



**HANDBOOK  
FOR  
FRENCH IMMERSION  
ADMINISTRATORS  
(2010)**

## ALBERTA EDUCATION CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION DATA

Alberta. Alberta Education. French Language Education Services.  
Handbook for French immersion administrators.

This resource is only available online at:

<http://education.alberta.ca/francais/admin/immersion/handbookimm.aspx>

PC 2068 C2 A333 2010      370.1175 21

ISBN 978-0-7785-9114-6

1. Education, Bilingual--Alberta--Administration.
  2. French language--Study and teaching as a second language--Alberta--Immersion method.
  3. Schools, French--Alberta--Administration.
  4. School management & organization—Alberta.
  5. Enseignement bilingue--Alberta.
  6. Français (Langue)--Étude et enseignement--Alberta--Immersion.
  7. Écoles Françaises--Alberta --Administration.
  8. Administration scolaire--Alberta.
- I. Titre

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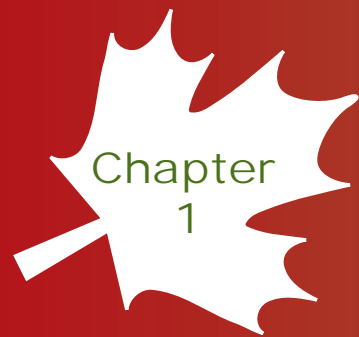
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# THE IMMERSION APPROACH —PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE

## A. Introduction

French immersion is a proven approach to second language learning developed in Canada in response to a desire of English-speaking parents to have their children become fluent in French. Two other French programs are also offered in Alberta schools: French first language (francophone) and French as a second language. French immersion is offered in Alberta as an alternative program as provided in Section 21 of the School Act.

French immersion began in Canada in 1965 as a well-researched experiment in St. Lambert, Quebec. The success of the program and the extensive research related to the learning of French, English and subject area content quickly became known across Canada. French immersion programs were first offered in Alberta in the early 70s.

In the 2009-2010 school year, 28 public school authorities and 13 separate school authorities and 3 private schools in Alberta schools offered a French immersion program to 34,885 students. Student enrolment across grade levels for the 2009-2010 school year follows:

Kindergarten	3,839
Elementary	18,766
Junior high	7,573
Senior high	4,707

## B. Program Goals

### English

To enable students to achieve a level of competence in English equivalent to English program students within three years of beginning instruction in English, and to maintain that equivalency through Grade 12.

### French

To enable students to become functionally fluent in French by the end of Grade 12, French immersion students will be able:

- to participate easily and willingly in conversations in French;
- to communicate in French for both personal and professional needs;
- to pursue their postsecondary education in French;
- to accept employment where French is the language of work.



## Subject Area Content

To enable students to achieve the learner outcomes in all [core](#) and [complementary](#) courses.

## Culture

To enable students to gain an understanding and appreciation of [francophone cultures](#).

## C. Key Characteristics

- Designed for students whose family heritage is other than French.
- A second language program in which French is the language of instruction for a significant part of the school day; several or all subjects, with the exception of [English Language Arts](#), are taught in French.
- A program with two entry points:
  - Early immersion begins in [Kindergarten](#) or Grade 1;
  - [Late immersion](#) begins in Grade 6 or 7.
- All students follow the [Alberta Program of Studies](#) and are expected to achieve established standards.
- French is acquired primarily by using it for meaningful communication within the school—that is, for instruction in subject areas.
- The students begin the program with little or no knowledge of French; instructional strategies and materials are designed with this in mind.
- The program begins with intensive instruction in French.
- Teaching of subject material is not repeated in English.
- In order to best achieve the program goals, early and late immersion students are expected to [remain in the program](#) until the end of Grade 12.
- [Parents](#) play a key role in promoting immersion programs and in supporting their child achieve the goals of the program.

## D. How French Immersion Works

### Integration of Language and Content

French immersion integrates language instruction and content area instruction. Students **learn** the French language, they **learn about** the French language and they **learn through** the French language.

- **Learning the language** enables students to read, speak, write and listen in French.
- Students **learn about the language** when they study French as a subject.
- Students **learn through language** when they use French to solve problems, understand concepts and create knowledge.

These three notions are interwoven throughout the students' French immersion experience. They learn the language as they are acquiring concepts in different subjects. As children learn



to read, they are also reading to learn. The same is true of language learning, be it one's first or second language. We learn a language and about the language as we use it in meaningful contexts. In French immersion, students are given many opportunities to use French for a variety of purposes. Finally, learning through language entails that all subject area teachers are also teachers of language. It is through language that students meet the learner outcomes identified for various subject areas.

### Learning Two Languages: Similarities

Children learn a second language in much the same way they learned their first language, by interacting with their environment to satisfy communication needs. At the beginning, this interaction involves approximations, risk-taking and negotiating meaning in a secure environment. Language is learned globally. Listening, speaking, reading and writing are interwoven and not acquired in a linear sequential fashion.

### Learning Two Languages: Differences

If there are similarities between learning a first and second language, there are also differences. A major difference is related to motivation. The motivation to learn and use a second language is not as strong as that of using one's mother tongue. Students can always revert to their first language, an easy solution in the early stages of second language acquisition. This has important implications for immersion teachers who must endeavour to present authentic and motivating learning situations that will compel students to communicate in French.

### Transfers and Interference

Another challenge in addition to motivation is dealing with the interferences that arise when learning and using two languages. These interferences can be related to word usage, syntax or pronunciation. Immersion teachers know that such errors are a natural part of second language learning. They know when and how to correct them.

French immersion teachers also build on the transfers and commonalities that exist between English and French: related syntax, basic grammatical structures, many identical phonemes and many identical or similar words. These positive effects far outweigh the interferences. Learning French allows students to reflect on the similarities and differences between their first language and French, and in doing so, enhances mastery of both languages. The Alberta Education document, *Bridging the Français and English Language Arts (ELA) Programs of Study*, provides many suggestions to maximize transfers between the English and French languages and to minimize the overlap in teaching similar or identical learner outcomes presented in both programs.

## E. Immersion Pedagogy

### Interests and Needs of Learners

Immersion pedagogy shares many features teachers use with first language learners. Paramount is a pedagogy based on learner needs and interests. This approach serves as an important catalyst to motivate students and to establish a secure atmosphere that will encourage them to take risks as they learn French and subject matter through French. Sound immersion pedagogy will also take into account the different learning styles and intelligences of students.



## Linguistically Rich Learning Environment

French immersion teachers are very conscious that French is the tool learners use to construct knowledge and understand their world. French language acquisition is integrated in the learning of all subject areas. This goal can be achieved by providing a linguistically rich learning environment: French books, videos, CDs, posters, visuals, Web sites, songs and dramatizations. All play a central role in second language learning.

## Variety of Authentic Learning Situations

The frequent use of authentic situations permits learners to make links between what they are learning in school in French and real-life situations. Such situations are critical in a French immersion classroom since this milieu is the only one where they are exposed to French. The use of meaningful and authentic situations increases the students' motivation to learn French and to learn content through the French language.

## Vibrant School Culture

If students are expected to learn French, they must be immersed in it. A rich and varied linguistic environment is vital to language acquisition. French must be seen not only as a tool to learn subject matter but as a means of communicating and dealing with the world outside the classroom. As a result, a French immersion school is one where the French language is prominently displayed on doors and in the hallways. Students are encouraged to use technology to access information in the French language. Activities are sought in the school as well as outside the school to encourage French language use and to increase the students' awareness of French culture and of the French presence in their milieu. A French immersion school is proud of its mandate to teach one of Canada's official languages and endeavours to search for means to meet this mandate ever more effectively.

## F. Types of Schools

The success of a French immersion program requires a school environment that values the learning of French and promotes French as a living language. This can happen effectively in one of the [two school settings](#) described below through the collaboration and understanding of all school personnel. As well, school and jurisdiction policies and practices should reflect an understanding of and commitment to the immersion program.

### Immersion Centre

- All students are enrolled in the French immersion program.
- French is the language of administration and the language of communication between all staff and students.
- The entire staff is fluent in French.
- All support services are offered in French.
- Students have the opportunity to live in French within the context of the school, a factor that favours a high degree of proficiency in French.



## Dual-track or Multi-track School

- The school houses both a French immersion program and an English program.
- The dual-track school is the most common school setting for immersion at all grade levels.
- A multi-track school houses more than two programs, for example, an English program, an early French immersion program and a late French immersion program or another second language program such as an Ukrainian bilingual program.
- Some members of the administrative and support staff may be fluent in French and thereby are able to provide some services in French.
- Creating a French environment in a dual-track setting is a challenge and requires active support and fostering of the use of French inside and outside the classroom.

## G. French Immersion Delivery Models

In Alberta, two types of immersion programs are offered.

### Early French Immersion

- Begins in Kindergarten or Grade 1 and is intended to continue through Grade 12.
- The most popular delivery model in Alberta and across Canada.
- Provides the best access and the greatest length of exposure to French to the most diverse range of students.
- No entry requirements; parents make the decision to enrol their children.
- Based on research that young children learn languages more easily than older learners. A young child's vocal structures are more flexible than an adult's, making the development of an authentic accent easier. Also, young children are more tolerant of ambiguity and do not feel as socially awkward when they find themselves in situations they do not understand.
- With very few exceptions, suitable for any child. Researchers have found that early immersion students with difficulties—learning disabilities, low intelligence, behavioural problems—will do as well academically as they would in a regular English program **provided they receive the same assistance as they would in the English program.**
- Gifted students can thrive in an immersion program, if they also receive the benefit of special programming.
- Initially concentrates on French language development to give students a sufficient understanding of French to learn to read and write in French and learn subject area content in French.
- Research and experience have clearly demonstrated that student proficiency in French is strongly correlated to the amount of time spent learning and using the language.
- Recognizing that many local factors may determine the time allocated to instruction in the French language, the [Guide to Education](#) recommends the following percentages of time to support the goals of French immersion:



Kindergarten	100%
Grades 1–2	90%–100%
Grades 3–6	70%–80%
Grades 7–9	50%–80%
Grades 10–12	40%–80%

### Late Immersion

- Begins in Grade 6 or 7 and is intended to continue through Grade 12.
- In the 2009-2010 school year, late immersion was offered in six school jurisdictions in Alberta: [Calgary Board of Education](#), [Calgary Catholic School District](#), [Christ the Redeemer School Division](#), [Edmonton Public Schools](#), [Red Deer Public School District](#) and [St. Albert Protestant Schools](#).
- Late immersion attracts a smaller student clientele with a more homogeneous range of abilities than early immersion.
- Enrolment is usually a decision made by the student, with parental support and encouragement.
- Attributes late immersion students usually possess are:
  - a predisposition for language learning;
  - strong English skills;
  - a keen interest to learn French;
  - efficient study skills and work habits;
  - a willingness to take risks and enjoy a challenge; and
  - a tolerance for change and ambiguity.
- While not essential, prior study of French is advantageous for the late immersion student.
- Late immersion students have more complex communication needs than early immersion students, and the academic demands upon them are greater. Therefore, the speed with which late immersion students must acquire skills in French is more crucial than in early immersion.
- For optimum language development, 90 to 100 % of class time should be spent in French in the first few months. This development progresses more rapidly than in early immersion.
- Initially, students can be expected to feel tired and stressed as they learn to cope with the greater demands of late immersion: paying close attention at all times, searching for the right words to express themselves and extra homework. Teachers, students and their parents must expect and be prepared for this stage.
- After the first few months, the recommended instructional time in French is the same for late immersion as for the early immersion program at the same grade levels.
- While late immersion students are expected to cover the same content as regular English program students, in the first year or two, some of the more complex concepts in some subject areas may be simplified. These are revisited in later months and years when students' language skills have increased.
- Graduation requirements for late French immersion students are the same as for all other students.





## Comparison—Early and Late Immersion

- Both early and late immersion programs produce graduates with high levels of French language proficiency. However, generally students who have had the most number of hours in French demonstrate the highest achievement.
- Early immersion students, despite representing a more diverse range of abilities, consistently score higher in speaking ability and listening skills than late immersion students and have been found to have greater confidence in using French. Researchers have also found a positive correlation between the relative second language proficiency of late immersion students and their IQ scores—a finding that does not apply to early immersion students.
- While little research has been done on the effects of combining classes of early and late immersion students in junior and senior high, researchers caution that the presence of late French immersion students in a combined class may slow the progress of the early immersion students.

## H. Research Findings

Dr. [Stephen Krashen](#), a well-known professor of linguistics at the University of Southern California with experience in neurolinguistics and second language acquisition, claims that:

“Canadian immersion is not simply another successful language teaching programme—it may be the most successful programme ever recorded in the professional language teaching literature. No programme has been as thoroughly studied and documented, and no programme, to my knowledge, has done as well.”  
“Immersion: Why it Works and What It Has Taught Us.” *Language and Society* 12 (Winter 1984), p. 61

In 1992, the Canadian Education Association reported that:

“French immersion is a proven successful Canadian approach to second language learning ... No educational program has been so intensively researched and evaluated in Canada as has French immersion. The effects of the program on the acquisition of French-language as well as English-language skills, and the academic achievement of French immersion students, have been well documented and research shows that the program works.”  
“French Immersion Today.” *CEA Information Note* (August 1992)

These statements go back many years but they still hold true in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 2000, Jim Cummins presented an [informative summary](#) of what was learned regarding French immersion over the past 30 years.

Literally hundreds of quantitative and qualitative studies have been carried out over more than 40 years of French immersion in Canada. These studies consistently show the following:

- Students achieve a high level of functional fluency in French by the end of Grade 12.
- After an initial lag lasting until a year or two after English language arts is introduced, early French immersion students perform as well in English as their English-program counterparts.



- No detrimental effects on students' English language skills have been found in studies of late immersion. In fact, some research tends to suggest that first language skills are enhanced by second language study.
- Immersion students do as well as their English-program counterparts in subject areas.
- There is a positive association between second language learning and cognitive and academic development.
- Immersion students experience no loss of cultural identity.
- Immersion students develop a **positive attitude and understanding** for other cultures.
- The more time learners spend immersed in French, the more competent they become.
- Students for whom French is a third language are aided by their mastery of the mother tongue and transfers of learning take place among the languages.

The Program for International Student Assessment ([PISA](#)) conducted in 2000 offers some insights into how well Canadian 15 year-olds enrolled in immersion programs are doing. In 2004, Statistics Canada published an [article](#) that looks at the PISA results for reading achievement, comparing French-immersion and non-immersion students in English-language school systems in the ten provinces.

In 2006, the [Language Research Centre](#) of the University of Calgary published *[A Review of the Literature on Second Language Learning](#)*. This document contains a wealth of information on various topics related to French immersion.

In the May 2007 newsletter of the [American Council on Immersion Education](#), Fred Genesee, Professor in the Department of Psychology at McGill University summarized the findings that have been reported consistently in studies conducted in Canada, the U.S. and elsewhere in the following article: *[Top Ten Most Consistent Findings from Research on Foreign Language Immersion](#)*. The August 2007 edition of *The Canadian Modern Language Review* includes *[Linguistic, Academic, and Cognitive Benefits of French Immersion](#)*. This article is an excellent reference for administrators and teachers.

## I. Myths and Facts

While the success of French immersion has been well documented by research, the program has also been the target of criticism. Much of this criticism has been constructive and has led to program improvements.

However, some of criticism stemmed from misconceptions about immersion, the results of questionable studies, or the results of valid research taken out of context. Consequently, over the years a number of myths about French immersion have emerged. These myths are encountered by administrators, educators and parents alike and can affect program delivery, program promotion as well as student enrolment and attrition.

In 1999, during a system-wide review of its French immersion programs, the Calgary Board of Education French Immersion Task Force identified [10 of the most common myths](#) about French immersion and the facts that dispel them.



The May 2007 newsletter of the American Council on Immersion Education has reproduced an article prepared by Canadian Parents for French: [\*Top Ten Answers for Parents about Immersion Education\*](#). This article provides succinctly answers to questions many parents may have regarding French immersion.

## J. Historical Overview of French Immersion

French immersion has been called “the great Canadian experiment that worked.” It is a modern-day educational innovation that has become a Canadian success story and has gained Canadian researchers, educators and parent groups respect worldwide.

### 1960s

French immersion began in Canada in response to parental interest spurred by political, social and economic [\*changes\*](#) happening in Quebec and throughout Canada. In Quebec, as a result of the Quiet Revolution, French was fast becoming the principal language of work and communication throughout the province, leaving anglophone Quebecers concerned for their futures. In the rest of Canada, socio-economic horizons were broadening—opening new career opportunities and changing attitudes.

The best-known French immersion experiment began in Quebec in 1965. After a two-year struggle to convince their reluctant school board, a group of 12 parents calling themselves the [\*St. Lambert Bilingual School Study Group\*](#) received permission to start a French immersion Kindergarten program. Their biggest challenge had been to make school board officials understand that children could learn French through immersion without harm to their competence in English.

They sought the advice and help of linguistics specialists, psychologists and other experts, among them [\*Dr. Wallace Lambert\*](#) of the Psychology Department, McGill University and the well-known Montreal neurosurgeon, Dr. Wilder Penfield. The involvement and professional advice of these two scholars helped to shape the future of second language education in Canada. This foresighted group of St. Lambert parents insisted that their fledgling program be carefully studied. By 1969, McGill University was releasing encouraging research results on the St. Lambert experiment.

In the same year, the report of the [\*Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism\*](#) led to the passage of the first [\*Official Languages Act\*](#). Anglophone parents throughout the country became increasingly concerned for their children’s future. They knew from personal experience that the traditional approach to second language instruction in school systems was inadequate to prepare young people for careers and lifestyles that would require competence in a second language. They began to call for improved opportunities in publicly funded school systems for their children to learn Canada’s other official language. Word of the St. Lambert results quickly spread, and soon parent committees across the country were demanding French immersion for their children.

### 1970s

Federal-provincial agreements to transfer money to the provinces and territories for first and second language education in the minority official language (English in Quebec and French elsewhere), the [\*Official Languages in Education Program\*](#) (OLEP), began in 1970.



By 1977, some 45,000 Canadian students were enrolled in French immersion programs and a national support group called [Canadian Parents for French](#) was formed. The [Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers/Association canadienne des professeurs d'immersion](#) (CAIT/ACPI) was also founded in this year.

Initially, many francophone parents enrolled their children in French immersion thinking that it would meet their children's educational needs. However, these parents quickly realized that this program was indeed conceived for children who wanted to learn French as a second language and not for children who had French as a first language.

### 1980-90s

French immersion enrolments increased by more than 650 percent during the 80s and 90s. By the 1998/99 school year, more than 320,000 students were enrolled in French immersion programs being offered in large cities and small towns from Vancouver Island to Newfoundland and Labrador to the Territories.

Following the adoption of the [Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#) in 1982, parents who had rights under Section 23 requested the establishment of French first language schools also known as francophone schools. In 1984, the first publicly funded francophone schools in Alberta were opened in Calgary and Edmonton. In 1994, the first francophone regional authorities were established in Alberta.

### 2010

Canada has become a world leader in second language teaching. Today, Canadian-style immersion programs can be found in countries around the world including Australia, Finland, Hong Kong, Singapore, Spain, and the United States.

## K. French Language Instruction in Alberta

### 1890s

While the earliest schools established in what is now Alberta used both English and French as languages of instruction, by 1892 the Council of Public Instruction of what was then the Northwest Territories abolished the use of French. It later gave permission for French-speaking students to study French grammar, reading, composition and literature for approximately one hour per day.

### 1920-1960

The 1921 School Act permitted instruction in French in grades 1 and 2 with one hour per day at each grade level thereafter, but the Department of Education did not identify learning resources. The teaching of French continued to be offered this way in many of Alberta's francophone communities until 1968.

### 1960-1970s

Amendments to the School Act in 1968 and 1970 increased the use of French as the language of instruction in Alberta schools and permitted boards and private schools to offer instruction in French from Grade 1 to 12.



By 1976, provincial regulations allowed French to be used as the language of instruction for a maximum of 80 percent of the school day from Grade 3 to Grade 12.

In 1978, the Language Services Branch of Alberta Education was established. In the same year, parents established the [Alberta Branch](#) of Canadian Parents for French (the [national association](#) having been established a year earlier). Enrolment in Alberta's French immersion programs was approximately 7,600 students.

### 1980-1990s

In Alberta, as in other parts of the country, parental interest in immersion programs grew slowly in the late 60s and early 70s, gaining momentum and spreading throughout the province during the 80s and early 90s.

By the mid-90s, immersion enrolments had grown to over 28,800 students. A decline was experienced in the second half of the 90s and by 1997-98, enrolments had fallen to just over 26,000. However, the last few years witness a small but steady increase.

### 2010-2011

Today, Alberta has 64 [school jurisdictions](#), five of which are [Francophone Regional authorities](#). Of the remaining 59, 27 [public school jurisdictions](#) and 13 [separate school jurisdictions](#) offer a French immersion program in over 180 schools throughout the province. French immersion is also offered in three [private schools](#).

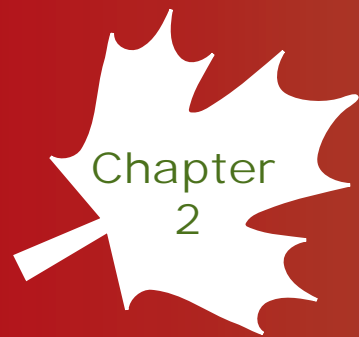
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# CONDITIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS

## A. Introduction

During the more than 40 years of French immersion education in Canada, hundreds of [research studies](#) have been conducted. The results of this extensive research and experience provide today's central office and school administrators with the knowledge and understanding to plan and deliver high-quality French immersion programs.

This chapter attempts to summarize [what has been learned](#) and to present conditions and practices to ensure the educational success of students in meeting the learner outcomes prescribed for French Language Arts and English Language Arts as well as the other courses presented in the [programs of study](#).

## B. Programming

### Program Characteristics

A successful French immersion program reflects current research and best practices from its entry point through Grade 12, including:

- ongoing development of all [French language skills](#)—listening, speaking, reading and writing across all subject areas;
- a wide range of courses offered in French, both [core](#) and [optional](#);
- availability of authentic [multimedia resources](#) appropriate to the age, interests and language skills of students;
- availability of [authentic French linguistic and cultural experiences](#);
- continuous evaluation of student achievement and progress;
- [implementation guides](#) and support materials developed or adapted for immersion programs;
- systematic monitoring and evaluation of the program.

