COMMON CURRICULUM ELEMENTS IN FRENCH RESOURCES
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When preparing lessons, teachers have certain concepts in mind, apart from the need to convey a particular body of work. One such concept is Queensland Studies Authority's 49 Common Curriculum Elements (CCEs) which underlie most of our teaching. These Common Curriculum Elements are tested in the NAPLAN and QCS tests, so they recur throughout the school life of the student and are, in any case, life skills which will stand them in good stead in their careers and daily lives.

Recently, when reviewing some of my many French resources, I realised that I really had had the CCEs in mind, though not, perhaps, consciously, at the time of doing the preparation. The resources featured in this article cover a great many of the elements, showing that we are working with different year levels to make sure that the Common Curriculum Elements are covered as often as possible.

This article covers two of my resources – a PowerPoint and a card activity.

Year 8 Speaking Practice PowerPoint
The first resource is a PowerPoint designed to help Year 8 students of French to practise using the sort of language one might need when ordering in a French restaurant or café. The required vocabulary and sentence patterns will have been taught to the class before this resource can be used. Students work in pairs in a role-play where one is the waiter and the other is the customer. In all slides, the students are expected to try to use the appropriate language, as indicated by the pictorial or verbal prompts. The first few slides give a great deal of help – when clicked, the screen will show a correct (though not necessarily the only) version of what needs to be said. Sound files are included so that students can listen to any sentence and repeat it until they feel confident. Later slides still have help attached, but it's less accessible - the students are expected to be more knowledgeable and confident by the time they reach the last couple of slides.
The activity can be broadened by asking the students to copy out portions of the text, or to write out portions and then check the accuracy of their wording and spelling by clicking on the appropriate screen. Students might also make their own additions to the given dialogues in order to make the situation longer, more realistic, and more conversational. If props are provided, they might act out the situation, producing the props when appropriate to the conversation; for example, serving a plate of pretend food or giving the right change using play money while they say the appropriate expressions in French. In an ideal world, costumes and real French food could be provided to add a great deal to the verisimilitude of the activity.

Year 9 Reflexive Verb Card Activity
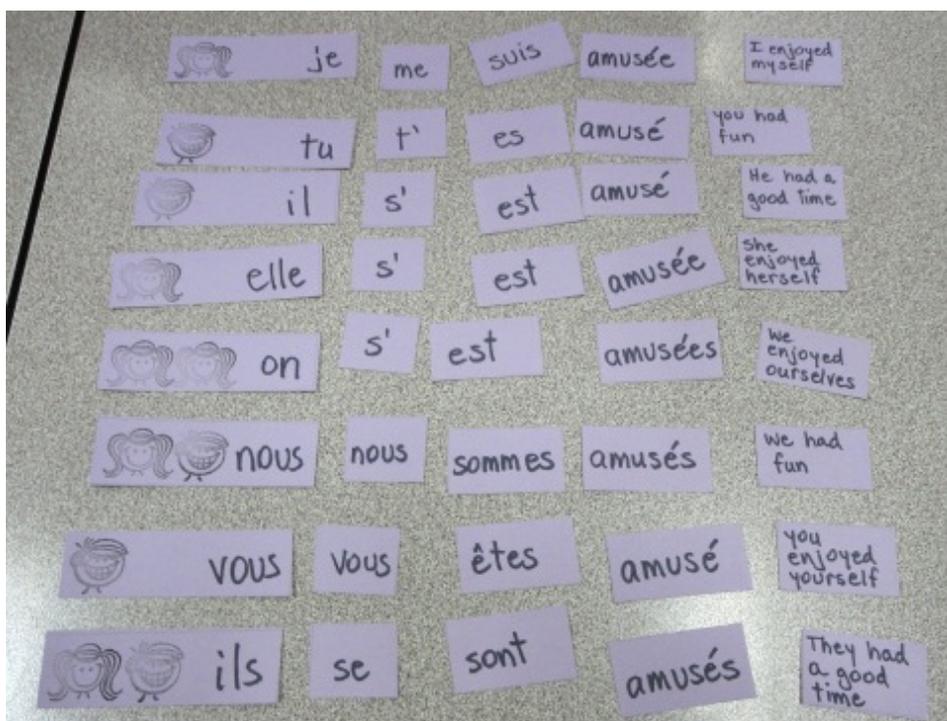
Figure 1: Students using verb cards.

Figure 2: A set of cards without negative elements

Verbs are a continual challenge to students of French. To use a French verb correctly, one must not only choose the correct tense, mood and voice, but one must match the subject with the correct form of the verb – a skill known as conjugation.

This activity is designed to give the students practice in conjugating the negative passé composé of reflexive verbs. An English example of this is: She has not enjoyed herself. (I assure you that the students do enjoy this activity – they actually request it!) The use of this sort of verb is probably the most difficult section of French for Year 9 students, and requires a good level of complex thinking.

