



Big Ideas in FSL... Connecting for Success

This is one in a series of **HOT TOPICS** articles that support FSL educators in their professional learning.

Teacher Use of French in the Classroom



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We know that the more French students hear in core French classrooms, the more they will understand that it is a language used for real communication, and the more likely they will be to try to speak it. It is also generally understood that we learn to speak French by... speaking French. But what if, as the teacher, your French skills are not strong?

Specialists—or teachers with a linguistic and methodological background—teach core French in many parts of Canada, but in a number of boards or districts,

a generalist model is used instead. This means that an elementary or a middle school teacher delivers core French to his or her class as one of many subjects in a regular teaching load. Generalist teachers may not have taken specialized coursework and/or are not proficient in French.

If you feel that you fit into one or both of the above categories, take heart; there are ways to be a successful teacher in a second-language environment while at the same time promoting success for your students. Just as our students are encouraged to work at just slightly beyond their comfort zone of knowledge and skills in order to learn and grow, teachers may be venturing into new territory and taking a risk in trying to use French as the language of instruction. Keeping in mind that we are all on a continuum of language learning, here are some suggestions for generalist teachers.

A Few Guidelines for Maximizing Teacher Use of French

In the core French class, as in most teaching and learning contexts, teachers provide modelling, verbal and visual supports, and logical sequencing of activities presented in learning 'chunks'

so as to challenge our students without frustrating them. As with any subject area that you are teaching, preplanning, preparing and reviewing resources is essential. Below are some suggestions that may be helpful in teaching core French.

1. Learn and use a small repertoire of classroom language for giving instructions, gaining attention, celebrating good work, and modelling strategies. Just as students learn French by starting with a limited amount of language that they learn and use over and over again in a variety of situations, so too can teachers learn, use and master key structures needed for authentic classroom conversation.
2. As you preview a new text, use the same strategies for exploring text that you are teaching students to use: highlight familiar content and format features, link to your own prior knowledge, and consult resources to help with new words or ideas.
3. Listen to the audio version of the text to be explored in class. Pause and repeat aloud as you listen. It takes time to practise articulating and using new language structures.

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Develop Your Language Repertoire

4. Limit what you say in class to your developing repertoire. In the beginning, this may mean that only your opening routine, strategy-modelling, key questions and instructions are delivered in French. That's a great start!
5. And don't feel that you can *never* use English in the core French class. There are times when it makes sense to let students give voice to some of the connections they are making regarding strategies they are using, or between French and English or other home languages. Even though we strive to make French the language of the classroom, there is also room for the "judicious use" of English (Turnbull, 2001).

Use visuals, gestures and keywords to illustrate/explain new language or ideas.	Voici un diagramme Venn. (Draw 2 intersecting circles on the board.) J'aime mon chien. Tu aimes les chiens? (Hold up a flashcard of a dog and give it a hug. Then shrug and raise your voice when you ask the question.) Quelle est la bonne séquence? (Write séquence on the board.)
Use cognates or familiar French words whenever possible.	Il regarde un film au cinéma. Tu portes un jean et un t-shirt.
Ask 'either/or' questions rather than more open-ended 'why' questions.	Est-ce que c'est ___ ou ___? rather than Pourquoi est-ce que...?
Keep your instructions simple and clear; use modelling as much as possible.	Écrivez vos idées. Regardez-moi. (Model how to fill in a graphic organizer, saying aloud what you are writing on the page.)
Share the fact that you are a language learner too and don't have all the answers.	Hmm, c'est une bonne question. Qui peut chercher dans le dictionnaire?
Share your think-aloud process when approaching or exploring a text. Use the anchor charts to support your growing repertoire of French expressions.	Je lis le texte. Je pose des questions. Je fais des prédictions. Je donne mon opinion.

Many of the instructional and literacy strategies mentioned in this article are useful to teachers as well as students in developing the capacity to learn and use French. Teachers of FSL, be they specialists or generalists, have a great deal to offer to school- and board-wide literacy goals when they use strategies in French that support literacy learning across the curriculum. *Bon courage!*

References

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