### Amount of Time

Research and experience have demonstrated clearly that student proficiency in the French language is strongly correlated to the amount of time during which French is used as the language of instruction. Recognizing that many local factors may determine the time allocated to instruction in the French language, the [Guide to Education](#) recommends the following ranges as supportive of the objectives of French immersion.





Kindergarten	100%
Grades 1 – 2	90%–100%
Grades 3 – 6	70%–80%
Grades 7 – 9	50%–80%
Grades 10 – 12	40%–80%

## C. Teaching

French immersion teachers implement [curricular resources](#) developed by the French Language Education Services of Alberta Education. Teaching in a French immersion program requires attention to the initial and continuous development of the students' ability to communicate fluently in French, and to the development of the students' understanding and appreciation of the culture, attitudes, and values of [French-speaking communities in Alberta, Canada](#) and around the world.

### Teaching Strategies

Teaching strategies in all grades should be based on the latest immersion pedagogy, including:

- activities that are meaningful and contextualized;
- the development of all language skills;
- the integration of language and content, i.e. all French immersion teachers share the responsibility for the students' French language acquisition;
- the spontaneous and frequent use of French by students in teacher-student and student-student interactions;
- the use of authentic multimedia resources such as those available on the [LearnAlberta](#) website;
- opportunities for interaction with native French speakers;
- ongoing assessment of the students' language development and continuous adaptation to ensure appropriate language development.

### Teacher Characteristics

Ideally, French immersion teachers must have:

- native or native-like fluency in both oral and written French;
- training in and a good understanding of immersion methodology;
- an understanding of French culture and its relationship to language; and
- the ability to communicate in English.

## D. French Instruction

Because students enter early immersion with little or no knowledge of French, the program begins with a concentration on French language development to give students a sufficient understanding of French to learn to read and write in French and learn subject area content in French.



## Listening and Speaking Skills

- Listening and speaking skills are acquired in much the same way as children learn their first language: first by observation and listening, then by association of sounds with gestures and objects, and finally by imitation and repetition. This approach is often called a “gentle” introduction to second language learning.
- Active listening, spontaneous speaking and oral feedback underlie language development throughout an immersion program from Kindergarten to Grade 12. Thus French music, videos and lots of interaction are commonly used in the immersion classroom. Concerts, plays, public speaking, field trips, and even [exchange programs](#) are used to enhance cultural understanding and to help round out the students’ experiences with the language.

### i. The teacher

In the early years, the teacher:

- uses French all of the time, except if the students’ security is at risk (e.g. health or safety concerns);
- uses gestures, mime, objects and pictures to help students understand;
- includes songs, rhymes, stories and routines to help familiarize students with words and concepts and to create a safe and predictable environment for using the language.

As oral language development progresses, new vocabulary and language structures are introduced, first incidentally and later, as more complex material is introduced, methodically. Developing and enriching oral expression is very important in immersion and generally precedes the development of written communication skills.

The formal study of grammar, as indicated in the [FLA program of study](#), begins once the students have had sufficient experience in listening to, comprehending and speaking French.

At all grade levels, the teacher:

- constantly listens and observes to verify what information the students understand, adapting speech and activities as necessary to convey meaning;
- encourages the students to speak French, and corrects mistakes through repetition and role modeling;
- takes advantage of situations in which language development can occur naturally and effectively.

### ii. The student

In the early immersion years, students:

- learn to be very good listeners;
- are encouraged to speak French all the time, but for the first couple of years may use English to express a complex thought for which they have not yet learned the required French words;
- may not speak French outside of the classroom, or they may use French sounds and words at play and sing French songs learned during class;



- listen to French being spoken by the teacher, before they are expected to fully comprehend it;
- listen and understand before speaking; and
- speak French before reading and writing it.

## Reading and Writing Skills

### i. Reading skills

By the time formal instruction in **reading** and writing is introduced, students have a good basic knowledge of French. The teacher continues to use oral expression as the basis for reading activities: by first introducing texts orally (with the help of cues, props and gestures), and by encouraging lots of discussion to ensure a high level of comprehension. Texts are chosen to suit the students' interests and level of comprehension.

Because students need to develop prerequisite reading skills in French, the Grade 1 French immersion teacher may introduce formal French reading instruction more gradually than the English-program teacher. This delay means that immersion students may appear to be slightly behind their English program counterparts in learning to read. Parents often raise concerns at this stage. Consequently, it is very important that they receive clear explanations regarding language and literacy development in immersion and their role in the process, and the reassurance that soon their child will be reading in two languages.

Immersion parents should be encouraged to read to their children in English. Children readily transfer reading skills and strategies from one language to the other. A love of reading will serve a student well in both languages.

### ii. Writing skills

Writing correctly in any language not only involves practice in handwriting but also requires knowledge of grammar and syntax. Knowing oral grammar facilitates and simplifies rule learning because the students are able to generalize from what they know. Therefore in immersion, the formal study of the written language begins once the students have had sufficient experience in listening, speaking and reading. The teaching of grammatical concepts and writing skills is then integrated in the teaching of all the other courses taught in French.

## E. English Instruction

As well as gaining functional fluency in French, immersion students must acquire English language skills equivalent to those of their English-program peers. This is one of the biggest concerns of many immersion parents and of parents considering immersion for their child. After all, there would be little value in children learning a second language, if their first language skills were to suffer.

Once students have developed a good foundation in French, formal instruction of English is introduced. Most immersion students come from English home environments and all are



exposed to English in the greater community. Thus, in introducing [English Language Arts](#), the teacher helps students to build on what they already know through their experiences with English and the skills they have gained while learning to read and write in French. For example, because of the number of cognates (up to 40%), it is easy for students to make transfers from English to French and vice versa. The teacher helps students to sort out the differences between French and English that may cause confusion during the transition from French to English reading and writing.

An examination of the [research](#) and an understanding of the typical immersion student's anglophone milieu indicate no cause for concern.

- Quantitative and qualitative research findings into the English skills of immersion students are clear and consistent. After an initial lag lasting until a year or two after English Language Arts is introduced, early French immersion students perform as well in English as their English program counterparts. There is further evidence that from late elementary on, early immersion students may out-perform their English program counterparts in some English skills (e.g. the figurative and metaphoric use of language).
- Most immersion students arrive at school having learned English at home as their first language. The introduction of French has no negative effects on their English language competency. On the contrary, learning a second language can enhance first language abilities.

The effect of learning a second language (e.g. French) on first language skills has been virtually positive in all studies. The loss of instructional time in English in favour of the second language has never been shown to have negative effects on the achievement of the first language [...] One can confidently assume that cognitive abilities acquired in the learning of one language can be put to use in the acquisition and proficiency of the other language. In many studies, first language skills were shown to be enhanced, even if instruction in L1 was reduced in favour of L2 instruction.

(Bournot-Trites, M. and U. Tallowitz. *Report of Current Research on the Effects of Second Language Learning on First Language Literacy Skills*. 2002, p. 3)

When discussing the results of English Language Arts Achievement Tests for French immersion students, Jim Brackenbury from Learner Assessment explains that over time “[according to the Grade 3 English Language Arts Achievement Tests the] French immersion students do just fine. They are obviously not suffering any damage in English Language Arts by being in a French immersion program.” (“Achievement Tests and Diploma Exams: Results and Implications for French Immersion Programs.” *French Immersion in Alberta. Building the Future: Leading the Way 2000—Conference Report*, p. 151.) He goes on to say that

...the gap between the English results and the French immersion results [on English Language Arts achievement tests] gets wider from Grade 3 to 9. So in Grade 9 we have as close to 100% of [immersion] students as you are going to get, meeting acceptable standards and a marked gap at the standard of excellence, well above the 15% requirement. (loc. cit.)



## F. When Should English Language Arts Be Introduced?

While the early immersion model is based on an initial intense exposure to French, researchers have not yet provided a definitive answer on the optimum time to introduce English.

Over the past three decades, several variations on the early French immersion model have been tried, from the “bilingual” or “partial immersion” approach, in which as much as half the time is spent in English and half in French, to “total immersion,” in which all of the time for the first few years is spent in French.

“...in the past, some parents have opted for a partial immersion program rather than total immersion program because of fears regarding their child’s English development. These fears appear to have little basis. The greater exposure to French in early total immersion has no detrimental effect on children’s achievement in English.”

James Cummins, *Research Findings from French Immersion Programs Across Canada: A Parent’s Guide. A CPF Special Report*, n.d.

Today, early total immersion is by far the most common approach used across the country because of student success in attaining high levels of French achievement. In the typical early total immersion program English is introduced in Grade 3.

“French immersion students are not disadvantaged in English in the medium to long term. Moreover, results from many studies... also show that early total French immersion students’ French skills are better than those of students who receive less instruction in French. There is thus a strong case for intensive French immersion in the early grades, with English instruction introduced gradually from Grade 2 or 3 onward.”

M. Turnbull, S. Lapkin, D. Hart, (2001) *Grade 3 Immersion Students’ Performance in Literacy and Mathematics: Province-wide Results from Ontario (1998-1999)*, 24.

In brief, we know from [extensive research studies](#) that:

- early immersion students consistently perform as well as their English-program peers in all skill areas by the end of Grade 6, **no matter** when [English Language Arts](#) is introduced, and that they continue to do so through Grade 12;
- immersion students who learn to read in French first, and remain in French immersion, experience no long-term detrimental effect on English reading skills; and
- students readily transfer reading skills from one language to another.

There is no conclusive research yet to indicate whether:

- learning to read in English first or concurrently with learning to read in French has any advantages or disadvantages, or
- a threshold of instructional time in French is necessary to achieve measurable progress in French.



## G. Who Teaches the English Portion of Time?

In his book *Learning Through Two Languages*, Fred Genessee considers “the use of monolingual language models” to be a distinctive and recommended feature of early immersion programs in Canada. By this he means the French teacher speaks only French with the students, leaving instruction of English Language Arts and other subjects taught in English to English-speaking teachers. This is important, he advises, to encourage the use of French among immersion students, whose tendency would otherwise be to use English. A disadvantage to this model is that the English itinerant teacher does not have the same opportunities as the classroom teacher to integrate the curriculum.

Regardless of the model chosen, that is, either the classroom teacher teaching English Language Arts (ELA) or an itinerant teacher, it is essential that the teacher be an effective model in the language of instruction. If the classroom teacher has the responsibility for teaching ELA, they must be vigilant to limit the use of English to the classroom time allotted to that subject. Effective language modelling by teachers with native-like fluency in the language of instruction (be it the French or English portion of classroom time) is an important aspect of the immersion approach, given the emphasis on second language learning and the importance of full development of English language skills.

Teachers who instruct immersion students in ELA and other subjects in English require:

- an understanding of the language learning process, including how students make transferences between languages and what aspects of one language may interfere with or support the acquisition of the other; and
- an understanding of how to maximize the complementary aspects of English and French instruction.

## H. Teaching the Content Subjects

Language development, as with reading and writing skills, continues and broadens with the introduction of subject content. Early mathematics and science concepts are very concrete and easily taught with the use of visual aids and hands-on activities. The fine arts, especially music and drama, as well as physical education, provide an abundance of meaningful language learning opportunities.

Teaching techniques and materials are used to encourage teacher-student and student-student interaction. Activity-oriented learning continues throughout all grades to allow for daily use of the language by students, and thus continued oral development. At the secondary level, French language arts teachers and those teaching other subjects in French should meet at regular intervals to implement effectively language teaching across the curriculum.

Not only do the various disciplines and specialty areas—such as social studies, the sciences, music, art, drama and physical education—taught in French add a cultural component to students’ language experience, they add an important dimension to the second language learners’ language acquisition by providing French language learning experiences in contexts other than the French language arts class, therefore increasing the time spent learning and using French.



## I. Kindergarten

Although enrolment in Kindergarten is optional in Alberta, most children begin school in Kindergarten and most immersion programs begin there.

A [French immersion Kindergarten](#) program has the same general goals as an English Kindergarten program with the added goal of introducing children to the French language in a “gentle” or natural way. Janette Pelletier (1998) discovered significant differences between French immersion and English Kindergarten students. Children in a French immersion Kindergarten demonstrated keener awareness of the teacher’s role in teaching as well as the importance of learning as the reason for being in school. She also emphasized the following:

“Children in second language classes are more apt to pay closer attention to paralinguistic aspects of teacher behaviour in order to figure out what is being said. In addition, children in FI may be more attuned to learning, since an explicit awareness of not understanding versus understanding is an ongoing process in second language programs.” (p. 254)

In a French immersion Kindergarten classroom, the introduction to French is an important step in the process of developing a threshold of language comprehension sufficient for the immersion student to develop literacy in French and to use French to construct his or her knowledge in a variety of subject areas.

The following are characteristics of an effective French immersion Kindergarten classroom:

- linguistically rich décor with French vocabulary supported by pictures and objects covering the walls;
- easy accessibility to French books, videos, music and games;
- the teacher speaks French all of the time (except if the students’ security is at risk) and using gestures, mime, intonation, pictures, and objects to convey meaning;
- the teacher encourages students to try French through the use of regular activities (such as the daily calendar), rhyme and songs;
- an emphasis on listening skills to stimulate language acquisition;
- students speak English to the teacher and among themselves, gradually trying French sounds and soon interspersing their English with French words;
- the incorporation of French culture through [authentic activities](#) and materials, visits from Francophones and field trips; and
- parents involved in such activities as helping with snacks, preparing materials and displays, supervising games, assisting with field trips, helping children with their clothing, and organizing the classroom library—parents are encouraged to learn French songs and vocabulary along with their child.

Parents are often concerned about their roles as immersion parents and their ability to support their children or be involved in the Kindergarten classroom if they speak little or no French. They are often also concerned about how their children will cope with the all-French classroom environment. They require reassurance, information and opportunities to see for themselves that there is no cause for concern.



Alberta Education has three publications for immersion parents:

- [Curriculum Handbook for Parents](#) presents the concepts and skills of all core and complementary subjects, including French Language Arts, at all grade levels.
- [Curriculum Summaries](#) present an overview of the key concepts and skills of all core and complementary subjects, including French Language Arts, at all grade levels.
- [\*Yes, You Can Help! Information and Inspiration for French Immersion Parents\*](#)

## J. French Immersion at the Secondary Level

While to the unilingual observer French immersion students may appear quite proficient in French by the end of Grade 6 or 9, continuing French immersion through Grade 12 is essential if they are to achieve the goals of the French immersion program.

The aim of French immersion at the secondary level is to further the students' French language competencies in keeping with their intellectual, social and emotional development. A French immersion program at the secondary level should offer:

- at least 40% instructional time in French;
- in a semestered environment, some courses taught in French in each semester, so that students are exposed to and use French continually;
- in addition to FLA, a variety of language-rich courses taught in French;
- a good supply of age-appropriate, subject-oriented reference materials in a variety of media, as well as suitable materials for leisure reading.

The [Alberta Distance Learning Centre](#) (ADLC) has developed a [French immersion website](#). ADLC offers students every opportunity to pursue their studies in French immersion in their current school setting. ADLC offers courses in Science, Mathematics, French Language Arts, Social Studies, and CALM as well as CTS courses, Psychology, Forensics, and Art.

Secondary schools should also be promoting and assisting students to explore [opportunities for study in French](#) beyond Grade 12.

## K. The Importance of Culture

While the amount of exposure to French is important for students' second language development, it is equally important that the exposure be relevant, authentic and varied. Language does not stand alone but is integral to the way of life of those who speak it. Language should not be separated from its cultural component.

Ensuring adequate exposure to culture in a French immersion program includes:

- exposing students to French through a [variety of cultural practices](#);
- providing students with opportunities to experience [music, art and media](#), literature, [drama](#) and [dance](#) in French;





- facilitating student interaction with native French speakers who represent the cultural diversity of [La Francophonie](#), through such means as classroom guests, videos, field trips and exchanges;
- organizing activities during the [Rendez-vous de la francophonie](#) held annually in March;
- visiting the French community centres in [Calgary](#) and [Edmonton](#);
- using resources and materials that reflect authentic, modern francophone life and the diversity that exists within francophone communities in Canada and around the world; and
- encouraging students to explore the Canadian [Francophonie](#) on their own outside school through such means as reading the weekly [Le Franco](#), visiting web sites and other virtual forums in French, watching [French TV](#), listening to French radio, reading in French, listening to French music, attending French theatre or [francophone community festivals](#).

## L. Language Instruction Across the Disciplines

Not only do the various disciplines and specialty areas—such as music, art, drama and physical education—taught in French add a cultural component to students’ language experience, they add an important dimension to the second language learners’ language acquisition by:

- balancing the students’ constant exposure to English during home and community life, with similar French content;
- providing real-life contexts through which students can acquire vocabulary and language structures, learn idioms, and explore abstract concepts in a more comfortable and effortless way than through regular classroom instruction;
- providing students with language skills to discuss with native speakers topics beyond the scope of course content.

## M. Leadership

A successful French immersion program requires jurisdictional and school leaders who:

- value French second language learning as an integral part of a world-class education;
- believe in French immersion as an effective means of learning French as a second language;
- acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to offer, support and maintain a high-quality program; and
- advocate for the program, its accessibility and sustainability.

## N. Stability

French immersion programs operate most effectively when they are stable from year to year. This requires a commitment on the part of the school board and central administration to long-range plans that include:

- optimal use of all available funding;
- established entry points and continuation of the program through all grades;
- competent staff with minimal turnover from year to year;



- sites that provide optimal access for potential clientele and adequate space to allow for the addition of grade levels and growth in enrolment;
- effective communication with parents to ensure adequate and stable enrolments; and
- effective communication with the community-at-large to ensure recruitment of new students.

## O. Professional Development

Administrators and teachers must remain abreast of research, issues and innovations related to their respective roles and responsibilities for the French immersion program.

Central office and school administrators require:

- an understanding of second language learning and the nature and goals of French immersion programs;
- an understanding of immersion methodology;
- knowledge and insights regarding administrative issues specific to French immersion programs;
- access to current research and developments in immersion methodology; and
- opportunities to network and engage in problem-solving with their colleagues, both within and outside the school jurisdiction.

French immersion teachers require:

- opportunities, which may include release time, to meet, network, plan activities and develop ideas with colleagues, both within and outside their programs, schools and jurisdictions;
- opportunities to attend workshops and conferences on French immersion-related topics, many of which may best be given in French;
- access to current research and developments in teaching practices;
- opportunities to maintain and improve their French language skills and cultural awareness; and
- in-service opportunities suited to their specific needs as immersion teachers.

The [Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia](#) offer, on a yearly basis, workshops for immersion teachers to help them implement successfully newly approved programs. [Bursaries](#) are available for French immersion to attend these workshops or other professional development opportunities.

## P. Resources

Planning and budgeting at all levels must provide for

- adequate, authentic and age-appropriate French resources from the entry grade through Grade 12 that support the learning outcomes of the different courses as well as general classroom instruction and activities;



- the establishment of high-quality French language, multi-media library collections;
- authentic French language experiences.

## Q. Support Services

The success of a French immersion program requires that jurisdictions and schools provide adequate support services from the program entry grade through Grade 12, including:

- central office staff who provide direction and support to school-based administrators and teachers;
- a pool of French-speaking substitute teachers qualified to teach immersion;
- access to appropriate testing and diagnostic services for French immersion students experiencing learning difficulties;
- access to appropriate resource programs, learning assistance, and gifted programs for French immersion students; and
- guidance counsellors able to meet the needs of French immersion students.

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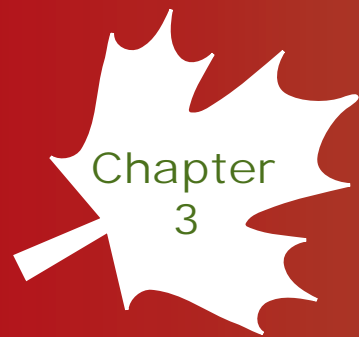
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# PROVIDING PROVINCIAL LEADERSHIP FOR FRENCH IMMERSION

## A. Introduction

The Government of Alberta encourages and supports the establishment and maintenance of the French immersion program as an excellent vehicle for realizing a student’s potential. Students registered in a French immersion program are expected to reach the same learner outcomes prescribed in the [programs of study](#) as those students who choose to study in the English program. In addition, graduates of French immersion programs will have had the opportunity to achieve a high level of proficiency in a second language.

## B. Language Education in Alberta

Education is a provincial government responsibility in Canada. In Alberta, education is governed principally by the *School Act* as well as regulations pursuant to the Act. Rights and responsibilities of the [Minister of Education](#), of students, parents, teachers, principals and school boards are set out in the legislation.

According to section 11 of the *School Act*, a board may authorize the use of French or any other language as a language of instruction. Since French is one of Canada’s two official languages, learning French is considered important both to enhance opportunities for living and working throughout Canada and the world as well as to foster a greater understanding between French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians. Alberta Education encourages opportunities for all Alberta students to learn French by making available programs and services for alternative French language programs (including French immersion) under section 21 of the *School Act*.

## C. School Administration

### Guide to Education

The [Guide to Education](#) contains the key requirements and other pertinent information regarding the implementation and delivery of Kindergarten to Grade 12 provincially authorized [programs](#) for students enrolled in Alberta schools.

### Time Requirements

Of particular interest to French immersion administrators is the recommended time requirements at different grade levels. Research and experience have demonstrated clearly that student proficiency in the French language is strongly correlated to the amount of time during which French is used as the language of instruction. Recognizing that many local factors may determine the time allocated to instruction in the French language, the following ranges are recommended as supportive of the objectives of French immersion.



Kindergarten	100%
Grades 1 – 2	90%–100%
Grades 3 – 6	70%–80%
Grades 7 – 9	50%–80%
Grades 10 – 12	40%–80%

## Elementary

In planning the immersion program in the elementary grades, the following percentage of time allocations for the school year are recommended for required and optional subject areas:

### Grades 1 and 2

Subject Areas	French Immersion Programming Percentage
<u>English Language Arts/French Language Arts</u>	30%
<u>Mathématiques</u>	15%
<u>Sciences</u>	10%
<u>Études sociales</u>	10%
<u>Beaux-arts</u>	10%
<u>Santé et préparation pour la vie and Éducation physique</u>	10%
Time for other subjects; e.g., drama, religious instruction.	15%

### Grades 3 to 6

Subject Areas	Francophone/ French Immersion Programming Percentage
<u>English Language Arts/French Language Arts</u>	35%
<u>Mathématiques</u>	15%
<u>Sciences</u>	10%
<u>Études sociales</u>	10%
<u>Beaux-arts</u>	10%
<u>Santé et préparation pour la vie and Éducation physique</u>	10%
Time for other subjects; e.g., drama, religious instruction.	10%



## Junior High

At the junior high level, the following hours per year are recommended:

Subject Areas	Hours Per Year
<a href="#">French Language Arts and English Language Arts</a>	250
<a href="#">Mathématiques</a>	100
<a href="#">Sciences</a>	100
<a href="#">Études sociales</a>	100
<a href="#">Éducation physique</a>	75
<a href="#">Santé et préparation pour la vie</a>	50
<a href="#">Optional Courses (Time may vary.)</a>	

French immersion junior high school students are required to take only one authorized optional course rather than the two that are required of the other students registered in the English program.