To make the activity, I used different colours of cardboard (the number of colours to match the number of students per class, with one or two extra) to make sets of cards in French. Each set features a different reflexive verb. There are 53 cards per set, including some featuring English meanings and some with negative elements. Students are required to arrange the cards in tabular form, correctly matching the subjects, reflexive pronouns, auxiliary verb and past participles, and adding the negative elements to some of the verbs. The subject cards have stamped pictures indicating masculine or feminine, and students must choose a past participle with an ending that matches the subject in gender and number.

When a student has finished her set, she raises her hand and gets her work checked. She fixes any mistakes and can then either help someone who is having difficulty, or help by checking her neighbour's work. She can also swap her set of cards for a new set and try another verb. The activity usefully lasts about twenty minutes. In a subsequent lesson, when all students are well-rehearsed, the activity can become even more entertaining by making it a race.

The table below lists the Common Curriculum elements covered in each of the resources, with a comment for each element, explaining how it is covered by the resource.

Common Curriculum Element	Year 8 PowerPoint	Year 9 Cards
Recognising letters, words and other symbols	*Apart from reading English cues and French responses, students need to recognise the Euro symbol and cope with cues such as a single question-mark.*	*The cards are in French, single words that need to be put together to make a whole idea.*
Recalling / Remembering	*Students need to recall correctly the expressions they have been taught in order to communicate clearly.*	*Students have been taught the rules required, and need to remember them to complete the activity. The activity itself is an aid to understanding and therefore future remembering.*
Interpreting the meaning of words or other symbols	*Students need to understand the French they say, read and hear.*	*The activity is intended to help students to understand exactly what each part of their verb means, and to be able to use the verb correctly.*
Interpreting the meaning of pictures / illustrations	*Illustrations have been used in the PowerPoint to limit the amount of English used in the cues, with the object of having the students think straight into French, rather than thinking in English first.*	*The cards indicating the subject of each part of the verb have small stamps of boys and/or girls in order to indicate masculine or feminine without the use of English.*
Interpreting the meaning of tables, diagrams, maps or graphs		*Once a student has finished arranging the French cards, she has to add English cards which give the meaning of each part of the verb.*
Translating from one form to another	*There will inevitably be some need to translate from one language to another during the practising process.*	*The aim of the activity is not so much to translate from English into French or vice-versa, as to teach students to be able to match correct verbs with subjects and correct endings on the past participle. However, some translation will occur, particularly when students reach the stage of adding the English cards to their verb.*
Using correct spelling, punctuation and grammar	*Spelling and punctuation will only be used if a writing task is added to the activity, but correct grammar is necessary in all micro-skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing)*	*Verbs are the most challenging part of French grammar, which is why they need so much practice.*
Using vocabulary appropriate to a context	*Until they reach this topic, students have mainly been using familiar forms of address, but they now encounter the need for polite language on both sides of the conversation. They must also use vocabulary appropriate to quantities of food and drink as well as the expressions required for buying and selling.*	*Students need to be able to use formal and informal parts of the verb as well as singular and plural, whatever is needed by the context in which they are communicating.*
Compiling results in a tabular form		*Students lay the cards out in tabular form, which is the most logical way to present the verb.*
Calculating with or without a calculator.	*If students are ordering from a menu, they will need to calculate the cost and the amount of change, ideally without a calculator. They may also choose to practice with play money, which requires further calculation and observation.*	
Substituting in formulae	*Sentences can be taught as sentence patterns which are like formulae. For example:* *Je voudrais + (article) +(food) +(article) + (drink) + s'il vous plait.* *Students can communicate easily by knowing the formula and substituting different words for the elements in the brackets.*	*A verb pattern is like a formula. Once mastered (which is the whole point of the activity), students can substitute a verb of a different meaning into the formula.*

