A QUALITY MATRIX FOR CEFR USE: Examples of promising practices

1. OVERVIEW

Project leader(s) contact: Elizabeth Hoerath

Country: Canada (Ontario) **Institution**: Ontario Ministry of Education

Type of context: Provincial

Educational sector: Primary, Lower Secondary, Upper Secondary

Main focus of your project:
Support materials for French teachers and instructional leaders

SUMMARY

Name: Web resources to support a transformation in teaching: Transforming FSL
Abstract: Development of dedicated websites for Ontario teachers of French as a Second Language (FSL) and school/departmental leaders, providing professional learning resources and local examples of teaching, learning and assessment practices, inspired by the CEFR
Stage: Implementation
Theme: Curriculum, Teaching; Teacher education

CEFR aspects targeted: Levels, Descriptors, Action-oriented approach
Main features of this example:
- Sustained engagement over many years flexible evolution
- Performance samples demonstrating levels
- CEFR-related model lesson plans
- Videos of classroom teaching
- Videos of teachers discussing teaching and CEFR implementation
- Guides on various aspects of CEFR (especially from communicative to action-oriented)
- Support for administrators and other stakeholders as well as teachers
Quality principles demonstrated: Relevance, Transparency, Coherence, Inclusiveness, Sustainability

European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe
www.ecml.at/CEFRqualitymatrix

2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Background:
Ontario, like other Canadian provinces, has multiple programs of study within French as a Second Language (FSL) programs (Core French, Extended French and French Immersion). Ontario curriculum policy was revised in 2013 and 2014, following a successful CEFR-inspired pilot project. This curriculum policy is inspired by the CEFR and the action-oriented approach, through the inclusion of concepts of authentic tasks, oral interaction, intercultural competence, explicit focus on language learning strategies and metacognition. Other documents produced by the Ontario Ministry of Education (*A Framework for French as a Second Language in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12 (2013); Including Students with Special Education Needs in French as a Second Language Programs : A guide for Ontario Schools (2015); Welcoming English Language Learners into French as a Second Language Programs (2016)*) reinforce the central belief that all students can learn FSL and may have different entry points to their development of proficiency and bring different language and general assets to their FSL learning.

The CEFR is used as a tool to support Ontario's vision that "students in English-language school boards have the confidence and ability to use French effectively in their daily lives."

Ontario has many initiatives related to the CEFR to support approximately 2 million students who will learn French as a Second Language in the Kindergarten to Grade 12 context (and beyond), including:

- the use of the DELF exam in most Ontario school districts as a voluntary opportunity for graduating FSL students (See separate Example Practice from Ottawa: "Reforming teaching practice through institutionalizing the DELF");
- research projects inspired by the CEFR to learn more about the proficiency and confidence of Ontario FSL students as French language users, and research about the changes in teacher practice as a result of their professional learning about the CEFR;
- research projects to describe the similarities and differences between the communicative and action-oriented approaches, and to apply these characteristics to develop action-oriented syllabi and lesson plans;
- local, regional, and provincial networks of funding for CEFR-related professional development and inquiry for FSL teachers and leaders; and
- the development of and open sharing (i.e. websites) of hundreds of artefacts and resources in support of sustained, coherent professional learning about CEFR-inspired practices to improve teaching and learning FSL.

This last example is the main focus of the rest of this report.

Stated aims:
The overall aim is to support implementation of the CEFR by providing stakeholders with readily accessible, practical resources and guides.
- To provide a user-friendly website for various stakeholders (e.g., teachers, instructional curriculum consultants, administrators, supervisory officers) to deepen their understanding of CEFR and have examples of transformed practice across various levels of elementary and secondary education (www.transformingfsl.ca)
- To provide a user-friendly website for district school boards to monitor the implementation of the CEFR in Ontario publicly-funded English-Language schools. Through self-assessment against a continuum of implementation, teachers, instructional curriculum consultants, and administrators can reflect on components intended to drive evolution in instructional practice (bit.do/cefr-ontario)
- To ensure access to learning through a variety of modes (research projects with district school board participation, provincial face-to-face and/or blended meetings, provincial webinars, regional collaborative projects)

Steps/stages: (Please describe separately and number these steps/stages)

A. **Transforming FSL website: https://transformingfsl.ca/en/**

This website provides tangible, practical tools illustrating various aspects connected with understanding and implementing the CEFR.