At the senior high level, it is the number of credits that determines the time requirement for teaching a given course in English or French.

## D. Program Resources

French Language Education Services (FLES) develops [curriculum and support documents](#) in French for each subject from Kindergarten to Grade 12 for French immersion teachers. It also authorizes student basic and support resources as well as teaching resources that are carried by the [Learning Resources Centre](#) (LRC) and listed in the *Français* section of the [LRC catalogue](#).

### Kindergarten

Kindergarten is intended for children in the year prior to entry into Grade 1. As in regular Kindergarten programs, children in French immersion programs learn the foundations that will enable them to succeed in Grade 1 and beyond. A French immersion Kindergarten is the child's first step in acquiring another language and gaining an appreciation of culture. It emphasizes French language acquisition to prepare the children for more structured learning in the elementary grades. The program offered is planned, implemented and evaluated on the basis of the [Programme d'éducation pour la maternelle – immersion](#) (2008).

FLES has also developed two support documents for French immersion Kindergarten teachers: a [guide](#) that provides a variety of strategies and activities and a [bibliography of children's literature](#) suitable for K-3 French immersion students.

### Grades 1 to 12

Programs of Study as well as support documents have been developed in French by Alberta Education for [core](#) and [optional](#) courses. There are also many [resources](#) available to teachers who have students with special education needs.

## E. Provincial Funding

As it does for all educational programs offered in Alberta's publicly funded school system, Alberta Education assumes responsibility for most of the funding provided to school





jurisdictions that offer a French immersion program. The [Funding Manual for School Authorities](#) informs school jurisdictions of the funding available for a given school year as well as the formulas, rates, criteria and reporting requirements. Administrators should consult the current Funding Manual to know the funding available for alternative French language programs, including French immersion. This funding includes the basic education grant as well as urban transportation funding.

## F. Federal Funding

### Program Funding

Part 4.2 of the [Funding Manual for School Authorities](#) describes the funding available under the [Protocol for Agreements for Minority Language Education and Second-Language Instruction](#) in support of alternative French programs, including French immersion.

The following table summarizes the minimum number of instructional hours per year, using French as the language of instruction, that are required to qualify for Official Languages in Education program funding and for full-time equivalent (FTE) funding in alternative French language programs (including French immersion) and in French first language programs.

Alternative French Language Programs	Instructional Hours in French for Minimum Program Funding	Instructional Hours in French for Full FTE Funding
Kindergarten	238	712
Grades 1 to 6	475	712
Grades 7 to 9	380	570
Grades 10 to 12	250 (10 credits)	600

School authorities only receive funding at the rate for French as a second language for students who receive less than the above minimum number of instructional hours in French, i.e., less than 238 hours in Kindergarten, less than 475 hours in Grade 1 to Grade 6, less than 380 hours in Grade 7 to Grade 9, and less than 250 hours in Grade 10 to Grade 12.

### Teacher Bursary Program

The [Teacher Bursary Program](#) is a bursary for professional training available to French language educators. Funding is available for courses offered in French in Canada and in Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, as well as for conferences and workshops offered in French within Canada. This program is funded by [Canadian Heritage](#) and administered by Alberta Education. Bursaries are awarded on a first-come, first-served basis.

The maximum bursary amount per person for one year is \$2,200 (2010–2011 school year). Bursary awards paid directly to an individual are taxable. Recipients must keep track of all expenses incurred should they wish to submit these against the bursary, when preparing to file an annual income tax return.

Information with regard to this bursary program is sent to all schools offering a French immersion program. Principals are encouraged to share this information with all staff members working directly with students in their French immersion program and encourage these staff members to apply for these funds for their own individual and professional development.



## Students: Language Learning Program

The [Council of Ministers of Education, Canada](#) (CMEC) has created the [Explore](#) program to help students improve their knowledge of one of Canada's two official languages and, at the same time, acquire a deeper appreciation for the culture embedded in the language.

CMEC administers this program in collaboration with the provinces and territories. [Canadian Heritage](#) funds the program through the [Protocol for Agreements for Minority Language Education and Second-Language Instruction](#).

Provinces and territories award bursaries by random selection based on provincial and territorial allotments and institutional quotas. Priority is given to those who have not previously received a bursary through the [Explore](#) program.

Administrators are encouraged to share this information with their secondary students as soon as it is distributed to schools. As well, this program may be used to enhance a French immersion program where numbers do not permit the range of courses offered in larger urban schools.

## Students: Language Development Exchange Program

Alberta Education sponsors the [French Student Language Development Exchange Program](#) for high school students. One of these exchanges is with the province of Quebec. In September, Alberta students host exchange partners from Quebec who spend three months here attending high school classes in English and living in the homes of their Alberta partners. In February, Alberta students travel to Quebec for a similar three-month experience in French. While the focus is on developing language skills, being immersed in a culture and lifestyle different to the one they are accustomed to also develops participants' coping and interpersonal skills.

## Language Assistants

The [Council of Ministers of Education, Canada](#) (CMEC) offers a program in which language assistants, having French or English as their first language, are assigned to elementary, secondary, and postsecondary institutions in another region of the country. They work with second-language teachers to provide students with the opportunity to interact with a native speaker and be introduced to the use of the language in daily life and its relation to its culture.

[Odyssey](#) offers language assistants full-time work in a different region of country, as they use their first language to make that language more alive and culturally vibrant for second-language students. English first-language speakers find themselves in French-language communities and French first-language speakers may be in English communities or working with Francophones in minority settings. Leading classroom language activities, whether in an elementary, secondary, or postsecondary institution, language assistants work for 25 hours a week from the beginning of September to the end of May, earning a salary and exploring the regional diversity of Canada.

Administrators of French immersion programs are encouraged to request that a language assistant be placed in their school at no cost to the school. Language assistants work directly with students learning their second official language and are an invaluable resource to relay the culture associated with the language being taught. Administrators of high school French immersion programs are also encouraged to inform their students about this program as it may be of interest to those pursuing post-secondary studies, who require financial assistance or would like a language-related experience.



## Project Support and Development for School Jurisdictions

Federal financial assistance is available to school jurisdictions, institutions and organizations to defray up to 50% of the additional costs of the French language programs and projects. Support for approved projects will cover costs to a maximum of 50% of the budget for the project.

Generally, projects receive approval for four years, however, one-year projects are also considered. Applicants are encouraged to identify their longer term funding requirements to ensure that these can be considered in the coming years under the Canada-Alberta agreement for the [Protocol for Agreements for Minority Language Education and Second-Language Instruction](#).

Information with regard to funding for French project support and for program development is sent to all school jurisdictions. Principals are encouraged to work with central office staff to request funding for school-based or system-wide initiatives.

## G. Provincial Assessment

Learner Assessment of Alberta Education is committed to supporting teachers and school system administrators in assessing their students' achievement of provincial learner outcomes and in reporting their results to their communities. In accordance with the [Student Evaluation Regulation](#), Learner Assessment develops and oversees the [provincial testing program](#).

Learner Assessment develops administers and marks the provincial [achievement tests](#) administered in grades 3, 6 and 9 and the [Grade 12 diploma exams](#). French versions of all achievement tests and diploma exams, except those in English Language Arts and Science 30, are provided for students whose language of instruction is French. Achievement tests for French Language Arts are administered in grades 3, 6 and 9.

General information bulletins are provided in French for both [achievement tests](#) and [Grade 12 diploma exams](#). French versions of [student guides](#) for the following exams are also available: Biologie 30, Études sociales 30-1, Études sociales 30-2 and French Language Arts 30-1.

## H. French Immersion Students' Results

A question often asked by immersion parents is how well do immersion students perform on provincial achievement tests and diploma examinations as compared to regular program students. Learner Assessment has been administering these exams in French for over 25 years.

Students in French immersion programs do very well on achievement tests and diploma examinations compared with students in all other programs. Immersion students do appear to benefit from participation in a French immersion program, not only by learning French but also by enhanced learning in English Language Arts and the content subjects.

In a recent analysis done by Learner Assessment (November 2010), Alberta Education, results for French immersion students on the provincial achievement tests show the following:

- The proportion of students in the French immersion program is approximately 8% at Grade 3, and between 5.5% and 6% at Grades 6 and 9.



- In both English language arts and mathematics, immersion students in Grade 3 are still catching up and dealing with a bilingual education, so there are fewer students at the standard of excellence than students in the regular program. However, in Grades 6 and 9, there are many more French immersion students at both the standard of excellence and the acceptable standard.
- By the time immersion students reach Grade 9, more than 30% of them are at the standard of excellence in English language arts and mathematics, compared to 17% to 20% in the regular program.
- In science and social studies, immersion students achieve weaker results in Grade 6 compared to the regular program at both the acceptable standard and the standard of excellence. However, in Grade 9, immersion and regular students have similar results at the acceptable standard, but there are still fewer immersion students at the standard of excellence.
- These results in science and social studies may be related to vocabulary development. In an English-language environment, students build their vocabularies both inside and outside school and students with an extensive vocabulary will excel in both science and social studies. Immersion students, unless they make special efforts, will have a school vocabulary in French, and an outside vocabulary in English.

Results for French immersion students on the Grade 12 diploma examinations show the following:

- The proportion of students in the French immersion program is approximately 3.6% of the Grade 12 population, with fewer school jurisdictions offering high school immersion programming.
- Immersion students generally take mathematics and social studies in French, and sciences in English. Of the immersion students who wrote French Language Arts 30, 83.6% took Pure Mathematics 30 in French, and 89.0% took either Social Studies 30-1 or 30-2 in French. The proportions taking sciences in French were 31.5% in Chemistry 30, 30.5% in Biology 30, and 21.8% in Physics 30.
- French immersion students were above the provincial average in all subjects, with differences ranging from a low of 1.7% in Social Studies 30-1 to a high of 7.8% in English Language Arts 30-1.
- French immersion students tend to take the 30 or 30-1 stream when offered a choice of courses at different levels in a subject. In mathematics, at least 87% of immersion students take Pure Mathematics 30, compared to 68% provincially; in English, at least 93% take English 30-1, compared to 68% provincially; and at least 92% take Social Studies 30-1, compared to 62.1% provincially.

## I. Language of Diplomas and Transcripts

Diplomas, certificates, transcripts and statements of courses and marks are issued in the English language. Principals of schools with alternative French language programs (including French immersion) are expected to advise their students that they can request a French version of their Alberta High School Diploma.

Principals should submit a letter to Learner Records and Data Exchange naming those students wanting French diplomas and transcripts.



## J. French Language Education Services

French Language Education Services (FLES)/Direction de l'éducation française (DÉF) develops educational resources to support the teaching and learning of French as a first or second language. In accordance with the *School Act*, the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the specific needs of its clientele, French Language Education Services carries out its mission through the following:

- to advise the minister and to recommend policies on any matter regarding French language education;
- to assume a leadership role in French language education matters based on the best known principles and practices;
- to develop and evaluate French language programs of study and recommend these for ministerial approval;
- to support the implementation of French language programs of study.

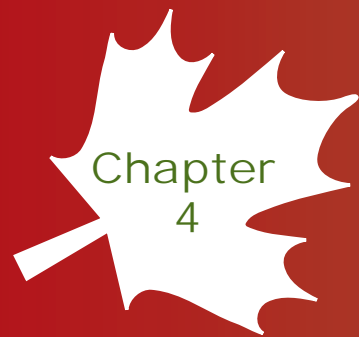
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# PROVIDING JURISDICTIONAL LEADERSHIP FOR FRENCH IMMERSION

## A. Introduction

The success of any [French immersion program](#) is dependent upon strong leadership throughout the education system. Within a school jurisdiction, the necessary leadership begins with the Board and in the central office. The school community and its decision-makers must value French language learning as part of a world-class education. Strong support for French immersion programs should be visible in and integral to the structure and functions of the total school system, including the equitable allocation of resources.

In 1998, the *French Immersion in Alberta: Building the Future* conference brought together some 160 trustees, senior central office administrators, and school principals of immersion programs. They explored issues and policy matters specific to French immersion programs and considered their respective roles and responsibilities for the programs. Delegates made more than 50 recommendations to guide themselves, their peers and other stakeholders in the effective delivery of French immersion programs in Alberta.

The following are some of the recommendations made by and directed to trustees, superintendents and senior administrators. They are presented here to offer potential direction for decision-makers.

## B. Roles and Responsibilities

### Trustees

As elected individuals responsible to the community and to all constituents within that community, trustees should:

- become informed about French immersion programs: [benefits](#), [funding](#), how they work and how they are best supported;
- ensure that policies are enabling; that they underscore the value and benefits of French immersion in the broadest sense of governance and set the stage of successful establishment and ongoing support of the programs;
- ensure that French immersion is considered in the three-year education plans and that a long-term plan is in place to offer a full program from entry point to Grade 12; commit to offering the best [French immersion program](#) possible.



## Superintendents and Senior Administrators

### i. Program

- Inform themselves about the [benefits of second language learning](#) (and specifically [French second language learning](#)) for their students' overall education and futures.
- Inform themselves about immersion as a means of delivering French second language learning and of the conditions under which the goals of an immersion program can be achieved.
- Provide 100% exposure to French in the early childhood years of French immersion, and delay the introduction of English until Grade 3.
- Attend a conference specifically about [French immersion programs](#).
- Become better informed about the French immersion program through such means as:
  - ⇒ increasing their involvement with school councils;
  - ⇒ inviting [Canadian Parents for French](#) (CPF) and students/graduates to make presentations at school board meetings; and
  - ⇒ attending conferences and taking advantage of other learning opportunities.

### ii. Program delivery

- Identify potential issues and challenges related to the delivery of a French immersion program and choose strategies to address them.
- Assign to French immersion schools administrators whose values and beliefs are supportive of the program.
- Ensure support from other jurisdiction level staff, such as those responsible for space allocation, transportation, curriculum support and staff recruitment.
- Think in more creative and innovative ways when considering new means of delivery and support for French immersion programs. Suggestions include:
  - ⇒ introducing late immersion;
  - ⇒ establishing bilingual certificates; and
  - ⇒ linking with community groups to promote the benefits of French immersion and provide students with real-life experiences in French.

### iii. Funding

- Identify and understand all potential sources of [provincial](#) and federal funding for French immersion programs.
- Set realistic and flexible enrolment targets (minimum enrolments) to enable the program to grow.
- Identify the additional costs of a French immersion program (Note: Most costs are basic and do not require extra funds such as teachers, desks, classroom space and general supplies; however jurisdictions and schools will need to plan for the purchase of French textbooks, library materials and teacher resources.)



#### iv. Networking

- Actively promote networking among their immersion schools and establish regional partnerships with neighbouring jurisdictions such as [MERFIP](#) (Metropolitan Edmonton Regional French Immersion Program) by facilitating jurisdictional member participation. The benefits of such partnerships include:
  - ⇒ networking among French immersion teachers and administrators;
  - ⇒ sharing of school/jurisdiction resources;
  - ⇒ sharing the services of a French immersion consultant/specialist; and
  - ⇒ providing and coordinating quality professional development activities.

#### v. Leadership

- Deal directly and openly with perceptions of inequity resulting from different treatment of French immersion and English programs, and be prepared to explain to parents and teachers the reasons for these differences.

#### vi. Program promotion

- Actively promote the [benefits](#) of French second language education, more specifically of French immersion as a credible program of choice.

#### vii. Students with special needs

- Establish the necessary support services for French immersion students with special needs (see Section Students with Diverse Needs) and adopt policies and procedures to assess the needs of students; provide the required services; and ease the transition if, after considering all other options, it is determined that a transfer out from the immersion program is necessary. Provide 100% exposure to French in the early childhood years of French immersion, and delay the introduction of English until Grade 3.

## C. Policy Matters

### The Value of Second Language Learning in Education

It has long been recognized that learning a [second language benefits](#) students' overall education and personal development. Since French is one of Canada's official languages, many parents want their children to have opportunities to learn French as a second language. Not only does learning French foster a greater understanding among Canadians, it increases their children's opportunities for living and working within Canada and around the world.

Board policies regarding French immersion education should provide the necessary framework for the program to succeed. The following are aspects to consider when developing such policies. Second language learning:

- fosters greater understanding among all Canadians;
- increases opportunities for living and working in Canada and other parts of the world;
- enhances knowledge of one's first language;
- makes learning additional languages easier; and
- increases understanding of other peoples and cultures.





## Access and Equity

While establishing and maintaining a French immersion program is ultimately a local decision, it is expected that any jurisdiction will respond to the needs of its community.

Jurisdictional policies should allow all students reasonable access to French immersion programs. This involves considering matters such as:

- location of the French immersion program;
- student transportation;
- inclusiveness of the program through provision of support for students with special needs, and
- promotion of the availability of the French immersion program.

French immersion programs should have access to all of the supports and services available in the regular English program. These include but are not limited to:

- equivalent basic resources (print and electronic) in French;
- access to technology to support the program, including French language keyboards and software;
- access to the same range of testing and student services as are available in the English program stream; and
- access to library materials and services that allow students to conduct research in the French language.

## D. Long-range Planning

The establishment of a French immersion program represents a long-term commitment. Any school jurisdiction establishing this program will need to provide the necessary resources for the program from Kindergarten through Grade 12; otherwise, the objectives of the program are seriously compromised.

### Funding and Accountability

All of the funding provided to English language programs should be available for French immersion programs as well. This includes [funding for basic instruction](#), funding for students with severe disabilities, English as a second language support, technology integration, [learning resources credit allocation](#) and the [Alberta Initiative for School Improvement](#).

In addition to this, jurisdictions offering French immersion programs have access to federal funding through the [Protocol for Agreements for Minority Language Education and Second-Language Instruction](#). These funds are intended to address the additional costs involved in offering a French immersion program.

In developing and implementing long-range plans for French immersion, boards are encouraged to access all available funding and to direct it to the French immersion program to ensure its long-term viability and success. Jurisdictions must be prepared to demonstrate to their communities that funds provided for a French immersion program are used for that purpose.



## Stability and Growth

Program stability contributes to the overall credibility of the French immersion program, making it a viable choice for parents and students. The factors that make up a stable program include:

- a declared commitment to offer the French immersion program from Kindergarten or Grade 1 through Grade 12 or at one of the other entry points;
- visible support from key decision-makers in the school jurisdiction, for example the superintendent and trustees attend functions held in French immersion schools;
- initiatives that support the French immersion program such as French public speaking competitions, the summer language program, [Explore](#), organized by the Council of Ministers of Education (Canada) and [exchange programs](#); and
- a leadership group that specifically looks at French immersion issues and makes recommendations to senior central office administrators. This group may include teachers, administrators, parents, trustees and students.

A firm commitment from the Board ensures the best learning conditions for students and contributes to the quality and stability of the French immersion program. Long-term growth may include:

- ensuring the availability of the program from Kindergarten to Grade 12;
- locating the programs in facilities that can accommodate both growth and expansion and that ensure access by the broadest population;
- ensuring that supports are in place to meet the needs of all students;
- helping parents make informed decisions by providing them with the information and support they need; and
- tracking enrolments, identifying reasons for changes in enrolments and addressing the issues.

## Staffing

The following are suggestions for long-term planning for staffing needs:

- When hiring teaching staff, consider French language proficiency, understanding of immersion methodology and subject area specialties.
- When staffing leadership positions, attitudes towards French immersion and second language learning in general should be key considerations.
- Hiring of all staff, whether directly involved in the French immersion program or not, should take into consideration positive attitudes towards French immersion and second language learning—look for acceptance and inclusiveness.

## Professional Development

Some suggestions for long-term planning for the professional development needs related to French immersion are as follows:

- Recognize that French immersion teachers have specific professional development needs in addition to their subject areas, such as methodology and language and cultural development. The [Alberta Regional Consortia](#) offer workshops intended for French immersion teachers.



- Plan the school year calendar so that professional development days are scheduled to permit French immersion teachers and/or administrators to participate in major conferences when held nearby, such as:
  - the provincial ATA [Conseil Français \(CF\) conference](#);
  - ATA teachers' convention and the « salon des exposants »;
  - conferences organized by the [Alberta branch](#) of [Canadian Parents for French](#);
  - the national [Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers](#)/Association canadienne des professeurs d'immersion (CAIT/ACPI) conference.
- Subscribe to professional journals related to French second language education and ensure access to these documents.
- Promoting networking opportunities within and among jurisdictions.
- Encourage educators to apply for individual [teacher bursaries](#) to attend French language courses that can provide them with enhanced language skills and the opportunity to experience second language learning personally.

### Support Services

Typically, jurisdictions have support systems in place for the programs they offer. These may include centralized document production, student transportation, counseling and other student services, and system committees for such tasks as designing report cards. Are the needs of the French immersion program considered when staffing for and providing these services?

In addition, those professionals offering support services in the jurisdiction should have a basic understanding of how immersion works and its implications within their own areas of expertise. For example, guidance counselors should be able to support the French immersion student in choosing appropriate high school courses or postsecondary programs in French as well as providing information about career opportunities.

### Quality and Assessment

It is important that the jurisdiction undertake regular program reviews to ensure that the following three elements are in place and working well:

- [Programs of Study](#) and support documents are available and being used effectively.
- Adequate resources are available to administrators, teachers and students and are being used.
- Teachers are well supported.

The data collection procedures listed below may help determine the levels of success:

- provincial [achievement tests](#) and [diploma exams](#) results;
- jurisdiction-wide surveys administered to teachers, parents and students over a period of time to measure satisfaction with the program;
- tracking of enrolments from grade to grade to monitor retention of students;
- student interest as demonstrated by enrolment in the program over time.

