task – due to interest in the task or because of its perceived relevance, for example to real life needs or to the completion of another linked task (task interdependence) – will promote greater learner involvement.

CEFR, p. 161

Students not only differ in ability from one another, but often possess different ability levels themselves in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Section 7.3.2.1 of the CEFR discusses factors that affect the difficulty of interaction and production, such as the

amount of support provided and time allowed, and the predictability of the task through a continuum of language skills. Appropriate scaffolding and differentiation of tasks enables students to recognize and value the skills they have developed, and to set individual goals.

Questions for Reflection

How do I determine my students' interests and linguistic needs in French?

How do I explicitly teach self-assessment and goal-setting so that students are aware of where they are in the development of their proficiency in French based on the continuum presented in the CEFR?

What self-assessment strategies do I explicitly teach my students?

COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE COMPETENCES

In Ontario, FSL teachers:

- support the development of communicative language competences through planning based on curriculum expectations and consideration of student interests and needs
- plan learning opportunities that allow students to refine their communicative language competences and to demonstrate what they can do in French
- integrate listening, speaking, reading and writing to reinforce learning
- support students in becoming aware of, and valuing, what they are able to do in French
- provide descriptive feedback, time and tools to support self-assessment and goal-setting
- provide explicit instruction in, and opportunities to practise, linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences

Connecting with the CEFR

Although there are many reasons for learning another language, students primarily want to be able to communicate effectively with speakers of that language. The ability to communicate involves reception, production and interaction, which include listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Developing competence in listening, speaking, reading and writing involves the application of knowledge, skills and strategies. It is by applying these in a wide variety of authentic situations that students develop the ability and confidence to use French effectively outside of the classroom.

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Communicative language competences are those which empower a person to act using specifically linguistic means.

CEFR, p. 9

Questions for Reflection

How do I support students in refining their language competences?

How do I support the development of higher-order thinking skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing?

What are my next steps in deepening my understanding of language competences based on the CEFR?

LANGUAGE CONVENTIONS

In Ontario, FSL teachers:

- value students' attempts to communicate from the very beginning, despite the errors they will make
- support students in continuously refining their ability to communicate effectively
- differentiate to meet the needs of their students
- verify that students are exposed to input they understand
- provide a linguistically rich environment through the use of technology and a variety of print and media resources
- present language conventions in context, in response to students' communicative needs
- explicitly teach language conventions, with a focus on meaningful communication
- use the gradual release of responsibility model to support students in mastering new skills
- integrate development of skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing
- employ, and reflect on the effectiveness of, various approaches to teaching language conventions

Connecting with the CEFR

The effective use of language conventions supports and enhances meaningful communication. The primary goal of learning a second language is to communicate effectively, rather than merely to acquire knowledge about the language (e.g., conjugating verbs or applying grammar rules in an exercise). It is by applying these in a wide variety of authentic situations that students develop the ability and confidence to use French effectively outside of the classroom.

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Grammatical competence is the ability to understand and express meaning by producing and recognising well-formed phrases and sentences ... (as opposed to memorising and reproducing them as fixed formulae).

CEFR, p. 113

[M]any practitioners find it more advantageous to go from meaning to form rather than the more traditional practice of organising progression in purely formal terms. On the other hand, some may prefer to use a 'communicative grammar' What is clear is that a language learner has to acquire both forms and meanings.

CEFR, p. 116

Expectations with respect to linguistic repertoire and grammatical accuracy increase in complexity throughout the process of language learning. While the CEFR does not

promote any particular methodology, it does clearly support the ability to use and understand oral and written language with increasing effectiveness and precision.

Questions for Reflection

How do I support students in developing the ability to express themselves with precision and clarity, while encouraging them to communicate and to take risks?

How do I support students in comprehending the nuances of increasingly complex oral and written text?

How do I integrate listening, speaking, reading and writing to strengthen the use of language conventions?