1. Examples of Classroom Practice:
   - *On est capable* (videos in classrooms across Ontario - different grades and FSL programs, that illustrate big ideas of the CEFR, with an emphasis on oral interaction and students as language users)
   - Samples of Student oral and written production based on CEFR levels (Ontario student samples from DELF exams, shared with permission from the CIEP)
   - CEFR-Inspired Classroom Practices (videotaped lesson studies in primary and secondary school settings)
   - *Harmonisation des Travaux d'élèves en FLS* (levelled examples of communicative and action-oriented tasks with evaluation grids and feedback that represent a hybrid of CEFR descriptors and Ontario's assessment policy guidelines)

2. Examples of CEFR-inspired Lesson Plans:
   - Working Together to Improve Students' Proficiency in FSL through CEFR-inspired Practices (lesson plans and syllabi created by Ontario teachers learning about the action-oriented approach)
   - From Communicative to Action-Oriented: Illuminating the Approaches (research guide, planning template and lesson plan examples co-created by a research expert (Enrica Piccardo) and classroom teachers.

3. Examples of Learning Modules for Administrators and/or Stakeholders outside of FSL programs:
   - Supporting all students in FSL: eLearning module for Principals and Vice Principals (a learning program specifically designed for school leaders with no FSL background)
   - Reflections of the FSL Provincial Principal Focus Group (videos of school leaders as they reflect on their role and key changes to support CEFR-inspired practices in their schools)
   - ED Talk: Principal to Principal (motivational video to challenge outdated belief systems that create systemic barriers for change and inclusive practices)

B. **CEFR - Ontario Website: https://sites.google.com/teltgafe.com/cefr-ontario**

Continuum of implementation

This document was created by adapting a research-based process from the Concerns Based Assessment Model (CBAM). According to the CBAM, the "innovation configuration" process:
- provides clear, specific, and shared descriptions of what a new program or practice should look like;
- focuses on the key components of a program or practice;
- describes variations for each component of a new program in terms of the actions and behaviors that are ideal, acceptable, and unacceptable;
- differs from rubrics in that Innovation Configurations describe rather than rate a new practice;
- produces flexible documents that can change as the use of a new program or practice matures; and
- helps teachers who are new to a school understand program expectations.

The continuum is a user-friendly 2-page document. It presents priority aspects in CEFR curriculum implementation, currently the following four aspects:
- French instruction focuses on authentic communication in French and a balance of listening, speaking, reading, and writing;
- Learning, teaching, and assessment have a proficiency angle;

- Learning is highly interactive;
- Learner autonomy and metacognition are of central importance.

For each of these aspects, four stages of implementation (from non-implementation to full implementation) are defined in a chart with a descriptor for each of the four stages.

The continuum was co-created by participants in a provincial webinar in June 2016, with the intent to describe more clearly and more coherently their current practice and set objectives and priorities for upcoming professional learning inspired by the CEFR. Professional learning related to the CEFR has been underway in all Ontario school boards since 2010.

Schools are invited to continually adapt and refine the descriptors throughout their learning, as well as use the common chart to describe progress and next steps using a common tool provincially, regionally, and locally. The chart was created keeping in mind that many important stakeholders in supporting effective FSL classroom practices may not themselves have training in the CEFR or speak French.

In 2016/17 and 2017/18, the continuum was used as a self-assessment and reflection tool by individuals and teams. Online learning sessions were organized according to the components (big ideas from the CEFR) and FSL teams could prioritize and select targeted sessions based on their self-assessment of CEFR implementation to date. All materials were subsequently shared on the website as part of the overall strategy.

Descriptors of implementation in the continuum also formed the basis for a formal research project to measure implementation, described below in the results section (Quantitative: 2017 Ontario study). In this way we have a triangulated approach to support and monitor implementation.