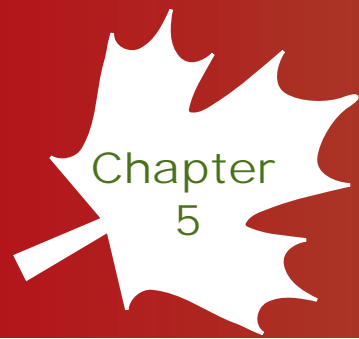


For more information on quality and assessment of the French immersion program, [Canadian Parents for French](#) has produced a [self-assessment tool](#) to help schools assess and evaluate their French second language programs.

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# PROVIDING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP FOR FRENCH IMMERSION

## A. Introduction

All schools, regardless of the programs they offer, function best when their administrators base their practices and decisions on sound administrative and pedagogical theory. This applies equally well to administrators of French immersion schools. It is not necessary for principals to take a hands-off approach just because they do not speak French. A positive personal attitude and sound leadership and management skills are key ingredients for success.

The following strategies and ideas are offered to assist [French immersion program](#) administrators. The following may serve as a general checklist:

- Do planning processes and administrative procedures consider the views of all? Do they recognize and respect the common and specific needs of the program(s) offered at the school? Is there a focus on the educational needs of each group of students?
- Does the school community recognize that each program is different, requiring distinct activities and measures?
- Are common concerns addressed by everyone?
- Are program-specific concerns identified and solutions found by staff, parents and, perhaps, students involved in the program?
- Is information about all programs readily available and offered to all?
- Does the leadership in the school reflect the specific educational needs of the community?
- Is professional development encouraged and supported for all staff?
- Are the [indicators of effective teaching practices](#) evident in French immersion classrooms?
- Do administrators regularly visit the French immersion classrooms, observe students, find out what they can do and cannot do, discuss their achievement and progress with the teachers?
- Are administrators aware of the specific needs and sensitivities of French immersion parents?  
Do parents feel comfortable bringing their concerns to them?
- At the secondary level, do administrators establish effective time-tabling practices that accommodate the needs of French immersion students for continuous language learning (i.e., providing language-rich subjects taught in French each semester) and to provide them with flexibility in choosing core and optional subjects taught in French?
- Do administrators deal directly and openly with perceptions of inequity resulting from different administrative decisions relative to the immersion and English programs, and be prepared to explain to parents and teachers the reasons for these differences?



## B. Addressing Program Needs in Dual-track Schools

The effective operation of a French immersion program in a dual-track school is much more difficult than in a single program school and provides a challenge to school administrators and to parents. However, with the collaboration of all partners, a dual-track school can provide an enriching experience for all participants. It provides an excellent opportunity to communicate Canadian values and to put into practice the dynamics found in an officially bilingual and culturally diverse country.

### Conditions for Success

In a dual-track school, planning has to reflect student and program needs. For this to occur, a number of conditions must be present:

- Strong leadership by the principal and the [school council](#).
- An understanding by the school administration, staff and all parents that in the school there are common student needs and needs specific to each program.
- There is a need to accept that each program is different and that different activities are required to address program needs. To be fair in such an environment, one cannot endorse the idea that what is good for one program is necessarily good for the other.
- Parents in each program should have the feeling that the school administration is using fully the resources available to each program for the enhancement of that program.
- In dual-track schools, one cannot prevent parents from comparing what happens in one program to what happens in the other. What is important is for parents to feel that the program objectives in the program their child attends are being fully met.

### True Partnership

In a dual-track school a true partnership is required. Parent, staff, and student must all feel that a sincere effort is made to recognize them and to address their needs. In such a school, one would expect the following:

- The visible presence of the two programs as you enter the school.
- The attractive features and details of both programs in the school's handbook and advertising.
- Understanding and acceptance of different program needs and activities.
- Sharing of resources between programs. The immersion program provides a wide variety of print and non-print resources that may serve to enrich the [ESL](#) program in a school.
- Within the school, communications could be made in French and in English. This provides an excellent opportunity for all students learning French to practice their comprehension skills.

## C. Creating a School Culture

School administrators have a responsibility to create and nurture a school culture that supports the goals of the French immersion program. The school's vision, mission and belief statements as well as planning documents must recognize second language learning as a vital component of a high-quality education and reflect the value and needs of the French immersion program



within the school community. The process by which these documents are developed should include the broadest educational philosophies and promote ownership by all.

While they may find it easier in a French immersion centre, even when the program is housed in a dual-track setting, administrators can shape the school's culture to fully support the goals of the French immersion program and at the same time embrace differences. The following strategies may be considered in creating a supportive school culture.

### French: The Language of Communication

Using French as the language of communication whenever possible helps to make the language more real for students and gives them an added purpose for studying the language. French becomes more acceptable not only to the immersion students and their families but also to the entire school community. Some ideas include:

- Delivering some announcements over the public address system in French. The administrator with little or no French language skills can delegate this task to other individuals in the school who have the appropriate skills.
- Encouraging staff members to speak French amongst themselves, providing role models for the students.
- Making French evident throughout the school, e.g., signs (bibliothèque/library), displays of students' work, and French background music or radio at noon hour.
- Using French with pride during school assemblies and other activities, e.g., sing "O Canada" in French as well as in English.

### Cultural Events

Celebrate and promote [cultural events](#) that are important to the francophone community. If local Francophones are having a *cabane à sucre* (maple sugar festival), encourage students and their families as well as staff members to participate. In a dual-track setting, encourage all students to participate. Extending an invitation to all members of the school community will increase harmony among the different programs. Encourage participation in theatre and musical presentations; invite artists and musicians to the school for all to enjoy.

### Community Supports

Take advantage of all the community supports available to students in French. Strategies that seek to show students and the greater school community that French is used in the local community will do much to support the goals of your French immersion program. When planning a field trip to a local site, for example, teachers should ask if the tour can be given in French; if not, whether a French-speaking guide might be provided, either by the school or the site administration. Other initiatives include:

- seeking community members with French language skills who might support a reading program for the primary grades;
- bringing in local artists who use French as a language of communication.



## Good Working Relations

The goals of the French immersion program are best achieved when all staff members of a school support them. Structuring activities where French immersion teachers talk and network with their colleagues will help demystify the program and may be an important first step to getting broader support for the program. These may include the following:

- Provide time for [French language arts](#) and [English language arts](#) teachers to plan together the teaching of specific language skills and strategies. By so doing, needless repetitions are avoided and transfers of skills common to both languages are encouraged.
- Promote collaboration among staff members to create a professional learning community which understands the particularities of each program.

## A Program for All Students

A common misperception is that the French immersion program is for gifted or advantaged students. School administrators are in a position to correct this perception and promote the benefits of the program for all potential learners. In practical terms, administrators should ensure that the necessary support systems are in place for all students to succeed. These include support systems for special needs students, library resources, French language software, etc. When these necessary support systems are available, the objectives of the French immersion program can be met.

## D. Staffing: Setting the Stage for Success

Since teachers have a considerable influence on the overall success of French immersion, staffing the program or school is perhaps the single most important responsibility of administrators. Consequently, administrators strive to select and maintain a team of staff members that have the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes to support student learning in a French immersion milieu.

All staff in the school—teachers, office staff (as they are often a parent’s first contact), custodial staff, and support staff such as librarians—should have a general understanding of, and a positive attitude towards, all programs offered in the school. All school staff should know what French immersion is, how it works and the importance of the use of French in school. All staff should be encouraged to work together to achieve the goals of all programs.

### Teacher Interviews

Interviewing prospective staff is an important initial component in choosing teachers who will contribute to the success of the French immersion program in a given school. The following questions and areas of discussion are meant to serve as a guide for administrators when interviewing applicants for a French immersion teaching position.

#### i. Educational philosophy

What is the candidate’s philosophy with respect to how children learn, particularly as it pertains to second language acquisition?

One of the most important areas to consider is the candidate’s philosophy of immersion learning and teaching. Ask them to talk about their understanding of learning a second language in an immersion context. Their ideas should include the following:



- Learners learn their second language much like they learn their first language. As a result, they must actively participate in language rich activities that are meaningful to them.
- Learners must be exposed to a variety of authentic learning situations.
- Learners have to be given many opportunities to communicate. Priority should be given to the message before the form.
- Language teaching is important in all subject areas at all grades levels throughout the French immersion program. Students learn the French language, they learn about the French language and they learn through the French language.

## ii. Second language pedagogy

What is the candidate's approach to teaching a second language? Ask them to describe how they would approach their teaching in a French immersion situation. Do they see teaching in French immersion as being the same or different as teaching in a first language context? The teaching should correspond to their beliefs about language learning. There should be some discussion about the role of transfers and interferences.

## iii. Second-language methodology

Explore the candidate's knowledge of second language teaching methodology. Within the context of the French immersion classroom, ask how the candidate would:

- include students with special needs;
- differentiate instruction to meet the needs of students;
- ground their teaching in literacy;
- use all forms of student evaluation to inform their teaching;
- describe their classroom management strategies.

## iv. French culture

How will the candidate integrate French culture into their teaching? One of the goals of the French immersion program is to introduce learners to [francophone cultural life in Alberta](#) and the [French-speaking world](#). Ask them to explain their vision of what it means to integrate French culture into their teaching.

## v. Student evaluation

How will the candidate evaluate his or her students? Evaluation strategies should reflect both their philosophy of learning and their philosophy of teaching. Ask them to explain the kinds of assessments and evaluations they plan to use and for what purposes.

## vi. Language skills

What are the French language skills of the candidate? Because French immersion teachers serve as models for students, they should have an excellent command of French. The French oral language proficiency of candidates should be assessed. Not all teachers proficient in French have the teaching methods that will allow them to be effective in the French immersion classroom. The candidate's written language skills should also be assessed. The following written assignment question may be used to this end:



- *Que feriez-vous afin d'encourager l'élève en immersion française de continuer son développement langagier?*

Furthermore, not all teachers have the French skills to be effective French immersion teachers. Both of these elements should be considered when hiring new staff.

### vii. Language proficiency goals

What are the candidate's goals to maintain and/or improve their French language proficiency? French immersion teachers may need to immerse themselves in a French language environment from time to time (e.g. Québec, New Brunswick, France) in order to maintain a high level of French language proficiency. Are they aware of available [bursaries](#) to help them reach their goals in this area?

### viii. English language skills

What are the English language skills of the candidate? Many French immersion teachers at the elementary level teach their own ELA classes. Again the teacher serves as a model for students and should command good English language skills, spoken and written. Furthermore, most parents are English-speaking and teachers need to communicate effectively with them on the phone, at meetings and during parent-teacher conferences, particularly in dual-track schools. The candidate's written language skills should also be assessed. The following written assignment question may be used to this end:

## How would you approach the teaching of culture in a French immersion program?

### i. Area of expertise

What is their area of expertise or specialization? In addition to having excellent French language skills and second language teaching methodology, French immersion teachers must be able to teach the knowledge, skills and attitudes identified for the different subjects.

### ii. Teaching challenges

Does the candidate understand the added challenges of teaching in French immersion? Attempt to find out what they understand these challenges to be and how they are prepared to cope. Examples might include the following:

- Resources such as hands-on materials for the early years—posters, films or videos, computer programs and audio recordings—may not be as readily available as in the English program.
- Parent volunteers with French language proficiency are not always available.
- Home-school communication (newsletters, report cards, etc.) is in English, which may pose a challenge for a candidate who may not be proficient in English.

### iii. Potential contribution

Explore the candidate's potential contribution to the overall success of the school. In addition to sound classroom teaching, staff members may contribute in the following areas:

- helping with the extra-curricular program;

- promoting the French immersion program;
- representing the school at the jurisdiction level; and
- assuming leadership for a particular curricular area, e.g., mathematics, science, technology, drama, music.

#### iv. Career plans

Explore the candidate’s short-term and long-term career plans. For many school jurisdictions, recruitment and retention of French immersion teachers are major concerns. To address this concern, the interviewer may wish to provide an overview of the support systems and strategies in place for teachers.

## E. Supporting Newly Hired Staff

Before beginning the task of supervising newly hired teachers, administrators should ensure that necessary supports are in place. Activities and strategies that are at once welcoming and supportive will go a long way to ensuring that newly recruited teachers settle in and plan to stay.

New immersion teachers, especially those from Quebec or francophone countries, would benefit from:

- a welcoming and supportive environment:
  - social events to integrate them into the school and community;
  - professional support (jurisdiction staff, a mentor or buddy);
  - assistance with finding appropriate housing;
  - information on the community’s values and attitudes.
- vital information and documentation about the school district:
  - payroll and benefits;
  - teacher certification;
  - mentoring opportunities at the district level.
- vital information and documentation about the school:
  - school handbook;
  - school routines;
  - school’s three-year education plan;
  - school’s report card.
- access to the resources that will allow them to meet the learning outcomes of the [curricula](#):
  - curriculum materials and [basic resources](#), print and [electronic](#);
  - development of long-range plans;
  - professional support (e.g. central office, experienced teachers, availability of [professional development funds](#)).
- knowledge of support systems in place to meet the needs or special needs of all students in French immersion classrooms:
  - school support team;
  - materials;
  - divisional resources (human and financial).



Several Web sites address the needs of French immersion teachers. Encourage your teachers to explore the following:

- [Accent](#)
- [American Association of Teachers of French](#)
- [American Council on Immersion Education](#)
- [American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages](#)
- [Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers/Association canadienne des professeurs d'immersion \(CAIT/ACPI\)](#)
- [Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers](#)
- [Canadian Heritage/Patrimoine canadien](#)
- [Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition](#)
- [Center for Applied Linguistics](#)
- [Centre d'enseignement et de recherche en français \(Campus Saint-Jean\)](#)
- [École internationale de français](#)
- [Institute for Innovation in Second Language Education](#)
- [Languages Canada](#)
- [Second Language Education Centre](#)
- [Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages/Commissariat aux langues officielles](#)
- [Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute](#)
- [Ontario Institute for Studies in Education](#)

## F. Supervising and Evaluating Staff

The administrator will supervise the teacher for both formative and summative purposes. Given a sound knowledge of how the program works and what to watch for, even the administrator who does not speak French can effectively supervise French immersion teaching staff.

Sally Rehorick, a former professor in the Second Language Education Centre at the University of New Brunswick advises:

...certain aspects of a French second-language class can, in fact, be observed more easily when one does not understand the language of instruction. Some aspects of the class become much more noticeable when the content of the discourse is not understandable.

She goes on to explain that,

In addition, a principal who wants to know more about the content of what is being taught should not hesitate to initiate discussions in English with either students or the teacher. Such discussions will in no way diminish the efforts of the class participants to learn their second language effectively.

S. Rehorick. "But I Can't Speak French: More Thoughts on Supervising the Second-Language Classroom," 1996, pp. 1–3.



Criteria for evaluating a French immersion teacher are similar to those for evaluating an English program teacher. There are, however, certain criteria that are particular to the French immersion context. The following areas may be considered when supervising French immersion teachers at any grade level.

Does the teacher...

- follow the **Programs of Study** as authorized by the Minister of Education?
- choose **language teaching strategies** specific to second language acquisition:
  - structure activities that enable students to see and hear language repeatedly in a meaningful context;
  - uses gestures, mimes and other body language cues appropriately to enhance communication;
  - allows sufficient time for students to express themselves (particularly when responding to questions);
  - provides corrective feedback in French; and
  - uses paralinguistic aids to help in comprehension in order to avoid reverting to English?
- build in **time for students to communicate**, orally and in writing, in French?
- share with learners the **value of learning French**?
- use **French teaching materials**, print and non-print, that are appropriate for the students?
- encourage **spontaneous use of French** through teacher-student and student-student interaction?
- establish an environment where **risk-taking** to communicate in French is valued?
- use **French at all times** (written and spoken)?
- use **English only during English Language Arts** or when a student's emotional well-being or security is at risk?
- use gestures, mime and other **body language cues** to enhance communication?
- use group work effectively?
- encourage students to speak in French to satisfy not only their academic needs but also their **emotional and social needs**?
- implement sound **evaluation** practices?
- contribute to the **extra-curricular program**?
- establish **positive relationships** with students, staff, parents and the general school community?

Although the above require little or no proficiency in French, the following areas of inquiry do. The administrator with little or no French language proficiency will want to seek the assistance of a colleague who has the necessary French language skills.

- Does the teacher use appropriate and correct language both orally and in written form?
- Are student errors (both oral and written) identified and corrected appropriately?



## G. Professional Development Needs

In addition to the regular professional development needs of teachers of regular English language programs, French immersion teachers may have several specific needs.

### French Language Skills

Teachers need to ensure that their own French language skills are maintained. Remember that living in an English environment does not readily facilitate language growth and maintenance. French immersion teachers may want to pursue opportunities to immerse themselves in the language through enrolment in courses or programs in Quebec, New Brunswick, or even France. French immersion teachers need to be made aware of the [bursaries](#) that are available to help them enhance their knowledge of French and of second-language pedagogy.

### Teaching Strategies

Teachers need to maintain their knowledge of effective second-language teaching strategies in light of the increasing use of information and communication technologies.

### Networking

Teachers need to network with and learn from other French immersion teachers. Encourage French immersion teachers to attend French immersion conferences and professional development sessions such as those offered by [CAIT/ACPI](#) and [Le Conseil français](#). The [regional consortia](#) also offer professional development activities.

### Professional Journals

Establish a professional development collection for French immersion teachers including subscriptions to journals and magazines related to French immersion and second language learning. Here are a few periodicals you may want to consider:

- [The Canadian Modern Language Review](#)
- The [CASLT](#) E-Newsletters
- [Education Canada](#)
- [Éducation et francophonie](#)
- [Le journal de l'immersion Journal](#)
- [Québec français](#)
- The [Centre d'enseignement et de recherche](#) of [Campus Saint-Jean](#) has designed the [Parlons français](#) ten-week courses for adults wishing to learn French or improve their French conversational skills.

## H. Organizing for Instruction

When organizing for instruction, consider the following:

- The more exposure students have to French through instruction and activities, the better their French language skills tend to be.
- When planning for the purchase of instructional supports, remember the need for French software and resource materials for courses such as music.



- Support programs such as early literacy and enrichment programs should also be done in French.
- French immersion students are taught two language arts programs: [ELA](#) and [FLA](#). By considering the language arts experience as a whole and working together, teachers will understand that many of the learning outcomes are similar. Teachers are encouraged to make effective use of their language arts time by avoiding unnecessary repetition. If students learn how to write a resume in English, it is not necessary to repeat this instruction in French. At the secondary level where different teachers may be teaching English and French, it is important that they collaborate to identify common learning outcomes and plan their instruction accordingly.
- At the secondary level, ensure that French is offered in each semester (that is, at all times throughout the year). When timetabling, consider immersion students' needs and interests; for example, avoid scheduling the only French language arts course at the same time as the only band course.
- Accommodate student exchanges. If students are going to be involved in the [Alberta-Quebec exchange](#), schedule the program to accommodate it.
- Alternative methods of course delivery, such as [online and distance learning](#) that are now available to secondary students through the [Alberta Distance Learning Centre](#).

## I. Establishing and Maintaining a Library

A library designed to support the [French immersion program](#) is a must for any French immersion school. When planning for the library, consider the following areas:

- Is there a budget for developing and maintaining a French collection?
- When you walk into the library, is the French language visible on walls, table displays and on signage?
- Can students sign out a book in French? Are they encouraged to speak French in the library?
- In the reference section, are there an appropriate number of French dictionaries, periodicals?
- In the collection, is there an appropriate quantity of French resources and do they match the expectations of the programs of study? Are these materials age appropriate? Is fiction as well as non-fiction available in French?
- Is reading at home with parents encouraged?
- Does the librarian have a working knowledge of French to facilitate working with the collection and the students?
- Does the library subscribe to French book clubs?
- Are book lists prepared for French immersion parents and included in the school newsletter?

Alberta Education has developed four annotated bibliographies of French literary resources for immersion students:

- [Kindergarten to Grade 3](#)
- [Grades 4–6](#)



- [Grades 7–9](#)
- [Grades 10-12](#)

These are excellent resources for both the FLA teachers and school librarians.

## J. Responsibilities of Staff and School Councils

### Teaching Staff

In addition to providing instruction or supervision, all teaching staff in a school that offers French immersion are ambassadors for the program. As such, they should have a general understanding of how French immersion works and be positive towards this program at all times in the school and the community.

### Resource and Support Staff

Staff who support French immersion teachers include school counsellors, secretaries and office clerical staff, teacher librarians and technicians, classroom aides, and special needs teachers. All should have:

- positive attitudes towards second language learning, and
- an understanding of how immersion works and its implications for their own area of expertise before they work with, do assessments on or make recommendations regarding French immersion students.

### School Councils

The [school council](#) acts in the interests of all stakeholders in the school community to enhance student learning. This includes the French immersion students and parents. The school council of a dual- or multi-track school should include among its members representatives from both (or all) programs offered in the school to provide input for the realization of the objectives of each program.

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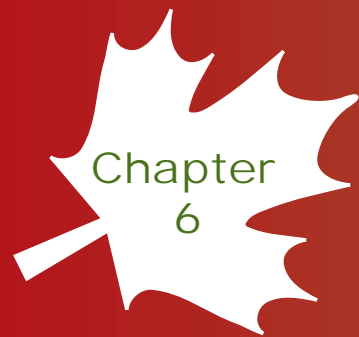
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## SUPPORTING AND WORKING WITH PARENTS

### A. Introduction

Because [French immersion](#) is an alternative program that requires an active choice on the part of parents, most French immersion parents tend to be very interested in their children's education and eager to be involved. At the same time, the very nature of French immersion makes parental involvement in their children's education seem more difficult than for most English program parents. French immersion parents who have little or no French language proficiency, and that is the great majority, often have the following concerns:

- they will not be able to monitor their children's academic progress; they will not be able to help their children with homework; they will not be welcome in the classroom, nor will they be able to volunteer at the school because they do not speak French; and their children will not learn to read and write well in English.
- French immersion has been a feature of the Canadian educational scene for over 40 years. Nevertheless, many parents still wonder if French immersion is suitable for their child. Will their young child be able to cope with learning a second language at such an early age? French immersion school administrators can find the answers to these questions and others in a simple, short and straightforward article from the Centre for Advanced Research on language Acquisition: [Why Immersion?](#) One of the reasons often cited for the success of the French immersion program is the strong role parents have played in establishing and supporting the program. How, then, can French immersion administrators ensure that their French immersion parents have the support they need to feel comfortable with and be effectively involved in their children's education? How can French immersion administrators work with French immersion parents to the benefit of the children, the program and the school?

### B. Parents as Partners

Parental involvement in their children's education is about more than sitting on the [school council](#), organizing a lunch program and [fundraising](#). While these are important contributions, the expectations, behaviours and attitudes children learn and experience at home and the encouragement and support of their parents are key to their success. This is the form of involvement that makes parents true partners in their children's education.