Setting out / presenting / arranging / displaying		*Verb cards need to be arranged logically and neatly so they can be clearly seen by the student and also by the teacher or classmate who is checking for accuracy.*
Structuring / organising extended written text	*Although this resource was designed for spoken practice, it can also be used for written practice. Students can practise writing out the dialogues by looking at the cues, then try writing the words, and only then click to see if they have used correct vocabulary, idioms, spelling and grammar. Each dialogue can be further extended by the addition of other elements, but students would then need to ask the teacher to correct their work.*	
Explaining to others	*Since the resource is designed as pairs-work, there will almost certainly be some level of mutual correction and explanation by the participants.*	*Students who offer to help a classmate gain valuable knowledge through the act of teaching. A student once said to me, "I can get it right without any trouble, but I didn't really understand it until I had to explain it."*
Reaching a conclusion which is consistent with a given set of assumptions		*The assumptions are that regular verbs will follow the same pattern, and that feminine and plural past participles need matching endings.*
Interrelating ideas / themes / issues	*These short dialogues can be joined together to create longer exchanges. In addition, the dialogues can be considerably lengthened by the addition of an extra customer with whom to make social conversation, using expressions taught previously. Language learning is like making a pile of sand – as one pours more sand onto the top, the base spreads out, so that all new work is supported by the basic work beneath it.*	
Applying strategies to trial and test ideas and procedures		*This is a good trial-and-error activity, with some minor risk involved in a non-threatening environment. Errors are easily fixed.*
Applying a succession of steps to achieve the right answer	*By substituting new words into familiar patterns to make new sentences, students are following a succession of steps, not necessarily consciously.*	*The most efficient way to approach this task is to set the cards out in an organised manner so that the logical steps can be followed to reach the correct conclusion.*
Criticising	*Students are encouraged to be kindly critical, of their own performance as well as their partner's. Self-correction is a sign that the student is understanding the construction of a sentence, or can hear the difference between a right sound and a wrong sound – a good sign that progress is being made. Too much self-correction, however, damages the meaning and is annoying to the listener, so a balance must be found.*	*Once a student has finished the activity, she is able to criticize her own performance and scan her work for errors before asking someone else to check. A student giving help to others is expected to be tactful.*
Analysing		*This activity teaches the students to analyse the verb – to recognize and reconstruct its component parts.*
Synthesising	*The act of forming even the simplest sentence requires the art of synthesis – putting parts together to make a whole. The student needs to consider such issues as the case, gender and number of nouns, pronouns, articles and adjectives; the tense, number, mood & voice of a verb; the word order; and any appropriate idioms, to name a few of the considerations that need to take place almost instantaneously.* *As well as putting words together into sentences, students can also use the PowerPoint resource to help them to put sentences together to make a cohesive conversation.*	
Judging and evaluating		*Self-evaluation and peer evaluation, as mentioned above. It's also pleasant when students judge the activity to have been helpful in making them understand their verbs and actually go so far as to say so to the teacher.*

Creating / composing / devising	*Speaking is a creative skill. Of course, there is a correct way of saying things – more than one correct way – but communication can still occur even if there are mistakes. When a speaker doesn't know the correct vocabulary, circumlocution is required, which means that lateral thinking must be employed – definitely a creative skill. The PowerPoint resource offers the student the chance to choose her own wording and devise her own responses, even if what she chooses to say is not exactly the wording given when she clicks.*	
Perceiving patterns	*As stated before, sentences can be taught as patterns. As practice proceeds, students learn to identify the patterns and substitute the words they want to use for the elements of the patterns.*	*Regular verbs have a regular pattern. Students who master the regular verbs should also be able to perceive the less obvious patterns in irregular verbs.*
Visualising		*This activity is particularly suitable for students who are visual learners, but will also help students with other learning styles to visualize the verb and its spelling.*
Gesturing	*Body language is an integral part of any culture and its language. In the PowerPoint resource, opportunities exist for handshakes, greeting-kisses, shoulder-shrugging, hand-waving, pointing and other gestures.*	
Searching and locating items / information		*Students have 53 cards to arrange, and it's surprising to see the occasional student searching vainly for a perfectly obvious card.*
Observing systematically		*Learning verbs is best done systematically, by chanting and by writing out. Once the verb cards have been arranged, the student can check her accuracy by applying the same systematic approach.*
Manipulating/operating/using equipment	*If realia is provided, students have the opportunity to set a table, carry a tray, use cutlery, crockery and table-napkins, read from a menu, manage play money and give change.*	*The whole activity involves manipulating cards and placing them into the correct order.*

In these two resources alone, more than half of the 49 Elements have been covered in one way or another, and will no doubt be covered again in other resources and in other subjects. The remaining elements are listed below. Many of them (marked with asterisks) are covered by language-learning resources or activities other than the two analysed in this article.

Summarising / condensing written text*
Compiling lists / statistics*
Recording / noting data*
Graphing
Estimating numerical magnitude
Approximating a numerical value
Structuring / organising a mathematical argument
Expounding a viewpoint*
Empathising*
Comparing, contrasting*
Classifying*

Reaching a conclusion which is necessarily true, provided a given set of assumptions is true
Inserting an intermediate between members of a series
Extrapolating*
Generalising from information*
Hypothesising
Justifying*
Identifying shapes in two and three dimensions
Sketching/drawing*

To conclude, it is clear that language-learning is particularly valuable to the student, incorporating as it does such complex thinking, a range of activities covering auditory, visual and kinetic learning styles, and so many of the 49 Common Curriculum Elements.

Reference

Queensland Studies Authority (2007): Common Curriculum Elements. Viewed 9 April 2012

http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/downloads/senior/qcs_elements.pdf