Timeline:
Transforming FSL - released 2013 (ongoing development)
CEFR - Ontario: continuum of implementation - released 2016 (ongoing development of related resources)

People/roles:
Ministry of Education: Field Services Branch: FSL Policy and Implementation Unit
    -policy/program development
    -administers funding
    -procures research and resource development
    -engages in long-term strategic planning for implementation and monitoring

Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (Provincial Lead)
    -leads collaborative learning sessions for leaders in the 60 English-language school boards. Ottawa-Carleton were the first to institutionalise the DELF for FSL in Canada (see separate Practice).

Formateur Network (Educators trained as Formateur for the DELF A1-B2)
    -contribute leadership and expertise in the CEFR gained through the DELF, regionally and locally

DELF Examinateurs/Correcteurs across the province
    -support effective implementation of DELF exams in their respective schools/boards;

60 publicly-funded English Language School Boards
    -each district creates and implements a strategic 3-year plan for FSL, which includes measurable targets for student proficiency, achievement, and confidence
    -each district participates in regional CEFR activities with their geographic neighbours

Researchers:
  Dr. Enrica Piccardo, OISE, University of Toronto
  Dr. Katherine Rehner, OISE, University of Toronto

Publications that have been used or produced related to this example:
The above-mentioned websites house all the resources that have been approved. For projects where external research was completed, references are listed in the accompanying documentation.

3. RESULTS

What was achieved:

Since its inception in 2013, **Transforming FSL** has continued to grow in scope of projects, starting with learning video modules to becoming a platform for eLearning modules and podcasts. Illuminating approaches: from communicative to action-oriented has helped teachers and other stakeholders appreciate the paradigm change involved in implementing the action-oriented approach. The resources have achieved recognition outside Canada, with a link included on the Council of Europe's CEFR website and a recommendation in the CEFR Companion Volume.

There has also been expanded scope of target audience as a portal was added to direct Principals and Vice Principals to material specific for their role. The website was created to support CEFR-related professional development in an Ontario context. Analytics show that other provinces within Canada access the site regularly, specifically Québec and Alberta. Globally, analytics show that within the top five countries who visit the website are France, Morocco, Spain and Algeria.

In 2016, **bit.do/CEFR-ontario** was created to capture professional learning specific to the *CEFR in Ontario: A Continuum of Implementation* document that was conceived following stakeholder input (English Language publicly-funded school boards) at a provincial CEFR-related webinar.

Impact:

Qualitative:
In Ontario, the 60 publicly-funded English-Language school boards have engaged in annual dialogue based on their FSL Three-year Plan. School boards have reported that (the number below show how many school boards out of 60 discussed each item):

Focus of their FSL three-year plan:
- CEFR inspired task - greater communication/focus on learning of the revised curriculum   31
- Building capacity among educations and stakeholders/different professional learning models   25
- FSL has a greater focus across the system (profile of FSL programs)   18
followed by:
- DELF (involvement or desire to offer the examination)   16
- Increase the confidence in students and teachers   16

Activities that have had the biggest impact on achieving goals:
- Teacher capacity - co plan/ collaborative inquiry / professional learning communities /
  Cross Panel - Teacher moderation   31
- Training Teachers - CEFR professional learning / Levels of proficiency / DELF correcteur training   16
- DELF is having an influence in encouraging students to continue in FSL until graduation   12

Building on the work in FSL:
- Goals around CEFR: PD for teachers/DELF Correcteur Training/Action-oriented tasks   20

- Changing data collection to a more quantifiable model - more measurable/realistic goals   18
- Working with a variety of stakeholders to achieve goal/awareness of FSL program and 3-year plan   12

Quantitative:

In a 2017 Ontario study, Dr Katherine Rehner found that CEFR-related professional learning appears to be having a profound impact on FSL teachers' classroom practice.

Teachers report a complete reorientation of how language is presented to students (e.g., the instructional planning stage, through the teaching practices used, down to how language is assessed and evaluated). Teachers are also reporting that they are placing a more balanced emphasis on linguistic, pragmatic and sociolinguistic competences within authentic action-oriented tasks.