Children spend only a small proportion of their total waking hours (less than 25%) in the classroom. The first thing parents need to understand about their role in their children's education then is that what their children do at home and in the community and how they, as parents, shape and react to those experiences are vital to their children's learning and success in school.



Peter Coleman, a professor at Simon Fraser University with 35 years of experience in education and the author of *Learning About Schools*, says: “Parental involvement in various kinds of children’s learning is a much stronger predictor of high levels of achievement than anything we know of.” (Quoted in Judy Gibson and Peggy Nicholson, “Partnerships: Supporting and Working with Parents.” *French Immersion in Alberta: Building the Future 1998—Conference Report, 1999*.)

In her review of 35 years of research into French immersion for the 1998 *French Immersion in Alberta: Building the Future* conference, Dr. Nancy Halsall wrote:

“Positive parental attitudes and beliefs towards immersion have been found to be instrumental in whether students enter immersion and whether they stay in the program.”

(“*French Immersion: The Success Story Told by Research.*” *French Immersion in Alberta: Building the Future 1998—Conference Report, 1999*.)

But for many parents, the expectation that they be involved in their children’s education creates additional pressures on family life. How, for example, do single parents or families with two working parents find the time to be involved?

Parents need the assurance that they can contribute to their children’s learning through everyday activities such as reading with their children, cooking or gardening together, assigning and supervising household chores, a trip to the zoo, reading bedtime stories, or discussing a TV program or newspaper article together.

On the other hand, administrators and teachers should be aware that most parents have not had the benefit of the formal study of child development, or training in how to talk to, educate and encourage children, as have educators. Parents need help to understand how they can use everyday activities at home to reinforce and complement the curriculum. They need specific directions and examples. They also need some basic knowledge, skills and attitudes. And immersion parents have some specific needs related to the second language learning process and their inability to understand French.

The following sections have been adapted from Judy Gibson and Peggy Nicholson, “Partnerships: Supporting and Working with Parents,” *French Immersion in Alberta: Building the Future 1998—Conference Report, 1999*. They are included here to provide administrators with a deeper understanding of parents’ needs, the benefits of parental involvement and what steps can be taken to better guide, support and work with parents.

“When all of the family characteristics examined were considered together in a multiple regression analysis, parental socio-economic status, the number of books in the home and family educational support emerged as important factors related to student achievement in reading, science and mathematics in virtually all countries and provinces. Participation in cultural activities, and parental academic interest also continued to be strongly related to student performance in reading and science, particularly among Canadian provinces.”

Patrick Bussière, Fernando Cartwright, Robert Crocker, Xin Ma, Jillian Oderkirk and Yanhong Zhang, *Measuring Up: The Performance of Canada’s Youth in Reading, Mathematics and Science*, 2001, p. 36.



## C. What All Parents Need to Support Their Child's Education

### Knowledge

All parents need to know:

- their child's basic needs and abilities (realistic expectations);
- how their child is feeling;
- the [curriculum/program](#);
- the school's philosophy, goals, teachers, etc.;
- the learning [expectations](#) for their child's grade;
- their child's peer group;
- how to be an effective volunteer.
- that they are always welcome at the school.

### Skills

All parents need the following skills:

- effective communication skills: listening and speaking both with the child and the school;
- a “common sense” approach towards education;
- planning and time-management skills to support learning;
- organizational and problem-solving skills.

### Attitudes

Parents need:

- to value education, their school and their child;
- to be constructive, positive, respectful, tolerant;
- to have realistic expectations and patience;
- to be supportive of learning;
- to want what is educationally best for their child—all children;
- to show an interest in what their child is doing/learning;
- to feel free to present concerns to educators.

## D. What French Immersion Parents Need to Support Their Child's Education

### Knowledge

Parents of French immersion students need to know:

- how second language learning works: the process and timing, particularly at the entry level (see [Immersion Approach—Principles and Practices](#));
- the [benefits](#) of the program.



## Skills

Parents of French immersion students need:

- good communication skills: often teacher and parent have different first languages and experiences;
- strategies for helping their child learn (when the language of instruction is different from their own);
- to develop a positive working rapport with the teachers.

## Attitudes

Parents of French immersion students need:

- to be open-minded;
- to value French;
- to be patient with things such as lag-time in English language arts;
- to have confidence in their child's learning (They need a lot of information about French immersion and to know that learning multiple languages is normal in much of the world.);
- to be open about learning some French themselves;
- to believe in the philosophy of a bilingual country: Canadian culture and history;
- to appreciate the benefits of the program;
- to feel free and welcome to communicate with the school as issues arise. They need reassurance that their lack of understanding of the language will not be a barrier to home-school communication.

## E. Benefits of Involving Parents

### Benefits for Students

- feel valued and supported—improved self-esteem;
- develop as healthy, whole children;
- are more successful;
- learning extends beyond the classroom;
- value education more highly;
- develop better attitudes towards learning.

### Benefits for Teachers

- feel supported;
- parents' perspective adds to the big picture—better insights;
- greater cooperation and communication;
- less burnout and frustration.



## Benefits for Parents

- greater awareness and confidence;
- better understanding of curriculum expectations;
- opportunities to voice opinions and to be involved in decisions;
- stronger parent/child relationship;
- better knowledge of their children and their peers.

## Benefits for Administrators

- more program support;
- sense of teamwork, mutual trust, better overall climate;
- support from the community, board and government through parent advocacy;
- increased enrolments and funding through word-of-mouth and parent advocacy.

## F. Tools and Strategies

These are some of the tools and strategies you may want to use to help parents acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to support their child registered in a French immersion program.

### Tools

- newsletters, curriculum newsletters;
- school/jurisdiction Web site and E-mail;
- parent information meetings;
- open houses;
- study skills workshops for parents;
- parents' meetings to explain the [curriculum](#);
- French courses for parents;
- special school cultural events;
- parent library;
- [curriculum handbooks](#) and [other resources](#) for parents.

### Strategies

- clarify [roles of parents](#) and teachers in school;
- ensure that staff understand why involving parents is beneficial;
- establish a welcoming atmosphere and facility;
- invite parents to be involved in the school's education plan;
- use different forms of media to inform parents;



- provide opportunities for volunteering;
- show parents they are appreciated;
- invite parents to a variety of activities, e.g., speakers, projects.

## G. Strategies—Immersion Parents’ Needs

Home-school communication is a key ingredient of all successful school programs. Such communication is even more important for a [French immersion program](#), since few parents understand and are aware of all aspects of immersion education. The following suggestions from experienced French immersion administrators may help you to address these parents’ needs.

### Understanding the Program

- Provide parents with the following information regarding [French immersion](#):
  - program goals and realistic expectations;
  - how immersion works;
  - the effect on English and other subject areas;
  - what happens if their child experiences difficulties; (see Chapter 8)
  - staff qualifications, such as fluency in French and subject area knowledge;
  - practical concerns such as bussing, [fees](#), lunchroom supervision, etc.;
  - how they can help with [homework](#) and support their child’s learning;
  - what happens in junior and senior high;
  - where they can get more information and support.
- Encourage parents to obtain [\*Yes, You Can Help! Information and Inspiration for French Immersion Parents\*](#) and use it as a resource at home.
- Include excerpts in your school newsletters, on your Web page, and include several copies in the parent resource collection.
- Offer information sessions for parents such as a panel presentation that includes an administrator, a teacher, a student and a parent.
- Hold parent discussion forums around the various chapters of [\*Yes, You Can Help! Information and Inspiration for French Immersion Parents\*](#) or other topics of interest to parents.
- Encourage parents to share their “immersion parenting” experiences, challenges and strategies with each other.
- Encourage parents to join [Canadian Parents for French](#) (CPF) to obtain further information about French second language learning, French resources and out-of-school opportunities and to benefit from the support of other parents. (The school can also join CPF as an associate member to receive newsletters and other publications of interest to parents, which can be added to the parent resource collection.)
- Encourage parents to visit a French immersion classroom to see, first-hand, how easily the students adapt to the immersion environment and learn the language. These visits are especially helpful prior to registration in either the early or late immersion program.



## Understanding the Curriculum and Teaching Strategies

- Be sure parents know about Alberta Education's [curriculum handbooks](#). These handbooks include specific information on the immersion program and [French language arts](#).
- Encourage teachers to use these handbooks to prepare parent sessions on understanding the curriculum.
- Encourage teachers to offer parent sessions to explain teaching strategies specific to immersion such as second language strategies and the transition to English language arts.
- Include user-friendly curriculum statements in report cards.
- Encourage parents to volunteer in the school. Being in the school exposes them to curriculum and teaching, helping to improve their understanding.

## How to Help with Homework

Because most immersion parents are not proficient in French, French immersion teachers need to understand that parents cannot be expected to help with French skills such as reading and editing or to help with [homework](#) as if their child was in an English program.

- *[Yes, You Can Help! Information and Inspiration for French Immersion Parents](#)* provides many suggestions such as how to help with *la dictée* and math. Of course, teachers will also have ideas and suggestions to add.
- Regardless of the language in which children are learning, parents can help them develop habits which will be vital to their success both now and throughout life.
- Publish good parenting articles in school newsletters.
- Send home curriculum newsletters from the teachers, including examples of activities parents can initiate to support and complement classroom learning.
- Teachers should ensure that students are prepared for homework, i.e. they have the background knowledge and material.
- School homework policies should be explained in the school handbook and shared with parents.

## Helping at School

- Help teachers understand and accept the benefits of parental involvement in the classroom.
- Parents with some proficiency in French can be encouraged to assist students with reading and other language activities suited to the parent's level of French proficiency.
- Parents with little or no proficiency in French can be encouraged to:
  - help with classroom activities that require little oral communication in French;
  - supervise on field trips, with the understanding that their role is as an observer in French language learning situations.

## Understanding Provincial Assessments

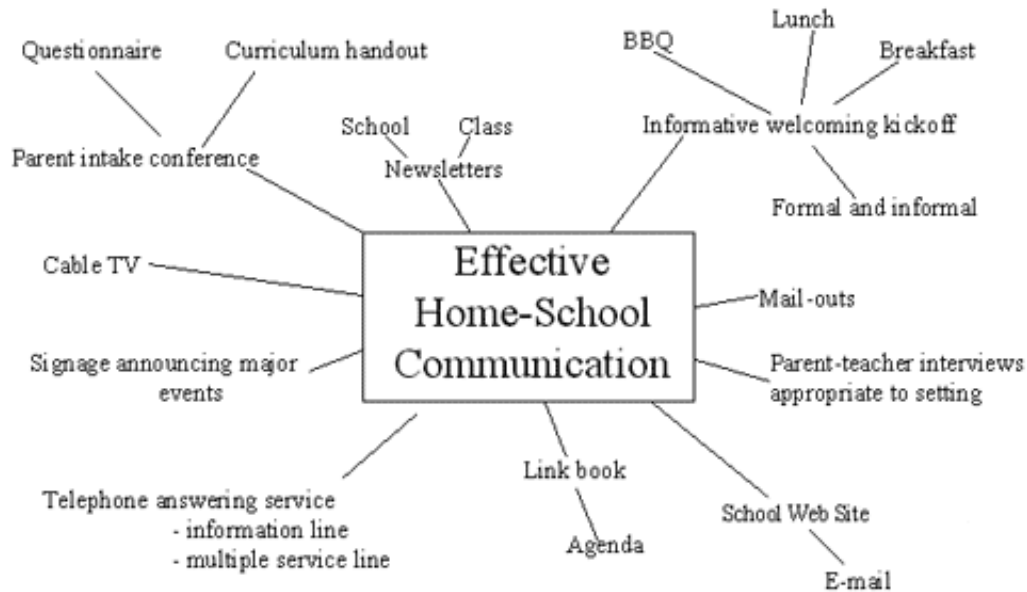
- Provide immersion parents with information on [achievement tests](#) and [diploma exams](#) as you would English parents, explaining their purpose, their relevance to the program, and how the results are used.





- Offer additional information for immersion parents. Tell them that achievement tests are written in the language in which the particular subject is taught and that immersion students have the choice of writing their diploma exams in either French or English.
- Provide information on the results of these provincial assessments. Immersion parents need the reassurance that immersion students' results compare favourably with those of English program student results in all subject areas, including English Language Arts.

## Effective Home-School Communication



Administrators should be aware that misunderstandings can occur between two people of the same language group. When one of the parties is using their second language to communicate, as in the case of a francophone teacher speaking with or writing to an anglophone parent, there is an even greater chance of misunderstanding. Be prepared, as an administrator, to provide assistance with nuances in meaning, where possible by enlisting the help of a fully bilingual individual. If difficulties arise, check first for possible communication misunderstandings and provide assistance to help to clear up any confusion related to language.

## H. Resources for Parents

In recent years, due to the increasing recognition of the important role parents play in their children's education, there has been a growth in the [information available to parents](#) wishing to actively support their children's education.

A parent resource collection, either in the school library or in the parent volunteer room, can now offer a range of such resources. In schools offering a French immersion program, attention should be paid to including specific resources to inform and assist immersion parents.

Parents should also be encouraged and assisted to obtain resources for home use. [Yes, You Can Help! Information and Inspiration for French Immersion Parents](#) includes a useful section on French reference material. The [Learning Resource Centre](#) has a variety of materials of help to administrators and teachers working with parents.

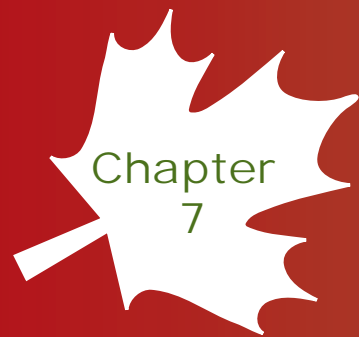


- [CPF Alberta](#) as well as the [national office of CPF](#) have a number of excellent resources for parents, including pamphlets, videos, learning resources and information on French resources and activities.
- What do I want for my child?/Qu'est-ce que je veux pour mon enfant? Edmonton: Alberta Learning, 2000. This is a joint publication of [CPF Alberta](#), [Fédération des parents francophones de l'Alberta](#), [Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta](#), and Alberta Learning. This leaflet describes the different French program streams offered in Alberta and how to choose. It is available [online](#). Click on “For Parents” then on “Information & Resources”.
- *Parent Guide—Alberta Provincial Achievement Testing*. [Grade 3](#), [Grade 6](#), [Grade 9](#).
- The federal department of Canadian Heritage offers a wealth of information on its [Web site](#).

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# RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF FRENCH IMMERSION STUDENTS

## A. Introduction

French immersion in Alberta is a program of choice. Since there is no requirement that school jurisdictions offer a French immersion program nor that parents choose it when it is offered, jurisdictions and schools with French immersion programs may face a dilemma. Without sufficient numbers of immersion students, the student population does not generate sufficient revenue to offer a quality program. But without a quality program, the jurisdiction or school is often unable to attract enough students, and hence unable to generate sufficient funding. Fortunately, French immersion programs are well established in many areas, making this dilemma less problematic than it once was. But even today, program quality and the ability to attract and keep students go hand-in-hand.

Retention of students is necessary for another reason as well. The benefits of a French immersion program are only fully realized when students remain in the program through Grade 12. Therefore, a successful French immersion program must extend into the senior high school years, including some Grade 12 courses. But this extension is not always possible if too many early immersion students leave the program at the end of Grade 6, or insufficient numbers of students are attracted to start late immersion in Grade 6 or 7, or if early or late immersion students drop out in their senior high school years.

Finally, where failing to retain immersion students is a result of negative experiences with the program, the pool of dissatisfied families that is created may, in relating their experiences, turn away many prospective students. Therefore, retaining students is an important recruitment strategy in itself.

Recruitment and retention of French immersion students are as vital to the success of the program as is its quality. Administrators should monitor enrolment trends and work with all stakeholders to address issues of recruitment and retention.

## B. Factors that Influence Recruitment

In a presentation to Alberta French immersion administrators in January 2000, Rick Parnell discussed the application of the business model to the marketing of the French immersion program. He explained that while

“...public education is not a business, and education is not a product that you can put a price on... I think we would all agree that public education has some intrinsic value, and that the perceived value is likely to differ from family to family. I think you would also have to agree that the choices the family makes with respect to education will affect and reflect family values and quality of life. These differences in values



and perceptions are what defines the market for a particular education offering, just as differences in values and perceptions define that market for commercial goods and services.”

(Rick Parnell, “Marketing French Immersion in Alberta.” Notes for presentation. French Immersion Administrators’ Workshop, 2000.)

## Successful Recruitment Strategies

From a business perspective, successful recruitment strategies are based on the understanding that the client determines all value. What does this mean in education? No matter how good a program is in the eyes of its providers (the jurisdiction or school), if it does not suit the target clientele (parents and students), it will not be considered. So what do parents, or students themselves in later years, consider valuable in any educational program? According to Parnell, there are six broad categories to consider:

- technical—quality of education and facilities
- psychological—perceptions, fears and beliefs
- demographic—financial stability, family profile: ages and background
- economic—perception of future financial benefits
- political—predisposition towards the place of the French language in Canada and the world
- cultural—connection between multilingualism and culture or roots.

Each individual must find sufficient value in one or more of these areas to choose a particular program. The weight that is placed on these areas varies from individual to individual, as well.

The figure, [Factors Considered When Parents Decide on a French Immersion Program](#), illustrates complexity of decision-making as it relates to the French immersion program. To maximize the attractiveness of a French immersion program to new students, the program must be considered for its strengths and weaknesses in each of these areas, and marketing efforts must be oriented around its strengths.

## Negative Recruitment Factors

The following factors may negatively influence the recruitment of French immersion students:

### i. Practical factors

- accessibility to the school: distance and bussing fees;
- competition among schools in recruiting students;
- anti-Quebec or anti-official languages sentiment;
- lack of time and resources to develop and implement effective marketing strategies.

### ii. Program factors

- other program choices;
- perceptions that the program is only for brighter or economically advantaged students;
- perceptions that French is not a worthwhile language to learn, in terms of economic advantages.



### iii. Student factors

- subject area mastery may suffer (ex. science cannot be learned in French);
- concerns on the part of older students (those eligible for late immersion) that French immersion is too hard, or that they will not be well prepared to study in English at college or university.

### iv. Parent factors

- fears that the child's English skills may suffer;
- concerns that they will not be able to help their child;
- concerns that their child may lose his or her cultural identity.

## Positive Recruitment Factors

The following factors may positively influence the recruitment of French immersion students:

### i. Program factors

- the similarity between the two languages—French is 27% lexically similar to the English language and there is a 39% overlap of cognates between French and English;
- enhanced extra-curricular activities.

### ii. Parent factors

- desire for a better education and job opportunities for their child;
- perceptions that knowing French is valuable in the global economy;
- parental desire to give their child advantages they did not have;
- supportive sentiments about multiculturalism and Canadian unity.

## C. Factors that Influence Retention

Those who have already made a commitment to a program define success much differently. Once in the program, the positive values that attracted the students or their parents in the first place must be supported by what actually takes place within the program. A program must avoid several negatives which, if they begin to outweigh the positive attractions, will lead to attrition from the program.

### Elementary Level

Retention at the elementary level may be undermined by:

### i. Student factors

- difficulty in understanding, speaking or reading French;
- poor relations with the immersion teacher, (or between the parent and teacher);
- emotional or behavioural problems.

### ii. Parent factors

- frustration with not being able to understand French;



- perception that their child should be able to read English, especially by Christmas of Grade 1.

### iii. Program factors

- lack of remedial help within the immersion program;
- insufficient support and information provided to parents;
- the possibility of transferring a student from the French immersion to the English program.

## Secondary Level

At the secondary level, retention may be affected by:

### i. Student factors

- perception of heavier workload in French immersion;
- concerns about needing English vocabulary at the post-secondary level, especially in science;
- disappointment or boredom with the program;
- desire for better grades—perceived as being easier to achieve in English;
- perceived teacher or instructional quality;
- degree of satisfaction with current level of proficiency in French and realistic expectations about retaining the language;
- goals and perceptions regarding post-secondary education;
- perceptions of the value of French in the global economy.

### ii. Parent factors

- parent’s perceptions of the level of fluency already attained.

### iii. Program factors

- breadth and variety of courses available in French;
- fewer optional courses because of the additional language arts course;
- location of the program—in relation to where the student’s peers go;
- reputation of the school in which the program is housed.

## D. Marketing: The Process

For business, marketing is the process involved in moving a product or service from producer to consumer. In this case, the product is the French immersion program; the producer is the educational system in general, but more specifically the jurisdiction or school; and the consumer is the student or parent. For educators, then, marketing is the strategy for recruiting and retaining students and their families.

### Components of Marketing

Marketing has four components. In business they are called the 4 Ps: Product, Price, Place and Promotion. With some allowance for the difference between business and education, these four components remain a vital element of any school’s marketing program.



### **i. Product**

The centrepiece of marketing a school program is the program itself. The school can also be part of the product. Is it seen to be a good facility: welcoming, attractive, well equipped with a proven track record?

### **ii. Price**

Although the basic costs are covered with public funds, parental choice of an educational program is not entirely independent of costs. Some programs have extra fees; some do not. Some parents may be concerned about the eventual cost of extra-curricular activities, such as a student trip to Quebec or France during Spring Break. Even where there are no financial costs, there are other kinds of costs. For example, if parents want to be involved in their children's education, but see their lack of proficiency in French as closing the door, that is a cost to them as a result of choosing the program.

### **iii. Location**

Location is significant to educational marketing. Are the desired programs offered in schools where the demand is most concentrated or, at least, in areas which are easily accessible with convenient and affordable bussing?

### **iv. Promotion**

This is the component most people think of regarding marketing: the actual advertising and information dissemination strategies and activities.

## **Messages Promoting French Immersion**

In marketing a French immersion program, the key messages will almost always include the benefits of learning a second language, the reasons for learning French, and basic points about the program: accessibility, quality, continuity, extra-curricular opportunities, and outcomes. Some of the messages that may be used follow.

French immersion:

- develops learning and listening skills as well as the self-discipline necessary for life-long learning;
- increases cognitive abilities, creating a more flexible thinker;
- improves knowledge of and skills in one's first language;
- makes learning yet another language much easier.

Knowing a second language:

- increases personal pleasures, such as the enjoyment of literature, art, music, theatre, travel;
- increases understanding of one's self and broadens opportunities to develop personal relationships;
- provides access to a larger pool of information and to more educational and career opportunities;
- provides a competitive edge in the job market.



