

FSL

FRENCH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

A Guide to Reflective Practice for Core French Teachers

MODULE 6

Learner Autonomy and Metacognition

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Contents

Context	2
Planning Tasks That Promote Learner Autonomy	3
Explicit Teaching of Metacognitive Strategies	3
Explicit Teaching of Learning Strategies	4
Assessment <i>as</i> Learning	7
Explicit Teaching of Self-Assessment Skills	8
Reflective Practice	12
Suggestions for Further Reading	13

Context

This module is intended to support elementary and secondary Core French teachers in the development of students' metacognitive skills and autonomy as learners. It draws on relevant research, includes practical suggestions from the experiences of Core French teachers, and provides opportunities to reflect upon teaching practices.

Educators and researchers (e.g., Holec, Little) agree that metacognition and learner autonomy are integral outcomes for students. In Core French, this means that students need to be explicitly taught the process of learning a second language and provided with the necessary guidance and tools to enable them to take responsibility for their learning.

Metacognition plays a critical role in successful learning since it is associated with “higher order thinking,” which involves active control over the cognitive processes engaged in learning.

Livingston (1997)

The first step towards autonomy is acceptance of responsibility for one's own learning.

Holec (1981)

Metacognition is defined in *Growing Success* (2010) as “the process of thinking about one's own thought processes” or simply, “thinking about thinking.” Students need to know a wide variety of learning strategies as well as when and how best to use them. In all Ontario curriculum documents, metacognition is evaluated in the “Thinking” category of the achievement chart.

Developing learner autonomy is a process that engages students in assuming responsibility for their own learning. As Core French students become autonomous learners, they are increasingly motivated, reflective, and strategic about their learning, developing both cognitive and metacognitive skills relevant to learning French. Core French teachers realize the importance of learner autonomy and look for opportunities to involve students in making choices and in providing input to personalize their learning. David Little suggests that there is a direct link between metacognition, learner autonomy, and motivation. Teaching learning strategies increases student motivation in two ways:

- It increases students' confidence in their own language learning ability.
- It provides students with specific techniques for successful language learning.

Little (2009) states: “In order to plan the next phase of my learning, for example, I must have a clear idea of what I already know and how well I know it. Thus self-assessment is the hinge on which reflective learning and the development of learner autonomy turn.” He quotes the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) p. 141: 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.” Students who develop these skills become more efficient and effective learners. Little notes that the CEFR “suggests that the development of learner autonomy (learning how to learn, assuming proactive responsibility for the learning process) should be a priority.”

Planning Tasks That Promote Learner Autonomy

Core French teachers consider the needs, interests, and readiness of their students when planning tasks. Learner autonomy is supported through the design of tasks that are:

- Relevant to students (connected to their life outside of school)
- Purposeful (result in a tangible outcome)
- Open-ended (allow for a variety of responses)
- Allow for flexible, personalized learning goals
- Foster experimentation with French language
- Allow student selection of resources
- Encourage student selection of strategies
- Involve students in monitoring their own progress

Core French teachers use assessment *for* learning to help students determine their needs, and they provide opportunities for students to share their interests. It is important to plan how evidence of student learning will be collected and recorded so that students may revisit their work at a later date to reflect on progress. This ongoing analysis of evidence informs planning for explicit teaching or review of strategies and concepts.

Explicit Teaching of Metacognitive Strategies

Core French teachers help students take responsibility for learning, think strategically about task completion, and reflect on the learning process. The following are samples of metacognitive strategies for which Core French teachers may wish to develop anchor charts with their students. These steps are generally introduced one at a time and practised through the gradual release of responsibility model. The strategies and complexity of language should be adapted to suit the needs and abilities of each group of learners.

<p>Avant de commencer: Je fais un plan d'action.</p>	<p>Je lis toutes les consignes./J'écoute toutes les consignes. Je comprends les consignes. Est-ce que je comprends bien les critères d'évaluation? J'ai combien de temps pour accomplir la tâche? Est-ce que j'ai tout ce dont j'ai besoin pour commencer? Est-ce que je pense à ce que je sais déjà? Quelle est la première étape?</p>
<p>Pendant: Je me mets au travail.</p>	<p>Est-ce que j'ai besoin de vérifier quelque chose avant de continuer? J'utilise une variété de stratégies pour bien comprendre ce que je lis et ce que j'entends. J'utilise une variété de stratégies pour bien exprimer mes idées. Je me corrige quand je me rends compte que j'ai fait une erreur. J'utilise les nouvelles structures. Je fais de mon mieux. Je lis les critères d'évaluation souvent. Comment est-ce que je peux améliorer mon travail?</p>
<p>Après: Je réfléchis à mon travail.</p>	<p>Est-ce que j'ai accompli le travail en respectant les critères d'évaluation? Je peux démontrer et expliquer ce que j'ai appris. Quelles stratégies m'ont aidé le mieux à comprendre, à exprimer mes idées et à apprendre? Qu'est-ce que j'ai bien fait? Quelle partie de la tâche ai-je trouvé facile? Difficile? Pourquoi?</p>

The metacognitive ability to select and use particular strategies in a given context for a specific purpose means that the learner can think and make conscious decisions about the learning process.