FSL teachers are reporting that they are employing strategies and resource materials grounded in more authentic, everyday uses of language, such as: online resources, authentic documents, specific CEFR/DELF resources, a wider array of reading materials and resources that they created on their own.

The changes in practice are a result of targeted CEFR-DELF related professional learning experiences which are taking place in wide-reaching ways across various teacher groups (i.e. FSL program, years of teaching experience, years of CEFR-DELF-related professional learning experience, and CEFR level of the envisioned class). Regardless of the level the teachers are teaching (elementary/secondary), the program of study (Core French, Extended French or French Immersion), and regardless of the number of years they have been teaching FSL programs, they all have reported similar influences on their instructional practice.

From 2013-2018, Ontario conducted a Pilot Project assessing student confidence and proficiency by way of district school boards volunteering to offer the DELF to their students who have completed or were enrolled in a grade 12 FSL course. Data was collected throughout various stages of the pilot project and reported back to the Ministry of Education to inform of areas of opportunity for professional development.

An example of how this research informed our practice was when data showed that student confidence was reported as lowest in Listening Comprehension (compréhension orale) at all levels of the CEFR, a resource entitled *Listening to Learn* was produced and shared on the Transforming FSL website. The goal of this resource was to help teachers deepen their understanding of different conceptions of 'listening' as well as the importance of considering the role of the listener, purpose for listening, and factors that can make an oral text more or less subjectively difficult. The resource describes these as *Dials of Difficulty* to help FSL teachers and students reflect on their challenges and to determine strategies for avoiding or compensating for their perceived challenge. It presents examples of lesson planning that incorporates differentiated instruction with the goal in mind that all FSL students can access authentic French oral texts, with appropriate supports.

Another finding from the DELF pilot related to students' challenges with spontaneous writing, especially with regards to the contextual use of grammar and vocabulary. This finding inspired the *Harmonisation des travaux des élèves en FLS* resource on the website. Teachers are able to learn how to better provide descriptive feedback to build student confidence and proficiency, not only linguistically, but also their pragmatic and sociolinguistic competences, while taking into account appropriate kinds of feedback based on CEFR levels.

Since 2013, resources have been developed to support professional development of educators of what a CEFR-inspired classroom can look like, sound like and feel like. The evolution of practice is evident in the need for providing structures for inclusion of all students (i.e. all students can be found on a CEFR proficiency scale and thus are able to be included in FSL programs) and that listening and speaking build a foundation for reading and writing. Learning took place at provincial meetings held twice a year along with local and regional learning sessions that took place throughout the year.

Online content to support deeper learning was shared for educators to access.

4 ADVICE AND LESSONS LEARNT:

Evolving teaching practice involves re-thinking intentional planning. In many schools, publisher generated textbooks/workbooks drove program development. Much of the early learning around CEFR-inspired pedagogy resulted in showcasing effective teacher practice, as well as developing new understandings of action-oriented tasks and backwards design[1]. Many teachers have shared that as a result of CEFR learning, they have changed the resources they use or how they use them with their students. Collaborative creation of new, evidence-based resources, making these accessible and adaptable, and developing teacher leadership have been the principles underpinning our work to reach over 10,000 FSL teachers in the province.

Looking to the Future:
The work in Ontario continues and we will keep posting new resources to the websites. Each year, our focus evolves to align with our provincial goals and respond to what we hear from our regional CEFR leads. We seek to continually embed our direction in research, while understanding the importance of respecting regional contexts and differences in where partners may situate themselves on the CEFR in Ontario: A Continuum of Implementation. With the recent release of the CEFR Companion Volume, we are interested in developing a learning plan that includes the new descriptors for Plurilingualism and Mediation.

Ontario is home to the most linguistically diverse city in Canada; over 200 languages are spoken in Toronto and according to the 2011 census about 45% of all families speak a language other that English or French at home. We will explore ways to support our students plurilingual and pluricultural competences as part of an overarching theme to build "global competencies" for a caring, competent workforce.

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[1] Backward design is the process of determining the content of teaching by working backwards from defined end objectives related to learners' needs, usually expressed in terms of 'can do' descriptors. Backward design contrasts with forwards design: following a linear, grammatically-based syllabus.