

Lesson Plan Ideas: The Conjugation of Regular Verbs

In the past when I tutored Core French, I remember the learning struggles of certain students when it came to the conjugation of French regular verbs. I would present the information in a text only format. I would write down the conjugations for “ER”, “RE”, “IR”, verbs and we would recite it together. I’d explain that there is a pattern and in a later lesson I would mention the exceptions as well (i.e. nous mangeons). We would do practice questions with fill-in-the-blanks where they would conjugate the verb in a given French sentence.

JE...TRAVAILLE
 TU ...TRAVAILLES
 IL/ELLE... TRAVAILLE
 NOUS... TRAVAILLONS
 VOUS ...TRAVAILLEZ
 ILS/ELLES... TRAVAILLENT

Many students did in fact learn with this way of representing the information. I knew this because I would formatively test them throughout subsequent tutoring sessions. (So how would I say that those group of girls there...they work?...Elles travaillent!) However, I remember two students I had who had lots of trouble with recalling the information. They understood the concepts perfectly well; they would correctly conjugate the verbs in front of me. However, in subsequent writing samples, they were not able to demonstrate what they had just learned. They were struggling to recall the correct conjugation with the corresponding pronoun.

I starting thinking about what could work for them. How can I help these students? I starting consciously observing their strengths and *their* ways of representing information around them and even their modes of communication. One of the boys at the beginning of every tutoring session when I asked what he did that weekend, would draw me a picture. He would often even substitute verbs for pictures with sound effects. He would resort to visually showing me instead of complete verbal communication.

I began to think that perhaps, a string of letters as a pattern does not work for these students. There was no recall success when I presented them with this ER pattern:

E, ES, E, ONS, EZ, ENT

Instead, I started visually representing the pattern. I assigned a 1cm line to mean 1 letter, 2 cm= 2 letters, etc... We created a line pattern to represent the number of *missing* letters needed after we remove the verb endings.

For instance, the conjugation pattern for ER verbs became this:

Je....—
 Tu...— —
 Il/Elle...—
 Nous...— — —
 Vous...— —
 Ils/Elles...— — —

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The above visual representation of the conjugation of ER verbs helped my students a lot. They were better able to memorize a visual cue and were better able to recall which ending went with which corresponding pronoun.

I found further success and a higher level of engagement when I took one of my students right outside of the library (where I tutored) into the grassy area with a sandbox and trees in the near distance. We gathered sticks of various lengths and we placed them on the asphalt. The sticks were placed with their relative lengths representing the line pattern above. In this case, we *physically* represented our knowledge with a 3D object. I then tested the student by asking:

How would I say that I work?

He would put down the shortest stick and say: Je mange.

It took practice and time but I definitely observed a difference in his engagement level and his recall ability later in writing samples.

I took it further to include other visual cues. In the ER conjugated verb endings, there are 6 *different* letters. E, S, O, N, T, Z These different letters make up the verb endings:

E, ES, E, ONS, EZ, ENT

I asked my students to come up with 6 different patterns we could use. We came up with (more or less):

E = yellow triangles
 S = red circles
 O = blue squiggly lines
 N = green dots
 T = orange squares
 Z = black diamonds

Using the above visual cues, we then drew a picture to represent the ER verb endings:

E, ES, E, ONS, EZ, ENT became:

E = 1 yellow triangle
 ES = 1 yellow triangle, 1 red circle
 E = 1 yellow triangle
 ONS = 1 blue squiggly line, 1 green dot, 1 red circle
 EZ = 1 yellow triangle, 1 black diamond
 ENT = 1 yellow triangle, 1 green dot, 1 orange square

From this learning experience with my students, I realized the importance of representing knowledge in various ways. Concepts can be taught in a plethora of ways and it is worth exploring these ways as it does enhance student comprehension. I now have this as a part of my pedagogical content knowledge (Slide 16, Jan 5th's class). I now "know" (as a part of my knowledge of teaching practices) that this method of visual representation can make the recall of regular verb conjugations more comprehensible to students. I can make the statement: I teach children French grammar. I am really taking into consideration the children, the *recipients* of this knowledge and their needs. As well, in looking at the different ways of representing knowledge, from Parsons & Beachamp (2012), one way is embodied knowledge. I have seen that this way of knowing is

beneficial for students. They state that ... “the meaning of coming to know involves the body as a whole that is not disassociated from the brain.” In the activity I did with my student, he collected sticks and placed them in a line. Those actions involved more movement across space. Rather than have him sitting down with only his hands moving, he was up and about moving objects, holding them and physically representing the ER verb patterns. As well, this method used an Indigenous way of knowing where Batiste (2010) has stated that Aboriginal people have come to know learning as “holistic, lifelong, purposeful, [and] experiential” amongst other things. This method created an experience for my student as he was actively searching, collecting, thinking, placing, visualizing amongst other verbs. From this revision in my teaching, I realized the value in using different ways of knowing to enhance student learning. I will continue using a multitude of ways to represent student knowledge in my teaching practice.