DESCRIPTIVE FEEDBACK

In Ontario, FSL teachers:

- provide descriptive, timely, specific feedback that is linked to success criteria and learning goals
- provide feedback at each stage in the learning process
- ensure that feedback includes suggested actions for improvement
- verify that feedback has been accurately interpreted
- provide explicit instruction of strategies to implement feedback, and allow time for students to act on feedback received
- explicitly teach students how to provide meaningful feedback to peers
- provide students with tools for recording feedback and tracking progress
- provide students with time for reflection on strengths, needs and next steps

Connecting with the CEFR

As indicated in *Growing Success*, “Descriptive feedback helps students learn by providing them with precise information about what they are doing well, what needs improvement, and what specific steps they can take to improve” (p. 34). Descriptive feedback helps students identify accurately not only what they can do but “how well they do it” (CEFR, p. 180).

Descriptors suggested in the CEFR can be useful to inform feedback on specific aspects of language development, such as fluency, flexibility, coherence, precision, sociolinguistic competence, vocabulary range, grammatical accuracy and vocabulary control or phonological control.

Self- and peer assessment play important roles in developing proficiency and monitoring progress. Students can use descriptors provided in the CEFR grids to provide each other with descriptive feedback and to compare their self-assessment with the

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Feedback only works if the recipient is in a position (a) to notice, i.e. is attentive, motivated and familiar with the form in which the information is coming; (b) to receive, i.e. is not swamped with information, has a way of recording, organising and personalising it; (c) to interpret, i.e. has sufficient pre-knowledge and awareness to understand the point at issue, and not to take counterproductive action and (d) to integrate the information, i.e. has the time, orientation and relevant resources to reflect on, integrate and so remember the new information. This implies self-direction, which implies training towards self-direction, monitoring one’s own learning, and developing ways of acting on feedback.

CEFR, p. 186

descriptors. The CEFR reminds the reader that monitoring “applies equally to the productive and receptive processes” (p. 92) as students develop a balance of skills in speaking, writing, listening and reading.

When students are able to use feedback effectively, monitor their own progress and provide feedback to peers, they are well equipped to take greater responsibility for their learning and become lifelong learners.

Questions for Reflection

What processes do I use to provide feedback (orally, in writing, using technology, in conferences to individuals, to small groups), and how do I assess the effectiveness of these processes?

What tools do I provide students to track feedback and monitor progress?

How do I ensure that students are able to apply feedback?

METACOGNITION AND LEARNER AUTONOMY

In Ontario, FSL teachers:

- explicitly teach metacognitive skills
- encourage students to select appropriate resources themselves
- include student voice when determining tasks and individual learning goals
- encourage students to self-correct
- explicitly teach students how to monitor their own progress and to reflect on the strategies that work best for them in developing proficiency
- use French as the language of classroom communication, including the development of metacognitive skills
- explicitly teach various achievement strategies to improve listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in French

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[S]elf-assessment is considered an important activity in itself. It is believed to encourage autonomous learning, to give learners greater control over their learning and to enhance learner awareness of their learning process.

CEFR, p. 227

Connecting with the CEFR

Developing metacognitive skills and learner autonomy is of central importance in preparing students to apply their French language skills in functional communication situations outside of the classroom, and in helping them to become lifelong learners.

As students gain experience learning French as a second language, they develop an increased understanding of how to learn

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In using achievement strategies the language user adopts a positive approach with what resources he or she has: approximating and overgeneralising with simpler language, paraphrasing or describing aspects of what he or she wants to say, even ‘foreignising’ L1 (first language) expressions (Compensating); using highly accessible pre-fabricated language he or she feels sure of – ‘islands of reliability’ – to create stepping stones through what for the user is a novel situation or concept he or she wants to express (Building on previous knowledge), or just having a go with what he or she can half remember and thinks might work (Trying out).

CEFR, p. 63

another language and, more specifically, of how they learn best. The CEFR notes that “Autonomous learning can be promoted if ‘learning to learn’ is regarded as an integral part of language learning, so that learners become increasingly aware of the way they learn, the options open to them and the options that best suit them” (pp. 140-141). This is a reminder that metacognitive skills help students effectively plan, carry out, monitor progress, self-correct and assess their own work.