Anderson (2002)

Metacognitive processes are central to planning, problem solving, evaluation, and many aspects of language learning.

Kearsley (2012)

Explicit Teaching of Learning Strategies

Core French teachers explicitly teach learning strategies in French. Naming the strategies in French, discussing their uses, and giving examples provide students with a common understanding and language so they are able to speak in French about how and why they choose certain strategies to accomplish a task.

The following are learning strategies and examples to help students understand how and when to use various strategies. As strategies are taught and practised over a learning cycle, Core French teachers develop anchor charts with their students.

Stratégie	Exemples
Faire des liens	Pense à ce que tu sais déjà sur ce sujet. Fais des liens entre ce sujet et des situations de la vie courante (p.ex., le monde, la communauté, la famille).
Faire des inférences	Sers-toi du contexte, des images, des titres ou sous-titres et de ce que tu connais déjà pour t'aider à comprendre.
Faire des prédictions	Anticipe l'information. Cherche les indices. Propose des idées logiques.
Utiliser des mots-amis	Quels mots ressemblent aux mots anglais ou de ta langue maternelle? Est-ce que le sens du mot que tu as deviné est logique dans ce contexte?
Faire des comparaisons	Pense à un groupe de mots ou d'idées qui vont t'aider à comprendre ou dire ce que tu veux exprimer (p.ex., <i>C'est comme un ...</i>).
Utiliser des indices visuels	Observe bien le langage non-verbal, les images, les diagrammes, et les gestes.
Visualiser	Quelle image te vient à l'esprit? Pourrais-tu faire un dessin de ce que tu lis ou entends?

I thought it would be too difficult for my students to talk about strategies in French because they didn't have enough language. I realize now that it is important to scaffold the language for them to use it appropriately. I put the strategies around the room for reference. These become our anchor charts.

Grade 7 Core French teacher

Students benefit by being shown that many strategies they apply when listening, speaking, viewing, reading, and writing in other subjects are equally useful in Core French. Core French teachers partner with their students' other teachers in the development of metacognitive and learning strategies.

I teach Core French to my own class and I decided that I would try to use some of the strategies that I am learning about in English. I translated a few of the checklists and asked students to use them in the Core French period.

Grade 8 Core French teacher

Core French teachers help students understand how important it is to monitor their comprehension by continually asking themselves if what they see, hear, say, write, and read makes sense. Students need to have a repertoire of strategies to draw upon to strengthen comprehension, oral language and writing skills. Anchor charts to support students' independent use of comprehension strategies could include the following:

Si je ne comprends pas:

- Je cherche les petits mots dans les grands mots (p.ex., *visionnement, ensoleillé*).
- J'utilise mes connaissances des familles de mots (p.ex., travail/travailleur).
- J'utilise mes connaissances des préfixes et des suffixes (p.ex., heureux/malheureux; tranquille/tranquillement).
- Je saute le mot et continue (p.ex., *Nous faisons du vélo dans le parc.*).
- Je recommence au début de la phrase et je relis (p.ex., *Nous faisons du vélo dans le parc parce qu'il y a des kilomètres de pistes cyclables.*).
- Je relis la phrase précédente (p.ex., *Mes amis et moi sommes cyclistes. Nous faisons souvent du vélo dans le parc parce qu'il y a des kilomètres de pistes cyclables.*).
- Je lis la phrase suivante (p.ex., *Mes amis et moi sommes cyclistes. Nous faisons souvent du vélo dans le parc parce qu'il y a des kilomètres de pistes cyclables. Nos bicyclettes sont nos objets préférés.*).
- J'établis la relation entre les pronoms et les mots qu'ils remplacent.
- Je fais attention aux connecteurs et mots de transition.
- Je fais attention à la ponctuation.
- Je note la différence entre les faits et les opinions.
- Je regarde les images.
- J'utilise les éléments du texte (p.ex., les titres, les photos, les symboles).