French is a natural second language for many Canadians. Its strong presence throughout Canada makes it an easy and economical second language to learn because of ready access to:

- textual, audiovisual and electronic resources in French;
- large numbers of French speakers from which to draw qualified teachers;
- abundant French media sources; and
- easy access to French speaking role models and activities in francophone communities.

Parents also need [information](#) about the program. First and foremost, they need to know that French immersion is a safe choice, that it will DO NO HARM. Administrators should be prepared to dispel myths and provide parents with information about the following:

- program goals and realistic expectations;
- how immersion works;
- research results;
- the effect on English and other subject areas;
- what happens if their child experiences difficulties;
- staff qualifications, such as fluency in French, subject area knowledge, etc.;
- how to prepare their child for Kindergarten;
- bussing, fees, lunchroom supervision;
- [homework](#) and supporting their child's learning.

### Did You Know?

French is spoken by 130 million people worldwide.

The French language is 27% lexically similar to English, 89% similar to Italian and 75% similar to Portuguese, Romanian, Spanish and German.

After English, French is spoken in more countries and on more continents than any other language.

French is the second language of the Internet (after English).

French is a language of world diplomacy and a working language of international organizations, such as the European Economic Community, the United Nations, NATO, the International Monetary Fund and the International Olympic Committee.

## E. Long-term Viability

Developing a marketing strategy will involve early planning for improvements to the French immersion program and paying attention to the needs and values of the potential parent/student market to ensure continuing alignment with customer values. You may not know what to change, but you will recognize that change is needed.





At the French Immersion Administrators' Workshop, 2000 organized by the French Language Services Branch, Rick Parnell, an advertising consultant, stated:

“Teachers are on the educational frontline and therefore critical to the success of the marketing approach. They must be educated in the objectives of the program and committed to its success. Use them to assist in the development of systems that will encourage families to give feedback and contribute ideas about how to enhance the value they receive.”

Again Parnell advises:

“Processes and programs will have to acknowledge the benefits and necessity in establishing long-term partnerships between the educators and families benefiting from the service offered.”

This partnership begins with ensuring that immersion parents are well informed and that prospective immersion parents are aware of the program and its potential for their children. Planning a marketing strategy starts with four steps.

### **Marketing Plan and Annual Promotion**

Recruiting and retaining French immersion students includes marketing the school as well as the program. Marketing is a continuous process that is integral to all the school does—once you attract a customer, you must work to retain that customer. Since the annual education cycle means new potential customers every year, annual promotion is a must.

- Try to get a better understanding of the specific product to market, in this case the French immersion program. Dual- and multi-track schools will have other “products” as well.
- Identify the positive elements to keep in the school and the program.
- Try to understand where the school is in terms of culture, climate, leadership, staff, and image.
- Plan for improvements by clearly identifying achievable goals, things that can be reviewed and modified.
- Identify what to implement in the school and the program.
- Identify the issues to be addressed by the marketing plan.
- Avoid becoming immediately overwhelmed by the need to change; start with two key elements.

### **Target Audience**

To ensure the long-term viability of a French immersion program, one must understand the target audience, the students and their parents, and their needs. This can be achieved in the following ways:

- Draw a demographic profile of the broadest potential community (Statistics Canada can provide information). This may be an exciting project to delegate to the school council.
- Ask questions within the learning community (of parents, teachers, support staff, students, etc.).
- Listen to and understand the expectations of the school's learning community.



- Ask tough questions and be open to the answers.
- Make a list of the kinds of information about the school and the French immersion program that parents need.

### Teamwork

- Find out what support the jurisdiction can provide.
- Find out what the jurisdiction is doing to promote immersion and other programs and suggest any enhancements.
- Consider the role of school administrative and support staff, often the first to speak to prospective parents and students.
- Gain the support and commitment of the teachers.
- Involve parents in the planning and recognize that they may be the best promoters of the school.
- Consider involving current French immersion students as well as graduates.
- Look to the community for available support and assistance, such as universities and colleges, business community, local media, and local CPF chapters.

### Strategies, Activities and Materials

The following strategies, activities and materials should be identified and planned for:

- Establish short- and long-term goals and ensure that progress can be measured.
- Inventory the available strategies, activities and materials that can be readily used or adapted.
- Consider and list new strategies, materials and activities.
- Remember to include strategies for both recruitment and retention and for both parents and students.
- Establish a budget and a timetable.

Once the plans are complete, implement them and evaluate success regularly, making necessary adjustments, and celebrating the successes along the way.

## F. Promotional Activities and Tools

A changing population, more educational options, greater consciousness of choice and less restrictive school boundaries are creating increased competition among schools and jurisdictions.

Where promotion has been well thought out and strategically implemented, the results are invariably increased French immersion enrolments and satisfied administrators, students and parents. What is some of the thinking that goes into these efforts and how does that translate into action?

Consider these questions:

- How do parents learn that a French immersion program exists in your jurisdiction? in your school?



- What is done to overcome the initial assumptions—such as French immersion is only for bright children, or I would have to speak French to help my child—that often stop parents from seeking more information about French immersion?
- How easy is it for parents to get more information and have their concerns allayed?
- What is done to encourage older students to remain in the program?
- How is word-of-mouth encouraged and supported?

This section provides some suggestions to promote the French immersion program to parents and students.

## **Attract Attention**

Parents' and students' attention can be attracted through several routes: direct promotion by the school or jurisdiction, promotion through the community, and promotion through current and past immersion parents and students. A variety of suggestions follow.

### **i. Promotion by a school or jurisdiction:**

- a jurisdiction brochure, introducing the French immersion program (and other programs of choice as well) made widely available in the community;
- a school brochure;
- newspaper advertisements or supplements delivered to homes;
- public service announcements placed on radio and TV;
- the jurisdiction's and the school's Web site;
- large portable signs placed at schools, billboards or banners;
- jurisdiction telephone receptionists and school secretaries should be aware of program choices and be able to offer information to inquirers or know where to direct queries;
- inviting students to seek more information about late immersion or continuing immersion in junior and senior high school.

### **ii. Promotion involving the community:**

- Welcome Wagon and city/town publications and Web sites can advertise educational choices.
- Realtors should know about the educational choices offered in your school or jurisdiction. They are frequently the first contact newcomers have with the community.
- Posters, brochures or flyers can be sent to preschools, playschools and daycares, and placed in public health facilities, libraries and community centres frequented by parents of young children.
- Announcements can be placed on public notice boards and in church bulletins.
- The media can be invited to special celebrations at the school or to meet exchange students or attend some other equally newsworthy event.



### iii. Promotion involving parents, students and graduates:

- human interest stories in community newspapers about students’ or graduates’ achievements, experiences, or aspirations;
- participation in displays at trade fairs and in malls;
- displays of students’ work at the library or mall;
- parent-to-parent word of mouth;
- local Canadian Parents for French (CPF) chapter support and materials.

## Make A Good First Impression

The impression parents have of your school when they arrive for the first time will often influence their decision whether to register their child.

### i. Reception

Your school secretary is likely to be the first person to greet a visitor, either on the phone or in person. Be sure your secretary is well informed about the school and its programs. In fact, school administrators may want to brief all staff on the French immersion program. A school brochure describing program choices and the special features of your school could be given to visitors. Phone callers could be referred to your Web site for similar information or a school brochure could be mailed.

### ii. Appearance

Is your school attractive and welcoming? Is the French immersion program visible to parents, such as signage or displays of students’ work?

### iii. Tours

Treat parent and student visitors to your school like VIPs. Offer a tour of the school including immersion classrooms in action. Encourage older immersion students to help with the tours. They are excellent ambassadors for the school and the program.

### iv. Make time

Parents who stop by the school for information deserve your time and full attention. Offer them a private place to talk. Answer questions and provide written information where possible, such as your school brochure, or Yes, You Can Help!. Encourage them to phone or stop by again if they have further questions.

## Provide Program Details

Once parents’ and students’ attention has been obtained, a good promotional strategy will follow up by providing specific information. Again, the three routes of direct promotion by the jurisdiction or school, involvement of existing community resources and indirect promotion through current immersion parents and students can be used.

Providing detailed information directly by the school or jurisdiction is a mainstay of promotion. Ways to do this include:

- parent information nights;
- school Open House or tours on request;



- school and community newsletter articles;
- providing Alberta Learning's [French Immersion Kindergarten: A Handbook for Parents](#) and/or Yes, You Can Help!;
- having well-informed teachers and school staff, including the school secretary;
- student and parent testimonials;
- meet-your-fellow-student evenings in which immersion students from elementary or junior high schools can meet with immersion students in junior or senior high schools to learn more about the program at the next level and what the school has to offer.

The community could be involved in several ways.

- Businessmen or bilingual adults, for example, could be invited to school meetings to talk about the value of learning French or their experiences in using French in their daily lives.
- The school could provide speakers or detailed information for local radio and TV talk and community digest shows.

Involving parents, students and graduates in providing more specific information includes:

- as speakers at parent information nights or school assemblies;
- testimonials on videos;
- as school tour guides;
- parent-to-parent word-of-mouth;
- local Canadian Parents for French (CPF) chapter support and materials.

### Develop a Comfort Level

Even when parents and students are well informed, some doubts or discomfort may remain. Once again looking at the three routes, several suggestions can be made.

#### i. Use direct promotional materials

Direct promotional methods can take many forms:

- different information sessions for parents as their children move through the grades;
- demonstration lessons for parents (have them experience a French immersion class of their own);
- opportunities for parents to observe and to be involved in the classroom and school;
- French classes for parents;
- a parents' collection of resources on French immersion, second language learning, parenting skills, etc.;
- supportive teachers who understand and can respond to parents' concerns.

#### ii. Involve the community

Community involvement can take the form of inviting influential members of the community to visit the school talk about bilingualism and its benefits or putting on events and celebrations in French that school families can participate in.



- Invite “experienced” immersion parents as speakers at meetings.
- Encourage older students and graduates to speak at meetings and visiting elementary and junior high schools.
- parent-to-parent and student-to-student word of mouth
- Obtain ongoing support and information through the local Canadian Parents for French (CPF) chapter.
- Encourage parents to become members of [Canadian Parents for French](#) (CPF).

Quality programs and good marketing are intertwined. Even good programs can’t afford to be complacent. French immersion student recruitment and retention must be part of the annual school cycle.

## Organize Parent Information Evenings

You may want to consider the following points when organizing an information night for parents:

- When should the meeting be held to maximize attendance?
- Who is invited? How will we advertise?
- What should be included on the agenda?
- Who should be involved in the program?
- What should we place in the information package?

Local CPF chapters have access to a manual on how to organize a parent information night. Contact your local chapter or [CPF Alberta](#).

## Involve the Parents

One of your best marketing tools is satisfied clients, in this case parents and students. Word of mouth is a very effective way of promoting your school. Parents also often have skills or connections that may be helpful in realizing your promotional strategies: layout skills, graphic design, Web site development, printing services, media contacts, etc. Perhaps one of your parents would volunteer to write regular school news items for the local weekly paper or distribute brochures.

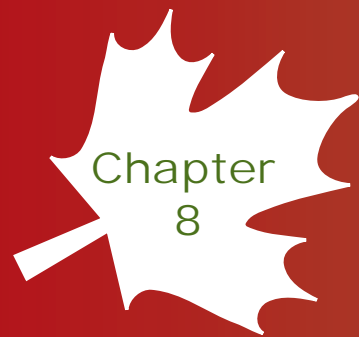
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# INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH DIVERSE NEEDS IN FRENCH IMMERSION

## A. Introduction

Today's French immersion classrooms are as diverse as those delivering other programs. Experts such as Fred Genesee (Duval, 2008) believe there is no reason to exclude students who are struggling from French immersion programs. For many students, the benefits outweigh the challenges; the immersion setting helps them build better language strategies in ways that might not be possible in an English only program. Some students may require accommodations to participate fully in a French immersion program, but this requirement can also be seen as an opportunity for administrators and teachers to find innovative ways of meeting all the needs in their immersion classrooms.

This chapter presents a series of questions and answers to help the school administrator support teachers in meeting the needs of students who may be struggling in the French Immersion program.

## B. What is inclusion?

Alberta Education's *Standards for Special Education, Amended 2004*, states that “‘inclusive setting/ inclusion’ means specially designed instruction and support for students with special education needs in regular classrooms and neighbourhood schools” (p. 3). More recently, educational literature has begun to see inclusion as a child-centred philosophy and approach that allows students to reach their full potential. This approach provides students with the best learning opportunities that will meet their needs by removing barriers to their participation. Inclusive schools recognize and celebrate diversity, value students and staff and see differences as valuable resources to support learning.

## C. Advantages of the inclusion in French Immersion

French immersion programs can be a good choice for some students who are struggling or who have special education needs. By learning both of Canada's official languages, students gain more than the ability to speak the languages. For example, students may benefit from a wider range of learning strategies for overcoming learning difficulties and renewed confidence for learning new things. Recent research has shown that language skills learned in one language may transfer to the other language, thus advancing language skills in both the first and second languages (Woolfolk, 2006). Furthermore, students at risk for reading or language development issues might benefit from attending a French immersion program where there is more instruction time spent on basic sounds and letters. In fact, more repetition and skill transfer can make students in French immersion stronger readers overall and help those with language difficulties to develop strategies for overcoming those difficulties.





The benefits of attending a French Immersion program in Canada are well documented. The Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) states that Canadians who speak both official languages have higher employment rates and generally earn more than those who speak only English or French. Furthermore, bilingual individuals have enhanced problem-solving skills because they better develop their ability to discern relevant from irrelevant information. Finally, bilingualism in French and English enhances one's ability to fully participate in Canadian society (CCL, 2007). Other benefits identified include greater cognitive flexibility, creativity and concept formation (Woolfolk, 2006). French is also an asset for employment, travel and leisure pursuits around the world.

### Guiding the concerned teacher

When a French Immersion teacher is concerned that a student is struggling, there are a number of steps that should be considered:

- 1) Work with the teacher to decide what kinds of data could be collected to help identify problems or issues that the student is experiencing. A portfolio of work, sample assessments and more formal assessments such as COLI (see resource list for more information) may be useful in determining the student's strengths and needs. Data should include everyday classroom tasks that are presenting a problem and strategies that the teacher has attempted to address these issues. It is also important to consider the learning environment and to observe if there are particular times when the student faces greater struggles.
- 2) Once the teacher has identified the student's strengths, needs and other environmental factors, the next step is to try new strategies to help the student progress. Examples of strategies may include presenting the materials differently, moving the student to a different area of the classroom or designing homework to address the student's needs. The teacher uses the data collected in first step to determine which accommodations can and should be made. During the second phase, the teacher continues to collect data on the student's progress and should, at the end of several weeks, be able to determine whether the new strategies have helped the student progress or if it is time for more specialized assessments.
- 3) If it is decided that the student requires specialized assessments, it is a good idea to hold a meeting that includes the classroom teacher, the student's parents and special education personnel from the school or school jurisdiction prior to assessment taking place. This is an opportunity to gather more data that will benefit the assessment and to create an understanding of the purpose of the assessment.
- 4) If the student requires an intellectual assessment (i.e., IQ test), it should be performed in the student's first language to ensure the assessment is as valid as possible. Achievement or academic functioning assessments should be provided in French, but these may be done at the school level by personnel qualified to administer Level B assessments.
- 5) The last step in the assessment process is to look again at the student's strengths and needs from a more formal perspective and to develop an Individualized Program Plan (IPP) that outlines goals, strengths and accommodations for the student. For more information on creating IPPs, see Alberta Education's [Individualized Program Planning \(2006\)](#).



## Special education needs can be accommodated in a French Immersion program?

A student's ability to succeed in a French Immersion program depends upon many factors, including motivation, support and environmental factors. If appropriate supports are in place, students with a variety of special education needs can succeed in French Immersion.

Students with language or reading difficulties or a learning disability can often thrive in French Immersion. As these difficulties are pervasive (i.e. they will exist regardless of language of instruction and in all languages learned by the student), the student may not struggle more in French Immersion than they would in an English-only program. Students struggling with reading or language may even be at an advantage because the repetition and review of basic skills in French may be beneficial. Furthermore, skills and strategies learned to overcome language or reading difficulties are transferable from one language to another, meaning that interventions can benefit the student for both languages.

Students with cognitive disabilities can also benefit from learning a second language in an immersive setting if they are provided with the appropriate supports. These students will learn more slowly and will require adaptations, but they will also enjoy benefits from learning a second language.

Students with behaviour difficulties or AD/HD often require behavioural interventions, but their ability to learn languages is not usually impaired. Behaviour issues may be addressed using strategies similar to those used in other programs.

Students who are gifted may benefit from the additional challenge that French Immersion education presents. However, some differentiating of instruction for these students is often required in order to best meet their needs.

French Immersion may *not* be appropriate for students with a significant delay or disorder in their first language or with significant hearing impairments, unless these can be rectified by adjusting the educational environment (e.g., by installing an amplification system or other equipment).

### Additional financial support for students

Many principals in French Immersion schools wonder whether there is funding available to meet special education needs. Currently, special education funding for students with mild/moderate needs is included in a school division's general revenue. For students identified as having severe special education needs, school divisions receive a grant to help fund specialized services for the student. This grant is available for students attending any school in the jurisdiction. At this time, the *Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta* project is looking at identification and funding options, so these standards may change at the completion of the project.

### Accountability to students in French Immersion schools

According to the *Standards for Special Education*, all students in a jurisdiction have the right to have their needs met. It is up to the school jurisdiction to make decisions as to how the needs of all students will be met.



## Strategies to meet all needs in the French Immersion classroom

Students in the French immersion classroom require the same range of strategies that they would need in an English-only program. Once the student's particular needs have been determined, appropriate strategies should be used. Generally, all students can benefit from differentiated instruction that meets the varying levels of ability found in any classroom.

## Differentiated instruction in a French Immersion classroom

French immersion classrooms are just like any other classroom where students' abilities vary. Teachers skilled in differentiated instruction techniques are better able to meet all the needs in their classroom by varying assignments, assessments and time allotments for completing tasks. More detailed information for French Immersion teachers can be found in *L'inclusion en immersion*, a practical guide to implementing differentiated instruction in the French Immersion classroom. Many other excellent resources on differentiated instruction are available in English, such as Carol Ann Tomlinson's publications (2000; 2001) on differentiating instruction and leadership for differentiated schools and classrooms.

## Decision about transferring a student to an English-only program

The school principal, together with the student's parents or guardians and other school jurisdiction staff, should decide what is best for the student. Psychologists and other specialists are an excellent resource for identifying student needs and strengths, but placement decisions should be made by all the members of the learning team.

## Transferring to an English-only program

If, after careful consideration of all relevant factors, parents, school personnel and the student (if appropriate) conclude that the student should be transferred to an English-only program, it is important to ensure a smooth transition from one school to the next. Although it is not specifically geared toward use in the French Immersion context, Alberta Education's resource entitled *Building on Success* is an excellent reference to help manage transitions so that they happen more smoothly. Generally, it is good practice to gather all the relevant documents and evaluations as well as the student's IPP and to outline the student's difficulties so that he or she may obtain the necessary support in the new school.

## Conclusion

Research shows that a wide variety of students can be successful in a French Immersion program, so it is important for teachers and school administrators to be open to student diversity in French Immersion. Interventions can make a big difference in a student's learning, but teachers first have to be willing to intervene and to provide students with the tools they need to succeed in their French Immersion program.

## Recommended resources

Recommended resources are available [online](#) or for purchase from the [Learning Resources Centre](#) (LRC):

- COLI (available at the LRC only)
- [Diversity in French Immersion Classrooms: A Quick Inclusion Guide for Teachers](#)
- [L'inclusion en immersion](#)



- *Resources to Support Students with Diverse Learning Needs/Ressources pour appuyer les élèves ayant divers besoins spéciaux*
- *Unlocking Potential / Révéler le potentiel*
- Dyslexia in the Immersion Classroom: [http://www.carla.umn.edu/immersion/acie/vol7/May2004\\_Dyslexia\\_in\\_the\\_Immersion\\_Classroom.html](http://www.carla.umn.edu/immersion/acie/vol7/May2004_Dyslexia_in_the_Immersion_Classroom.html)
- Possible Factors Affecting Student Performance in French Immersion: [http://www.carla.umn.edu/immersion/acie/vol7/May2004\\_Student\\_Performance\\_Factors.html](http://www.carla.umn.edu/immersion/acie/vol7/May2004_Student_Performance_Factors.html)

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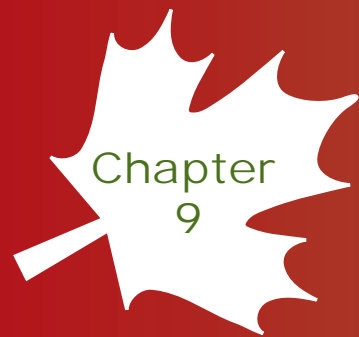
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## FRENCH STUDIES BEYOND GRADE 12

### A. Post-secondary Opportunities

There are many opportunities for further study in [French at the postsecondary level](#)—whether at [universities](#), colleges, technical institutions and/or non-credit continuing education courses. It is important that immersion graduates be informed of the possibilities of pursuing their studies in their second language. It is through constant use that they will be able to maintain their competency in French and improve it.

Information about the many opportunities to continue to learn and use French beyond high school is important to parents and students both as a demonstration of the value of learning French and as motivation to continue in a French immersion program to the end of Grade 12.

Alberta has a growing array of post-secondary opportunities to pursue studies in the French language. Students should also be made aware of the [fellowships](#) available for full-time, post-secondary studies in French. Students at the post-secondary level are also eligible to participate in the [Explore](#) program to help them improve their knowledge of French and acquire a deeper appreciation for the culture embedded in the language.