Planning: locating resources, rehearsing, considering audience, activating schemata, identifying information/opinion gaps, judging what can be presupposed, planning moves

Execution: taking the floor, building on previous knowledge, trying out, co-operating, compensating, dealing with the unexpected, asking for help, inferring from cues

Evaluation: monitoring success, hypothesis testing

Repair: asking for clarification, giving clarification, self-correction, communication repair, revising hypothesis

Based on CEFR pp. 84–85

Questions for Reflection

How do I support students in making their thinking visible?

What tools do I provide students to monitor their metacognitive skills development?

How do I scaffold students’ language skills to enable them to discuss metacognition in French?

A POSITIVE APPROACH

In Ontario, FSL teachers:

- when assessing
 - focus on the positive elements of students' oral and written production and comprehension
 - draw these positives to the students' attention
 - ensure that students have a sense of accomplishment
- create a positive learning environment
- ensure that students are aware of what they can do, even at the early stages of learning French
- heighten students' awareness of their progress
- provide feedback in positive terms; for example, "Can describe familiar objects using basic vocabulary"
- encourage students to use "Je peux" statements to express their French skills
- correct errors in a way that helps students develop confidence

Connecting with the CEFR

Valuing, praising and celebrating what students can do in French promotes a sense of accomplishment and a positive attitude toward learning a second language. Particularly at the early stages of learning a

language, it can be expected that students will make many errors as they make attempts to express themselves using French only. It is important that they not become discouraged as this could inhibit participation and limit progress.

The CEFR prompts educators to reflect on errors and mistakes, as different points of view exist. The following phrases reflect a range of attitudes on learner errors: "errors and mistakes are evidence of failure to learn"; "errors and mistakes are evidence of the learner's willingness to communicate despite risks"; or "errors are an inevitable, transient product of the learner's developing interlanguage" (p. 155).

Educators are aware of affective factors, such as nervousness and self-confidence, that may impact student performance and progress. A "lack of inhibition is likely to contribute to successful task completion where the learner has the necessary self-confidence to persist in carrying out the task" (CEFR, p. 161).

Being attentive to these factors, taking steps to build student confidence in their French skills, helping students feel relaxed in class, and encouraging an open attitude towards new languages and cultures all contribute to a positive classroom environment.

Questions for Reflection

How do I create a sense of accomplishment in French for all my students?

How does my approach to error correction build student confidence?

How might the CEFR scales be useful in helping students value their progress in French?

PLURILINGUALISM AND PLURICULTURALISM

In Ontario, FSL teachers:

- promote the importance of learning French as it is part of our heritage and culture, as well as a valuable communication skill
- support students in transferring skills between languages
- explicitly teach similarities and differences between French and English language and culture
- expose students to a wide variety of authentic aspects of different francophone cultures
- explicitly teach sociolinguistic skills that allow students to interact appropriately in authentic French cultural situations
- remind students that studying French can facilitate learning additional languages
- make connections to students' knowledge of other languages and cultures

Connecting with the CEFR

In a plurilingual and pluricultural society, high value is placed on learning languages and strengthening understanding of cultures. The

twenty-first century learner, with increasing opportunities for work, travel, communication, interaction and access to information in other languages, benefits by developing plurilingual and pluricultural competence.

By embracing plurilingual and pluricultural competences, students develop a deeper understanding of their own language and culture, broaden their horizons and enrich their lives through interaction with others. As understanding of different languages and cultures grows, the learner “builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact” (CEFR, p. 4).

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[Plurilingual and pluricultural competence] refines knowledge of how to learn and the capacity to enter into relations with others and new situations.

CEFR, p. 134

Questions for Reflection

How do I ensure that my students develop an understanding of authentic French culture?

In what ways do I support students in understanding the value of learning French?

How might I provide my students with opportunities to connect with francophones their age?

How do I raise my students' awareness of the power of speaking many languages?

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