Selecting and Scaffolding Appropriate Learning Strategies

Core French teachers support students in using a variety of learning strategies, with a particular focus on those that are unique to learning second languages, such as recognizing when making connections with the first language is helpful. The more strategies the students have in their repertoire, the greater the likelihood they will experience success. Overdependence on one strategy often results in frustration and misunderstanding. For example, Core French teachers draw students' attention to the fact that looking for cognates can often be a very useful strategy, but not always, as there are also "faux-amis" – that is, words that look similar in French and English but have different meanings (e.g., *ancien* does not mean ancient in English, but 'former,' as in the sentence *Voilà mon ancien élève.*). Core French teachers show students how to use context cues to infer and check meaning.

Scaffolding teaching of metacognitive and learning strategies supports students in becoming increasingly autonomous. The importance of using the gradual release of responsibility model in Core French to build language skills relevant to metacognition cannot be overstated. The teacher models the appropriate language structures and supports student success in using them independently through shared and guided instruction. By thinking aloud and discussing options with students, the Core French teacher makes the learning process visible.

[T]o be effective, metacognitive instruction should explicitly teach students a variety of learning strategies and also when to use them.

Anderson (2002)

Anchor Charts to Support Learner Autonomy and Metacognition

Core French teachers provide support to students by co-constructing charts of sentence starters, brainstorming useful language structures with students, and modelling a variety of options for completing sentences.

Examples of sentence starters include:

- Je pense que ...
- Peut-être que cela veut dire ...
- Je devine que ...
- Je prédis que ...
- Je peux visualiser ...
- Je me demande si ...
- Je ne comprends pas pourquoi ...
- J'ai besoin de voir un exemple de ...

The ability to coordinate, organize, and make associations among the various strategies available is a major distinction between strong and weak second language learners.

Anderson (2002)

Core French teachers co-construct charts so that students are able to identify, select, apply, and refine strategies that successful second language learners use.

Co-constructed charts might include the following:

Un bon auditeur ...

- Anticipe le contenu de l'écoute ou de la conversation.
- Identifie le type du document (p.ex., conversation, chanson, bulletin météo, court métrage, entrevue).
- Fait appel aux expressions, à la prononciation et aux structures reliées au contexte.
- Comprend l'objectif de l'écoute (p.ex., s'informer, réagir, se distraire).
- Est attentif aux mots et expressions communs.
- Est attentif aux mots et expressions qui changent le sens d'une phrase. (p.ex., pas, mais, ni, personne).
- Est attentif à la communication non-verbale (p.ex. aides visuels, gestes, ton).
- Continue à écouter même s'il y a des passages difficiles à comprendre.

Un bon écrivain...

- Respecte le type du document (p.ex., carte, lettre, réponse à la lecture, résumé, courriel, affiche).
- Respecte l'objectif de l'écriture et l'auditoire prévu.
- Écrit des phrases compréhensibles et logiques.
- Cherche de nouveaux mots ou expressions à l'aide de ressources.
- Utilise le vocabulaire et les structures appropriés à la tâche écrite.
- Précise une description avec les adjectifs.

Un bon orateur...

- Prends son temps et parle lentement et d'une voix claire et articulée.
- Respecte l'objectif de la parole et l'auditoire prévu.
- Se rappelle des mots et des expressions connus.
- S'exprime avec des gestes ou des mimiques si le vocabulaire manque.
- Organise ses idées en phrases complètes avec des mots de liaison.
- Justifie ses idées avec des exemples.

Un bon lecteur...

- Repère la forme du document (ainsi que les éléments du texte).
- Réfléchit aux indices donnés par le titre, l'auteur, la date, les illustrations.
- Lit une fois afin d'avoir une compréhension globale du texte, ensuite relit pour en ressortir les éléments clés.
- Identifie le thème principal et les idées secondaires.
- Surligne tout ce qu'il/elle comprend.
- Essaie de comprendre des mots inconnus à l'aide des stratégies de compréhension (p.ex., les mots-amis, les champs lexicaux, les référentiels).
- Infère le sens de ce qui est inconnu à partir de ce qu'il/elle comprend.

Un bon interlocuteur...

- Est attentif et concentré afin de bien écouter l'interlocuteur.
- Fait répéter l'interlocuteur au besoin.
- Pose des questions.
- Répond aux questions et réagit.
- Paraphrase le message de l'interlocuteur pour vérifier la compréhension.
- Formule ses propres idées avec clarté et précision.

I am part of a TLCP in my school for the first time and am attempting some of the same strategies in Core French that the classroom teachers are using. One aspect is metacognition. This was particularly challenging at first, but once I had a clearer understanding of what it means to ask students to demonstrate their thinking, I gave it a try. It takes time and much modelling, but it is working.