### B. Alberta Universities

- **Athabasca University**  
[Athabasca University](#) offers a [BA – French Concentration \(3-year\)](#) and a [BA – French Major \(4-year\)](#).
- **Grant MacEwan University**  
The Department of Humanities at [Grant MacEwan University](#) consists of nine different disciplines, including [French](#).
- **Mount Royal University**  
Students at [Mount Royal University](#) can register in a variety of [French courses](#) to fulfill in part the requirements for a General Studies Diploma. They can also obtain a [Bachelor of Arts](#) with a minor in French.
- **University of Alberta – Campus Saint-Jean**  
[Campus Saint-Jean](#) is a faculty of the University of Alberta, which offers the opportunity to study in a unique bilingual environment.  
As of September 2010, it offers seven [undergraduate programs](#) in French:
  - [Bachelor of Arts](#)
  - [Bachelor of Science](#)
  - [Bachelor of Education](#)



- [Bilingual Bachelor of Commerce](#)
- [Bachelor of Science \(Environmental and Conservation Sciences – bilingual\)](#)
- [Bachelor of Science in Engineering](#)
- [Bachelor of Science in Nursing – bilingual](#)

And two graduate programs:

- [Master of Education – Educational Studies in Language and Culture](#)
- [Master of Arts in Canadian Studies](#)

A wide range of [bursaries and scholarships](#) are available to students registered at Campus Saint-Jean. Administrators and prospective students as well as their parents may contact [Campus Saint-Jean](#) for further information.

- **University of Alberta – Faculty of Arts**

The [Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies](#) of the [Faculty of Arts](#) at the [University of Alberta](#) specializes in the study of French as an international language in contact with multiple cultures.

- **University of Calgary**

The [Department of French, Italian, and Spanish](#) offers a variety of language and literature courses.

The [Faculty of Education](#) works in partnership with the Faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences to provide undergraduate and graduate students with a variety of opportunities to learn and study second and additional languages.

The [Centre français](#) offers a variety of [courses](#) and [activities](#) to promote the French language and culture. It also awards a [Certificate in French Language Studies](#). This certificate is intended for intermediate students of French and provides university recognition for completing a prescribed program of study in the French language.

- **University of Lethbridge**

The [Department of Modern Languages](#) of the University of Lethbridge offers courses in language, literature, culture and civilization as well as academic and living experiences in francophone Canada and abroad.

The [Faculty of Education](#) offers courses leading to teaching French.

## C. Alberta Community Colleges

Some of the community colleges throughout Alberta have French departments or offer French courses.

- [Concordia University College](#)
- [Grande Prairie College](#)
- [Red Deer College](#)



## D. Elsewhere in Canada

The Web site of the [Association des universités de la francophonie canadienne](#) lists all the Canadian francophone universities and colleges where French immersion students can continue their studies in a French milieu. The Web site of the [Réseau des cégeps et des collèges francophones du Canada](#) provides information on the francophone colleges across Canada.

The following universities and colleges offer a variety of French programs. Some of these programs allow students to obtain a degree in French. Interested students are advised to research each university to discover the specific programs and courses they offer. This list is not intended to be comprehensive.

### British Columbia

- Simon Fraser University, Vancouver: [Department of French](#)
- University of British Columbia, Vancouver: [Department of French, Hispanic and Italian Studies](#)
- University of Victoria, Victoria: [Département de français](#)

### Saskatchewan

- University of Regina, Regina: [Institut français](#)
- University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon: [Department of Languages and Linguistics](#)

### Manitoba

- [Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface](#), Saint-Boniface
- University of Manitoba, Winnipeg: [Department of French, Spanish and Italian](#)
- University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg: [Modern Languages and Literature](#)

### Ontario

- Glendon College, York University, Toronto: [Études françaises](#)
- [La Cité collégiale](#), Ottawa
- Laurentian University, Sudbury: [Département d'études françaises](#)
- Queen's University, Kingston: [Études françaises](#)
- Royal Military College of Canada, Kingston: [Department of French Studies](#)
- University of Ottawa, Ottawa: [Département de français](#)
- University of Toronto, Toronto: [Department of French](#)

### Quebec

- McGill University, Montreal: [Département de langue et littérature françaises](#)

### New Brunswick

- Mount Allison University, Sackville: [French Studies](#)
- University of New Brunswick, Fredericton and Saint John: [Département d'études françaises](#)



## Nova Scotia

- Dalhousie University, Halifax: [Department of French](#)

## E. Other Post-secondary Opportunities

Information on a wide variety of post-secondary and other opportunities to continue to learn and use French is available in the following Web sites:

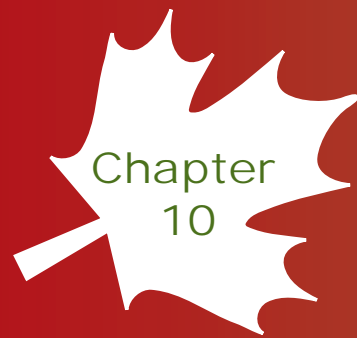
- [Canadian French Studies and Language University Programs](#)
- [Inventory of Post-secondary Opportunities](#) (CPF)
- [Languages Canada](#)
- [Language Learning](#) (Canadian Heritage)
- [Schools in Canada](#)

The following are suggestions of available bursaries and programs. This is not a comprehensive list.

- [Languages at Work](#) is a component of [Young Canada Works](#) (YCW) which offers a number of summer job placements for graduating [Explore](#) participants.
- [Campus France](#) presents a lot of information for anyone interested in studying in France.
- The [Association Périgord linguistique et culturel](#) offers students an opportunity to improve their French in one of the most beautiful regions of France.







## SUPPORT AGENCIES AND WHAT THEY OFFER

### A. Cultural Activities/Organizations

#### **ACCENT**

ACCENT provides French immersion and francophone schools with a selection of recreational, cultural, and educational activities available in French for groups of students.

ACCENT is a joint project of the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta and Canadian Parents for French, Alberta Branch.

#### **Alliance Française**

Alliance Française is an international non-profit organization founded in Paris in 1883 by intellectuals who wanted to spread the French language and culture around the world. The Alliance Française of Calgary and the Alliance Française d'Edmonton offer many French courses and organize events for both children and adults.

#### **Ciné-Club of Edmonton**

The Ciné-Club of Edmonton presents one French film on a monthly basis from October to May.

#### **Cinémagine**

The Cinémagine Society is a non-for-profit organization responsible for promoting French films to Francophones and Francophiles of Alberta.

#### **Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta**

The Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta has developed a French Web site that presents a variety of information on tourism in Alberta.

#### **Francalta**

The Francalta Web site is an on-line calendar of French cultural activities taking place in various localities in Alberta.

#### **Heritage Community Foundation**

The Heritage Community Foundation has created Alberta's Francophone Heritage Web site in the Alberta Online Encyclopedia.

#### **La Girandole**

La Girandole is committed to promoting the francophone culture through dance and folklore. It offers a wide variety of dance classes and training programs year round.



## Le Regroupement artistique francophone de l'Alberta (RAFA)

The [RAFA](#) is recognized by the Government of Alberta's Foundation for the Arts as a Provincial Arts Services Organization and serves as an umbrella organization that provides services and financial assistance to Francophone arts associations, major artistic and cultural event, and individual artists (includes all art mediums such as visual, musical, theatrical, etc. It prepares a yearly [French performing arts directory](#).

## La Société francophone des arts visuels de l'Alberta

[La Société francophone des arts visuels de l'Alberta](#) endeavours to promote the importance of visual arts through demos, workshops, exhibitions and touring and to encourage the creativity of Francophone artists and artisans of Alberta.

## L'Unithéâtre

[L'Unithéâtre](#) presents five French plays on an annual basis at the theater of La Cité francophone in Edmonton. Many of the presentations have English surtitles.

## B. Newspapers and Media

### Le Chinook

[Le Chinook](#) is an Alberta French newspaper published monthly that covers topics and issues concerning Francophones in Alberta and across Canada. It is available free of charge in many locations across Alberta.

### Le Franco

[Le Franco](#) is the only weekly provincial French newspaper in Alberta. It is a valuable source of information about the Alberta's francophone community.

- [Radio-Canada – Alberta](#)
- [Association de la presse francophone – Alberta](#) (Web-based news service)

## C. French Bookstores

- [Librairie Le Carrefour University Bookstore](#) (Edmonton)
- [Livres Lacoste Books](#) (Calgary)

## D. Provincial and National Associations

### Alberta School Boards Association for Languages Education

The Alberta School Boards' Association for Bilingual Education was established in 1978 to embrace the issues and needs surrounding French immersion and French as a second language programs. In 1999 its scope was broadened to include all languages in Alberta and it was renamed the [Alberta School Boards Association for Languages Education](#) (A.S.B.A.L.E.).



## Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta

The *Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta* (ACFA) represents about 65,000 Albertans of French background. Its membership includes Franco-Albertans and other French-speaking Albertans who support the goals of the association. The association is a member of the [Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada](#) that has produced a document useful to French immersion teachers: [Francophone Community Profile of Alberta](#).

The ACFA has its main office in Edmonton and has regional offices in [Bonnyville](#), [Calgary](#), [Edmonton](#), [Falher](#), [Fort McMurray](#), [Grande Prairie](#), Jasper, Legal, [Lethbridge/Medicine Hat](#), [Plamondon](#), [Red Deer](#), and [St. Paul](#).

## Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers

The [Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers](#) (CAIT) was established in 1977 to promote and improve French immersion programs in Canada. Since its creation, CAIT has initiated numerous activities with the aim of enhancing immersion teaching:

- [annual national conferences](#) for teachers and administrators;
- alternate year thematic colloquiums for teachers and administrators;
- professional development activities;
- *Journal de l'Immersion Journal*;
- the development of many valuable French immersion [support resources and guides](#);
- creation of a consortium of Canadian universities offering French immersion teacher training programs, which meets regularly to assist CAIT in initiating and carrying out a variety of projects;
- promotion of dialogue and partnerships with both national and provincial associations working in the area of French second language learning and provincial departments of education, as well as with federal initiatives.

## Canadian Parents for French

### Background

[Canadian Parents for French](#) (CPF) was founded in 1977 by English-speaking parents attending a national conference on French language and exchange opportunities. It has been a driving force behind the popularity and growth of French immersion and has strongly supported the significant improvements that have been made to core French.

The [Alberta Branch](#) was incorporated as a non-profit society in 1978. Chapters, the local level of CPF, work within communities to promote and support French second language learning opportunities. There are more than 35 local chapters throughout Alberta.

A school, jurisdiction or organization (such as a school council) can become an associate member of CPF to receive information and support the goals of CPF.

- CPF and the school administrator
- CPF's services and activities support French and immersion programs, students, parents, and staff in a variety of ways:
  - advocating for supportive policies and adequate funding and resources;



- informing the community about the value of and opportunities for learning French (pamphlets, posters, information meetings, speakers, displays, etc.);
- sponsoring, organizing, and sharing information about extra- and co-curricular activities for students;
- supporting parents by providing information and addressing their concerns from the preschool to the post-secondary level (newsletters, Web sites, responding to enquiries, etc.);
- serving as a clearinghouse of information about French second language learning (research, resources, statistics, etc.);
- developing links with [Alberta Education](#), [Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta](#), [Alberta School Councils' Association](#), [Alberta School Boards Association](#), [Alberta Teachers' Association](#), [College of Alberta School Superintendents](#), and the universities.

Teachers and administrators can support CPF and make it even more effective by:

- encouraging parents to become members;
- taking out an associate membership on behalf of the school;
- coordinating their efforts with those of their local CPF chapter;
- sharing information with CPF about their programs: successes and challenges, ideas and resources.

### Conseil français

The *Conseil français* is a specialist council of the [Alberta Teachers' Association](#). It supports the professional growth, both pedagogical and linguistic, of teachers in French first language and French immersion settings throughout Alberta.

### Fédération des parents francophones de l'Alberta

The *Fédération des parents francophones de l'Alberta* (FPFA) was founded in 1986. It is a provincial, non-profit organization, which works to:

- support the central role of parents in French first language education;
- encourage francophone parents to participate in governing French first language preschool programs and educational institutions; and
- ensure quality and equity in French first language education.

While the FPFA's main focus is on French first language education, it also has an interest in the promotion of French as a second language. It is available as a resource to parents and educators wishing information on the different French programs offered in Alberta and their intended clientele.

## E. Government Agencies

### Francophone Secretariat

The Government of Alberta established the [Francophone Secretariat](#) in 1999 in recognition of its commitment to its Francophone citizenry. In its role as a liaison between the government and Alberta's Francophone community, the Francophone Secretariat represents the needs of



the Francophone community in Alberta and supports initiatives aimed at promoting French language and culture.

### Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages

As an agent of change and an ombudsman, the [Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages](#) has been mandated to take all measures intended to ensure that the three main objectives of the [Official Languages Act](#) are met, namely:

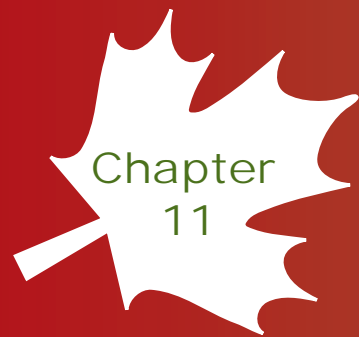
- the equality of English and French in Parliament, within the Government of Canada, the federal administration and institutions subject to the Act;
- the preservation and development of official language communities in Canada; and
- the equality of English and French in Canadian society.

Although based in Ottawa, the Commissioner also has five regional offices: Moncton, Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg and Edmonton. The Commissioner produces an [annual report](#) and several [studies](#) and many other publications available on their [Web site](#). The Commissioner's office also produces many resources for children and students. This includes [games](#), [posters](#) and [videos](#) that can be ordered free of charge.

### Legislature Tours

French language tours of the provincial legislature are available upon request. To schedule a tour, please contact Visitor Services at 780-427-7362 or by [e-mail](#). You can also tour the Legislature [online](#) (in French and in English).





## TEXTUAL AND MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

### A. Learning Resources Centre

The [Learning Resources Centre](#) (LRC), a branch of Alberta Education, distributes the learning and teaching resources required to support Alberta's Kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum. The LRC also offers alternative-format resources and specialized equipment for loan to students with visual impairments, as well as a variety of resources for students with various perceptual disabilities.

The LRC carries over 3,000 approved French resources that support the implementation of Alberta's French immersion program. Orders can be placed using the 24-hour, secure [on-line ordering service](#).

### B. Authorized Resources Database

A [database](#) of all authorized learning and teaching resources is available on the Alberta Education Web site. All of the curricular areas taught in French are listed under "Curriculum Area".

### C. LearnAlberta.ca

[LearnAlberta.ca](#) offers engaging digital learning and teaching resources for Alberta's ECS to Grade 12 community. LearnAlberta.ca supports lifelong learning in Alberta by providing access to high-quality digital resources designed for teachers, parents and students. These resources can be accessed from any computer with a high-speed Internet connection.

The LearnAlberta.ca Web site offers resources to enhance French language studies. Some projects have been initiated in French and others involve the translation and adaptation of resources developed in English. New resources are continuously being added at all grade levels in many subject areas.

### D. Connection

[Connection: Information for Teachers](#) provides information on a wide variety of topics to support teachers in the classroom such as curriculum, authorized resources, assessment, technology and special education.

French immersion teachers should subscribe to receive the [French edition of Connection](#) in order to be aware of the latest developments and approvals about French resources, programs and initiatives.



## E. 2Learn

The [2Learn.ca](http://2Learn.ca) Web site has a [French section](#) where French immersion teachers can find resources to enhance their planning and teaching across many subject areas.

## F. Professional Development Resources

There is a wealth of books, articles, periodicals, and newsletters to support the continued professional development of administrators, teachers and other stakeholders involved in French immersion programs.

Periodicals are a good source of information on research and pedagogy. Membership in the [Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers/ Association canadienne des professeurs d'immersion](#) (CAIT/ACPI) includes a subscription to *Journal de l'immersion Journal* and membership in [Canadian Parents for French](#) includes provincial and national newsletters.

A growing number of Web sites offer research articles, searchable databases, and access to classroom resources for French immersion or second language learning:

- [American Association of Teachers of French](#);
- [American Council on Immersion Education](#);
- [American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages](#);
- [Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers](#);
- [Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition](#);
- [Center for Applied Linguistics](#);
- [Languages Canada](#);
- [Second Language Education Centre](#).

As referenced throughout this handbook, the reports from the *French Immersion in Alberta: Building the Future* conference series provide another excellent source of information for administrators of French immersion programs. Copies can be ordered at <[www.cpfalta.ab.ca/](http://www.cpfalta.ab.ca/)>.



# Appendix



- ◆ Mandin, L. **“French Immersion: How It Works.”** *French Immersion in Alberta: Building the Future 1998—Conference Report*. Edmonton, November 19–20, 1998. Edmonton: Building the Future Conference Committee, 1999. Reprinted with permission.
  
- ◆ Lapkin, S. **“Uses and Misuses of Research in School Board Decision-Making: Examples from French Immersion.”** *Contact* 10, 3 (October 1991). Reprinted with permission.



## BACKGROUND

### French Immersion: How It Works

"No educational program has been so intensively researched and evaluated in Canada as has French immersion. The effects of the program on the acquisition of French-language as well as English-language skills, and the academic achievement of French immersion students, have been well documented and research shows the program works." (**Canadian Education Association, 1992, p2**)

Since its inception 35 years ago, the program has evolved but the distinct feature of immersion remains—teaching curriculum via a second language. French immersion is a highly successful approach to second language learning—an effective way for students to become functionally fluent in a second language while achieving all of the objectives of a regular program.

How well does it work? One only has to think about the numerous students in Alberta who successfully write diploma exams in French in Social Studies 30, Biology 30 and Math 30. Not only do they learn a second language but they also develop their ability to think, to reflect, to analyze and to apply knowledge. They develop what we call second language proficiency, which enables them to master concepts as simple as colours and the family, and as complex as the causes of the world wars and trigonometry. Indeed, learning another language in an immersion setting is not limited to the language per se, its vocabulary or its grammatical rules. It is learning the skills of communicating, according to social and cultural context. It is adapting communicative strategies to get the message across, or cracking the right joke without making a cultural or linguistic *faux pas*. Many adults who have learned French as a second language know how difficult and frustrating it can be to express themselves in French. It is not the case for French immersion students. They don't have to blush, get nervous or think twice to express their thoughts. French speakers do not switch to English when they speak to French immersion students. They perceive immersion students as being able to carry on a normal conversation in French, so they just continue to speak French.

#### How Do Students Achieve This Level Of Functional Bilingualism?

##### *Second language acquisition vs. first language acquisition*

For the child, learning French the immersion way will be much the same as learning in his first language. In a typical French immersion classroom, the 'gentle approach' is used. The teacher uses French all of the time, speaking in English only if a student's health or safety is at risk. Gestures, mime, pictures and objects are used to help the children understand. Very quickly, through watching and listening, the students begin to recognize words and phrases, responding appropriately.

Immersion students learn to be good listeners. From the beginning, they have to pay very close attention to the teacher, in order to understand what is happening in the classroom. They must attend not only to words but also to gestures, body movements, intonation and expression. In addition to these clues, they pick up on the similarities between certain English and French words (e.g. "banana" and "banane").

Children also become very sensitive to the teacher's response to what they do and say. The teacher listens and observes carefully to verify what information the students possess and understand. On this basis, she consciously adapts her speech and classroom activities to assist the children. The early years of schooling have to be more structured until a functional level of fluency is reached. As language develops, the potential of meaning-making develops, resulting in second language proficiency, that is, using language for real purposes. Students are able to use the target language in various social-communicative situations as well as in academic-intellectual situations. Once the students develop a certain level of second language proficiency, they are able to engage in divergent or evaluative thinking processes which will lead to the creation of new thought schemata by means of the target language. As children acquire more meanings in the second language, they become better able to use the second language for cognitively demanding tasks. It takes years of immersion schooling to reach such a level of comfort in communication. The more exposure students have to French and the more they use it, the better their communication skills and the greater their confidence in their ability to use the language.

Immersion students gain control over two language systems and they are accustomed to learning the nuances of another language in order to be understood by their teacher and in their mother tongue by their parents and neighbours. Immersion works so well because the students are not just studying the language—they are using it in meaningful ways.

### *Positive transfers*

Clearly, the research shows us that students' knowledge of English is not in jeopardy in French immersion programs. Many children are reading before they start school; some begin on their own to read in English once they have acquired this skill in their second language. It seems clear that once literacy skills are well established in one language, they transfer readily and rapidly to the other language.

Both French and English are read from left to right, both use groups of letters to form words and groups of words to form sentences, and both use the same alphabet. All of this makes it relatively easy for children to transfer the skills of reading from French to English or from English to French. However, because the children in Alberta are constantly exposed to English in the home and in the community, their knowledge of English is not threatened. We should therefore take this opportunity to immerse the young students in the target language so as to ensure that their level of language is sufficiently functional to enhance their ability to understand what they read as they learn the mechanics and the strategies of reading.

### *Level of stress for immersion students*

Children in immersion programs accept French as a normal part of their schooling. Obviously, the younger the child, the easier it appears for them. Healy (1990) in his book *Endangered Minds*, tells us "the brain is ravenous for language stimulation in early childhood but becomes increasingly resistant to change when puberty arrives" (p. 86). Since language shapes our thinking, and sharpens our ability to reason, to reflect and to respond to the world, it is important that we focus on this moment to introduce young children to a second language. We all know bilingual or trilingual children who are able to communicate to different audiences in their language of choice. Penfield tells us children can learn up to five languages simultaneously, providing the audience is relatively stable. We know that young children who are exposed to a second language quickly develop fluency with a native accent. This is seen, for example, among children living in a foreign country who have a nanny or whose parents use two different languages in the home.

As for the notion that children will find it difficult to begin school in a second language, researchers (Weber & Tardif, 1990), comparing reactions of children beginning immersion and English kindergartens, reveal to us that the issue is not the language but simply adapting to the new social setting with children they do not yet know.

The fact that not understanding the teachers seemed only a minor nuisance to the children could indicate that children are more tolerant of ambiguity than are adults. Even in their first language, young children are accustomed to not understanding everything adults say. In addition, they do not feel as socially awkward about not understanding as adults might in a similar situation, nor are they as reluctant to ask for help. Not knowing everything, relying on adults and asking lots of questions are part of the socially accepted role of being a child...At the beginning of the year, the immersion kindergarten children often told us that they didn't understand French but were adamant in telling us they understood the teacher, who spoke almost exclusively in French.(p.57)

Older children and adults have far more difficulty learning another language and developing an authentic accent.

### *The classroom context*

Successful teachers in French immersion programs are mindful of three factors: how children learn, how children learn languages, and their own ability to serve as good linguistic models. These teachers are aware that learning a language is a long, complex and continuous process. It is a labour of love and patience. Because we believe the process is as important as the product, their pedagogy must reflect and value both. Furthermore, the teachers must not lose sight of the double mandate of French immersion programs: teaching the curriculum and teaching a second language.