Grade 4–6 Core French teacher

Assessment as Learning

Assessment *as learning* [is] the process of developing and supporting student metacognition. Students are actively engaged monitoring their own learning, using assessment feedback from teacher, self and peers to determine next steps, and setting individual learning goals. Through teacher actions such as ensuring that learning goals are clear, co-constructing success criteria, and providing students with timely descriptive feedback, Core French students learn to effectively monitor their learning, explain their thinking, and make choices to improve their learning. Black and William (2006) remind us that “students can only achieve a learning goal if they understand that goal and can assess what they need to do to reach it. Thus the criteria for evaluating any learning achievement must be made transparent to students.”

Metacognition and learner autonomy are also reflected in the second chapter of *Growing Success*, which focuses on the importance of developing learning skills and work habits. “As students develop the ability to understand how they learn, recognize areas that need improvement, set goals for improvement, monitor their own learning, and become independent learners, they are acquiring the basic habits and skills they will require for lifelong learning.”

See Module 5: *Assessment and Evaluation* in *A Guide to Reflective Practice for Core French Teachers*.

Given the significance of metacognition to learning, students should always be required to reflect on and self or peer assess their work.

Hume (2009)

Explicit Teaching of Self-Assessment Skills

When planning instruction, Core French teachers incorporate explicit teaching of self-assessment skills and provide frequent opportunities for students to monitor their own work and reflect on their learning. Davies (2007) writes: “Self-assessment gives learners the opportunity to think about their learning – a process called metacognition. Students who are able to self-assess – that is, to reflect on how they learn – are better able to monitor their own learning process.”

When Core French students are taught to self-assess regularly throughout the learning process, not only upon completion of the task, they are better able to determine whether they need additional instruction, feedback, or practice. Students who take time to reflect on how they are doing can assess whether the strategies they have used are effective, and if not, try different ones. A critical aspect of monitoring progress is the ability to self-correct. Core French teachers encourage students to think about what they are saying or writing and to compare this to what they have learned in order to self-correct and refine their French language skills.

Core French students are motivated to become autonomous learners when they can see their progress. Portfolios are useful tools for students to track their work and reflect on their progress over time. Students’ portfolios might include audio, video, or paper samples of their work over time. In addition to providing evidence of their learning, portfolio tools such as reflection journals and self-assessments allow students to track their thinking as they progress. Core French teachers do not rely solely on written products as evidence of students’ understanding or reasoning. They also record what students say that reflects their metacognitive development.

Core French teachers provide students with time and a variety of prompts to reflect on their overall progress in listening, speaking, reading and writing in French, such as:

- Est-ce que je suis capable de me rappeler et utiliser les structures déjà enseignées (hier, le mois passé, l’année passée)?
- Est-ce que j’ai confiance en mes habiletés de compréhension orale, production orale, lecture et écriture?
- Quelles sont mes forces en tant qu’apprenant de français langue seconde? Qu’est-ce que je trouve le plus facile et difficile? Comment est-ce que je peux utiliser mes forces pour mieux apprendre?

Through opportunities to work with different partners, students learn from each other and practise giving and accepting feedback. Students deepen their understanding of the success criteria by seeing how their peers interpret their communication and by comparing their work (oral or written) with models provided by the teacher. Core French teachers provide students with regular opportunities to articulate their learning and to explain their thinking in French.

Self-assessment based on analysis of the student’s own work or performance in relation to specific criteria and next steps helps students to understand what to do to be successful and shifts the focus away from thinking only about marks.

When I build success criteria with my students, I provide them with a road map to a learning goal.
Most of them become more self-reliant and better able to learn independently.

Grade 8 Core French teacher

SAMPLE TRACKING SHEETS

The following tracking sheet supports students in self-assessing their learning goals before, during, and after a specific learning task.

Nom:		
Objectifs d'apprentissage:		
Je dois ...	Avant	Date
J'utilise ...	Pendant	Date
J'ai appris ...		
Je peux ...	Après	Date
Je veux ...		

One of the simplest forms of self-assessment in Core French is a checklist students can use to indicate when they have accomplished a learning goal. The focus of this type of assessment is to increase student awareness of what they are learning and what they can do.

Objectif d'apprentissage	Élève	Enseignant(e)
Je peux comprendre les points essentiels des dépliants touristiques.	√	
Je peux comprendre les points essentiels d'une annonce simple et courte à propos d'une destination de vacance.	√	
Je peux parler de mes activités préférées.	√	
Je peux écrire une carte postale pour raconter ce que j'ai fait pendant mes vacances.	√	

Core French teachers can provide students with templates for specific learning tasks so that they can compare their performance to a set of criteria, assess their progress, and plan next steps.

Objectif d'apprentissage: Écrire une carte postale		
Critères d'évaluation	Mon auto-évaluation (Niveau 1, 2, 3, ou 4 et pourquoi?)	Mes prochaines étapes pour améliorer sont ...
Formule d'appel appropriée		
Description de l'endroit (des faits)		
Description des activités (au passé composé)		
Message personnel (une opinion)		
Expressions simples appropriées (p.ex., <i>Tu me manques</i>)		
Formule de politesse		

Practical Tips

Core French teachers:

- Clarify learning goals.
- Co-construct success criteria.
- Explicitly teach peer- and self-assessment skills.
- Develop ways for students to track their learning and thinking.
- Scaffold learning of metacognitive and learning strategies.
- Provide opportunities for individual goal setting.
- Assist students in identifying their next steps and determining how to achieve them.

Student Reflection

The process of developing learner autonomy and metacognition involves students in knowing themselves as learners. Just as it is important for Core French teachers to get to know their students, it is important for students to understand their own learning styles and preferences. Core French teachers encourage students to reflect on their personal learning profile by providing prompts such as:

- Est-ce que je préfère travailler seul(e) ou avec un partenaire?
- Pour apprendre, est-ce que je préfère lire, écrire, parler ou écouter? Pourquoi?
- Comment est-ce que je me sens quand je fais une erreur? Pourquoi?
- Est-ce que je pense avant de parler? Pourquoi ou pourquoi pas?
- Est-ce que je travaille vite ou prends mon temps?
- Est-ce que je pose des questions quand je ne comprends pas ou essaie de me débrouiller seul(e)? Pourquoi?

Learner autonomy is also connected to self-esteem and self-image. Core French teachers and students discuss ways to ensure that everyone feels confident to take risks in using French. Prompts such as the following can be used to initiate discussions.

Lis chaque phrase. Est-ce que c'est vrai ou faux pour toi?

- Tout le monde fait des erreurs; je n'ai pas peur d'essayer de parler en français.
- Je dois parler parfaitement ou pas du tout.
- J'aime essayer de me faire comprendre.
- Je me sens fière quand je parle bien en français.
- J'aime quand mes copains me corrigent.
- Je sais que j'apprends quand mon professeur me corrige.

Core French students might be tempted to resort to English to express ideas that are not easily conveyed in French. It is therefore important to help them develop a variety of strategies to convey their message and understand others. The following chart shows possible teacher and student actions to support the use of French when teaching and learning metacognitive skills.

Teacher Actions	Student Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Models language structures • Encourages students to personalize responses, build on models provided and make connections with prior learning • Sets a clear context for the learning • Provides visual cues • Uses non-verbal cues and actions • Repeats and rephrases • Provides synonyms • Uses intonation and expression for emphasis • Focuses student attention on comparisons between French and first language • Co-creates anchor charts of expressions and strategies • Posts reference charts in the classroom and provides copies for student notebooks • Considers individual learning profiles and prior knowledge • Refers to what they already know about a topic to help learn more about it • Checks comprehension regularly • Addresses errors in a manner that promotes risk-taking • Validates attempts to use more complex language • Develops engaging and rich learning tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follows models presented by teacher • Expresses personal opinions by building on models provided and making connections with prior learning • Engages in the context for learning • Looks for visual cues • Looks for non-verbal cues (e.g., facial expressions, gestures) • Listens for familiar vocabulary • Listens for tone of voice, intonation • Thinks about how language conventions in French compare with those of their first language • Builds and refers to personal phrase lists and strategies • Activates prior knowledge • Participates in the co-construction of anchor charts • Checks comprehension regularly • Asks for clarification as needed • Persists in communicating in French only, recognizing that errors are part of learning, and refining skills by acting on feedback • Brings personal views and connections to learning tasks

Reflective Practice

- ✓ How do I teach metacognitive skills in my Core French classroom?
- ✓ What strategies and tools do I use to promote learner autonomy?
- ✓ How do my students keep track of their learning?
- ✓ How do my students make their thinking visible?
- ✓ How do I support beginning language learners so they can use French to discuss their learning?
- ✓ How do I assess metacognition?
- ✓ How do I ensure that learning goals are clear?
- ✓ How do I involve the students in setting learning goals and co-constructing success criteria?
- ✓ What strategies do I use to teach students to provide effective and constructive peer feedback?
- ✓ What would I remove, repeat, or rethink in my teaching of metacognition and learner autonomy?
- ✓ How does explicit teaching of learner autonomy and metacognitive skills benefit my students?

Suggestions for Further Reading

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