The problem may not be one of learning in a second language or in one's native language but one of pedagogy. In order to learn, children's minds must be stimulated by learning situations which will enable them to function at all thinking levels in the language of instruction of the classroom. Every pedagogical action influences the development of children.

Ideally, the French immersion teachers should consider the pedagogical implications identified among the distinguishing characteristics of immersion practices. Among the practices which deserve attention in immersion classes, we find:

- the ability to simplify teacher talk to a level that makes it possible for the learners to process the information,
- the ability to assist children in expressing the acquired information in their own words,
- the ability to create activities inviting students to produce comprehensible output at the appropriate age level, not only for pedagogic functions but also for organizational and social function.

### **The Roles of Decision-Makers**

As decision-makers in French immersion programs, a number of issues surface at this time. To keep the programs healthy and viable, we must, together, reflect on fundamental questions such as:

- why does it make sense for children to be exposed to a second language from kindergarten?
- depending on grade level, what are the points at which there is too little exposure to or use of French to make an immersion program work—that is, the students' French skills are not adequate for the acquisition of concepts and skills in math, science and social studies?
- as an English speaking unilingual administrator of a school/district offering an immersion program, what do I need to know to supervise and evaluate instruction?
- as a supervisor or evaluator of programs, what are indicators of appropriate and effective teaching strategies?
- as an administrator, which qualities are important in a French immersion teacher?
- what are the differences between a good immersion teacher and an excellent immersion teacher?

### **Conclusion**

Teaching in a French immersion context demands support and dialogue. Educators teaching in French immersion programs need to reflect on their beliefs regarding learning, language acquisition and ideal pedagogical practices in such a context. They need time to reflect as well as strong leaders who will accompany them as they probe their pedagogical practices. Who asks the questions? Are we asking the right questions? The parents—what is their role in this endeavour?

In order to continue to ensure success in our immersion programs, we must continue to reflect on what is happening in French immersion classrooms. A stronger partnership between teachers, administrators and researchers would enhance the possibilities of assisting all educators involved in this initiative to further improve our pedagogical practices in French immersion schools. A reflection *on* and *in action* clearly helps raise the level of consciousness of teachers as they attempt to meet the challenging but rewarding task of teaching children in a second language. Teaching should not be a solitary activity. As educators, we must question even what seems so obvious!

Dr. Lucille Mandin, Associate Professor, Faculté Saint-Jean, Edmonton, Alberta

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- Healy, J. (1990), *Endangered Minds*. New York: Touchstone.
- Weber, S., & Tardif, C. (1990). The young child's view of starting French immersion. In *So You Want Your Child to Learn French!*, Canadian Parents for French.

## SESSION NOTES

# French Immersion: How It Works

Lucille Mandin

The following summary was prepared from notes taken during the session by a volunteer recorder, and from any other written records of the session as may have been kept on flip charts or work sheets. The summary was reviewed by the session presenter and printed with his agreement.



### Opening concerns raised by delegates

*French immersion programs are challenged by attrition. Why?*

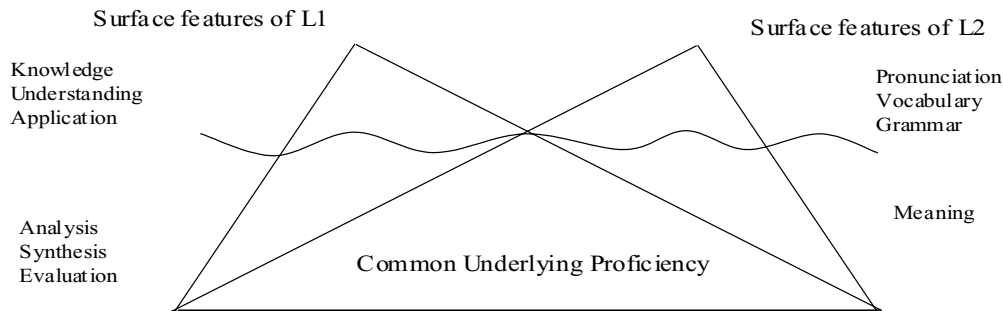
We've stopped promoting the program, riding on past success stories. We have taken for granted that the momentum is strong enough to ensure continuity.

We may have forgotten why it works, and why and when it works so well. There is therefore a need to promote the program more positively through such means as providing research results to parents.

*French immersion programs need to be improved/enhanced.*

Because we have forgotten the fundamental principals of immersion pedagogy, the program is often watered down. Whether consciously or unconsciously, there is a perception that the program is too difficult for the students and therefore English is often overused in classrooms, particularly in the early years. It is not uncommon to hear English spoken in Kindergarten in March. This is also evident throughout the program, but particularly at the high school level. As we get closer to university, French is used more and more sparsely; therefore the end results are flawed.

## The dual iceberg Representation of Bilingual Proficiency



Cummins, Jim *Bilingualism and Special Education: Issues in Assessment and Pedagogy*, London, UK: Multilingual Matters, Ltd., 1984.

Modified by Mandin, 1985

We need to work on increasing comprehensible language input for our students and providing multiple opportunities for student output in authentic contexts. We must focus on the importance of interaction in French in our classes—teacher-student and student-student interactions. Attention must also be given to error correction to avoid error fossilization.

We need to reflect on pedagogical practices, that is, on what happens in the classroom. Too much emphasis is placed on results and not enough on how we get these results.

[Dr. Mandin's presentation followed.]

### Issues

#### *How does French immersion work?*

In a typical French immersion classroom, the “gentle approach” is used. The teacher uses French all of the time, offering the children a rich, varied linguistic environment similar to the one in which he learned his first language.

What is the difference between acquiring and learning a language? Language acquisition refers to the natural approach. It focuses on the need to communicate and to get things done in the language. The exploration of meaning is done in the context of interaction with significant others. On the other hand, learning a language focuses on forms to be mastered. Learners are very conscious that they are studying a language. In the immersion setting, students are introduced to the second language via the natural approach; however, conscious learning is also part of the process.

#### *What does learning a second language do for children?*

It not only helps them learn a language; it helps them learn how to learn.

Children become very good listeners and sharp communicators. They learn to attend to gestures and contexts, not just to words. They become very sensitive to the teacher’s response (tone, intonation, body language), and to the context of communication.

Children learn to get control over two languages. They are able to transfer skills from one language to the other effortlessly. Language awareness is sharpened.

Children develop a sense of pride if they are supported in their endeavor of learning a second language. This pride creates a sense of belonging (particularly important for children with learning disabilities who often suffer as a result of transferring out of the program.)

*How do children make meaning when learning a second language?*

Cummins’ model of the “dual iceberg” of bilingual proficiency was presented. (See figure below.) This schema demonstrates the fact that children are not empty headed when they register in the French immersion program at Kindergarten. They have knowledge/comprehension of their first language on many levels (semantic, syntax, grammar, phonics). This knowledge is learned through modeling and through significant communication in authentic contexts.

Children also have a basic understanding of the world, referred to as a common underlying proficiency in Cummins’ diagram. They have knowledge and an ability to comprehend, apply, analyze, synthesize and evaluate the world in which they live. They are also creative, divergent and critical thinkers, albeit at their level of development.

In a French immersion program, teachers must be mindful of the outstanding triangle in the iceberg model—the triangle of surface features of the second language which involves visible features such as spelling, pronunciation and grammar—on which there is too much emphasis in the early years. Teachers need to emphasize the deep semantic and functional meaning, which is equally important in learning a second language as in learning a first. Today we have become so content-focused (result-based) that we neglect some of the cognitive abilities or skills required in developing deeper thinking skills.

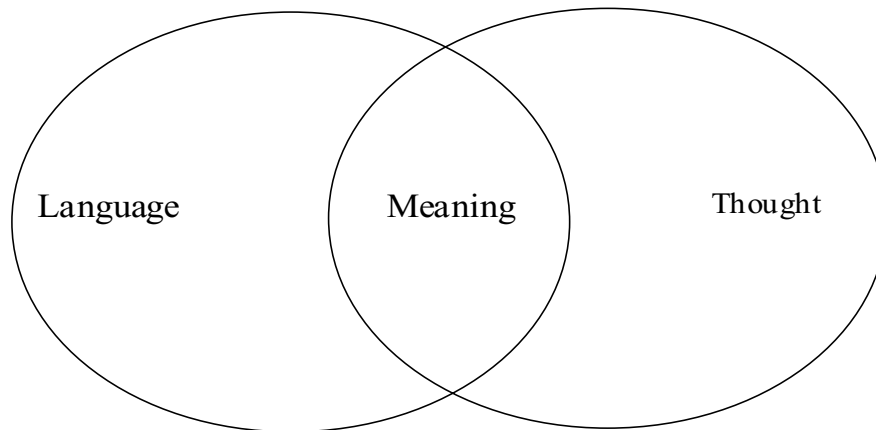
Immersion pedagogy must involve “connected” knowing in which the language is being developed while there is learning in subject areas. We therefore need strong language models who can adjust the linguistic input to the learner’s level of development (N+1, Krashen) and have the ability to inspire students to articulate knowledge in their own words.

In the communicative approach, language and thought are developed simultaneously. (See figure below) Thought and language are two intersecting circles with the overlap constituting “meaning making”. This is possible with authentic learning experiences where kids are kept connected to what they know and are continually constructing meaning. If we keep the two circles connected all the time, we will be mindful of the questions we generate, since it is these questions which will allow us to get at the deeper levels of meaning.

*Characteristics of a desirable environment for second language learning*



# Communicative Approach



Kindergarten teachers should speak almost exclusively in French. Teachers must remember that children are capable of making meaning within the context of the classroom. Children may use different strategies to bring meaning to teacher input, many of the same strategies they use to understand their native language. Teachers must be conscious that their non-verbal language is just as important as their verbal code in the early years. Repetition through songs, games and routines are also to be part of the educational practices in early childhood immersion classes.

Children should be corrected with tact.

Teachers should endeavor to create a safe climate in which students are able to take risks. Students learn language by using it in authentic contexts.

The success of the program depends on early emphasis on rich, authentic teacher input and opportunities for student output in significant contexts. Learning a language is a long, complex and continuous process.

## **Pedagogical concerns**

### *Factors contributing to a second language literacy?*

French immersion educators must be mindful of the following factors contributing to second language literacy:

- linguistic variables—oral base (N+1)—building on vocabulary and language structures

- literacy variables—purpose of reading, intention and level of understanding
- knowledge variables—background information, what is significant to children

As presented in the “dual iceberg” model, the linguistic variable draws our attention in French immersion programs. Because, the literacy and knowledge variables are part of the basic understanding children already possess, the good French immersion teacher builds on vocabulary and language structures by making students aware of linguistic transfers such as cognates, consonants and sentence structures. She/he also ensures that students use their own words to make meaning so that reading is truly understanding print, bring meaning to text, not simply decoding. This critical oral component must be linked to the child’s experience.

The concern must be with the language that is feeding the learning. Reading must be closely linked with the literacy variable. The delaying threshold is very important to ensuring that children will be ready and will have had sufficient comprehensible input to be able to bring meaning to text. To create a rich linguistic environment to prepare children for reading, these features must be built into the pedagogical practices: simple teacher talk, interaction, referential questions encouraging children to answer in their own words, opportunities to control the development of topics, a climate of confidence, and using a second language not only to teach concepts but also in the organization of the classroom.

*When is not enough French an issue?*

Concerns were expressed with respect to the early (Grade 1) introduction of English Language Arts. The use of English in the early grades robs the student of optimal exposure to the target language (French) thus sacrificing the precious time needed for critical comprehensible input. We need to remember that students need a rich linguistic environment in which to develop literacy. This is especially important in second language programs. The period of oral development in the second language must be rich and extended. The more students hear and explore deep semantic and functional meaning with the second language, the faster they will learn to read. Once children understand the connection between the oral and the written language, the process of reading will be accelerated. However, texts must be at the appropriate level of development of the second language. In our resource-driven world, it is dangerous to expose students to texts for which they are not ready. If this occurs over a long period, students convince themselves that reading is too difficult, that they are not capable of reading.

**Participants’ concerns**

Some administrators have no experience with French or with second language learning and, therefore, do not make good decisions regarding the programs, including staffing decisions.

Unfortunately, teachers who are less fluent in French and have lower levels of second language mastery are often assigned to lower grades and this is where the comprehensible input is critical. They are often less able to spontaneously provide the critical (N+1) level of language. It is the adjustment of the code to the audience that enhances immersion program success.

Concern was expressed that administrators sometimes say that if it's an important concept, then it should be taught in English.

Alberta Education's expectations with respect to the Early Literacy Program are counter-productive in French immersion programs. Teachers are being told that the resources must be in English. French immersion teachers are asked to identify students by October and to start working with them by December (with English resources.) This encourages more emphasis on the use of English in the classroom.

The process of teaching children how to read must be revisited. It is important that the reading process not emphasize surface features only. Too much focus on surface features produces students who can decode but cannot bring meaning to text. Students must discover meaning, make strategies as they learn how to read. For example, they should be alerted to the images created in their minds as they read and given strategies as to what to do when they do not know a word.

Teachers are often restricted by the structure of the classroom and the presentation of the Program of Studies, which tend to separate into subject areas and not favor integration.

Programs need to be evaluated to identify features that need to be improved. Research pertaining to French immersion as well as program results should be made available to all stakeholders.

Transportation issues should be addressed.

Special education programs need to be developed.

Continued efforts must be made to develop appropriate resources.

Stakeholders must seek strategies to keep programs vibrant.

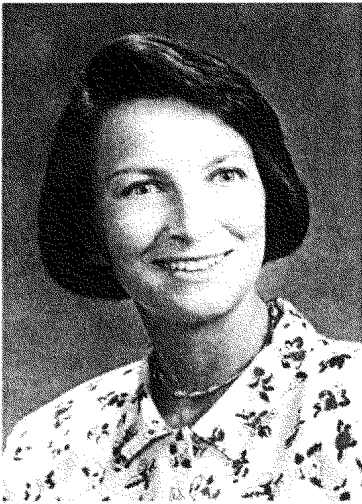
#### *Participant Recommendations:*

- Provide leadership that is convincing about second language acquisition. Ensure that administrators are knowledgeable about French immersion by holding this kind of symposium every two years.
- Raise the profile of French immersion by reinforcing the fact that French immersion programs through the dissemination of research results and visibly celebrating successes. Make it important enough that people want to get involved.
- Promote the idea of Canada's two official languages.
- Have high expectations of immersion teachers.
- Reflect on existing and desirable classroom practices: insist on experiential approaches to teaching and learning, pay more attention to providing comprehensible input, ensure that students use the second language in authentic contexts, emphasize the concept of intrinsic motivation.

- Provide 100% exposure to French in early childhood years of French immersion, delaying the introduction of English Language Arts until Grade 3.
- Empower and inform administrators of the way in which French immersion works and the importance of sufficient exposure to oral second language during the critical years. Administrators can easily observe this feature in French immersion classes.
- Develop and administer a French Language Arts Achievement Test in Grade 2.
  - The emphasis placed on the results of the English Language Arts Achievement Tests in Grade 3 encourages premature introduction of English during the critical period of second language acquisition. There is a need to validate French and to encourage its extensive use in those critical early years. There is a need to counter the effect of the HLAT (Highest Level of Achievement Testing, developed by Edmonton Public) and CTBS (Canadian Test of Basic Skill) English language tests which are administered by many schools.
- Request a modified approach for French immersion with respect to the Early Literacy Project and develop adequate resources.
  - Ensure that teachers have a clear understanding of the importance of teaching reading strategies in French in class in Grade 1 rather than outside class in Grade 2. Teachers should be mentored to be strong advocates of literacy development within their classroom, rather than hiring specialists to work with individual students outside the classroom.
  - Develop adequate resources.
  - Involve Alberta Education in adapting early literacy skills (Reading Recovery) materials.
  - Begin the process of translating materials with a small effort and build on it.
  - Provide teacher training, not just resource development.
- Ensure excellent language models for the classroom by encouraging personal action plans to ensure teachers (both new and practicing teachers) maintain their language competency in French on an on-going basis.
- Engage student teachers and practicing teachers in dialogues about language learning and teaching by including these issues in the syllabus and possibly in the summative evaluation of field experiences. This would ensure that current pedagogical practices are discussed and that student teachers have opportunities to try new approaches, be they related to language development, learning styles or integration of special needs.

# Uses and Misuses of Research in School Board Decision-Making: Examples from French Immersion\*

Sharon Lapkin



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## Introduction

It has long been acknowledged that French immersion education came into existence for social, economic and political reasons, and in some sense, school boards have had to put immersion programs in place with or without actively wanting to. The first program was distinctive in its early reliance on extensive research (Lambert and Tucker, 1972) to monitor student progress, document program outcomes and thereby justify its continued existence.

As immersion has grown, research has continued to serve as a resource for decision-makers (and other consumers, such as parents) and as a rationale for administrative decisions. In this paper I illustrate from my own experience both constructive and destructive uses of immersion research with the help of three concrete examples.

The paper concludes with a plea for a rich, interactive dialogue between decision-makers and researchers. We cannot appreciate the complexity of the issues involved in your policy decisions unless educators fill us in on all relevant contextual variables. Thus the challenge to us, the researchers, is to shape research that is responsive to administrators' and teachers' concerns, and further, having identified appropriate research questions, to make all stages of our work accessible to them.

The first case presented here (Case A) is paradoxical in that it provides findings that may be misused for political purposes and can, at the same time, be used constructively to improve program delivery. Since no definitive action has yet been taken, it is not clear whether the research will have contributed in a constructive fashion to an administrative decision.

Case B, the second example, illustrates a clear misuse of a number of immersion studies to rationalize an administrative decision. And Case C exemplifies the potential of a large-scale study to provide valuable insights for program implementation in a board where conditions differ, but useful inferences can be drawn from the available research.

Often research is used as after-the-fact rationalizing of politically motivated decisions. And although responsible researchers cannot be "bought", all of us have come up against situations where our findings and interpretations are cited to bolster opposing points of view. Also, if we are not totally "in the picture" we can sometimes prove insensitive to local conditions and make unsuitable recommendations.

## Case A: the danger of generalizing from one study

In 1990 I was asked to act as a resource person to a subcommittee of trustees and

staff in a board in Northeastern Ontario. In the urban part of the board, immersion had, since its implementation in 1975, been housed in single-track schools, or in what are known as immersion centres. Elsewhere in the board, immersion is found in dual-track schools.

As an author of the only published study of comparative student outcomes in immersion centres and dual-track schools (Lapkin et al., 1981), and as someone familiar with research on immersion, I was asked to respond in an open meeting to committee questions on the issue of the optimal housing of immersion programs. Many of the parents present had a vested interest in maintaining existing immersion centres, and wanted research evidence to support their preference.

The design of the published evaluation carried out a decade ago in the Carleton Board involved testing immersion students at the grade 5 level in immersion centres (6 classes) and dual-track schools (4 classes) in English and French. A survey of staff was also conducted. On two of four French tests (listening and reading comprehension) and on two CTBS subtests (vocabulary and reading comprehension), immersion centre students outperformed students in dual-track schools. There were no other differences in performance.

Questionnaire data indicated that immersion centre students might use more French in out-of-class contexts (e.g. when speaking to teachers other than their homeroom immersion teacher) than students in dual-track schools. There is evidence from questionnaire responses that centre students get more exposure to spoken and written French in the school environment than dual-track counterparts, a fact which may have had an impact on their French listening and reading comprehension scores. Moreover, teachers in centres appeared better satisfied with resources available in their schools, and with their teaching situations overall. (The scope of our study did not include an examination of financial and other resource allocations to the two types of schools. If it is more cost-effective to deliver immersion in centres,

this may have had a bearing on reported perceptions that centres had superior resources.)

In interpreting the results we speculated that support for French in the school environment was more pronounced in the centre setting where we found that school corridor displays featured more material in French, assemblies were more likely to be conducted partly in French, administrative and other staff were more likely to be bilingual, and so on. The presence of French outside the classroom walls was palpable, and doubtless had a positive effect on French performance.

To return to the parent meeting mentioned above, those who felt that the existence of their immersion centres might be threatened, were prepared to take this single evaluation as proof positive that centres provide optimal housing for immersion programs. My job was to explain that the results of a study conducted in 1979 (published in 1981) in a large national Capital board, focussing on one grade level only, with no subsequent replication, cannot safely be generalized.

This is not to say that the evaluation did not yield important findings, however. Mainly through the questionnaire data, it identified factors that might be significant in enhancing student achievement in immersion. It suggested that there are various ingredients that can contribute to a recipe for successful implementation, regardless of school organization — encouraging actively the use of French outside the classroom but within the school so that the language is perceived as an authentic means of communication for a social purpose that goes beyond academic learning within the class and pervades the life of the school.

Among the representations made to Board A following the public meeting was a memorandum from schools interested in maintaining current dual-track arrangements and discouraging delivery of immersion programming in centres. They quoted directly from a telephone conversation with a parent in which I reflected that personally, given the choice as a parent, I would prefer (but never expect) to see my own child in a centre, but that

she had been for most of her schooling in a dual-track setting that I had found very satisfactory. This kind of personal comment was used by proponents of both sides of the issue, thus conferring on my off-the-cuff parental musings the status of research evidence!

(There is a sobering lesson for researchers here: given the unforeseen power that casual comments can have when the researcher is considered “an authority”, what we do in our personal educational choices carries more weight sometimes than what we say about relevant research!)

During the open meeting I was able to point out that although research findings can contribute to decisions about program housing, it is both appropriate and necessary to consider it as one source of evidence along with information about transportation, physical space, staffing and other resources (such as library collections) — all of these having cost implications — as well as information on demographics and social variables such as the perceived value of the community school, and so on.

This first example is meant to illustrate the pressures to generalize and the pitfalls inherent in generalizing from a single study to settings where population demographics and a host of other factors may differ dramatically from the context where the evaluation in question was carried out. Specifically, the pressures to generalize were coming from immersion centre parents who perceived that immersion delivered in a centre setting was superior. The potential pitfall would lie in making the unwarranted generalization that because of a single study, there is a single recipe for success in program delivery. At the same time, there are important lessons to be learned from a carefully designed and executed program evaluation. In the case presented here, it proved valuable for both the board and me to have a public airing of the issue. Where such face-to-face interactions are not possible, the consequences of citing research findings out of context can be quite devastating, as we shall see in the second example.

## Case B: a misuse of research

In Case B, the misuse of research played a major role in the phasing out of an early immersion program and its replacement by a middle immersion program (beginning at grade 4). On the face of it, there might be any number of legitimate reasons for a decision to replace one program alternative by another. The fact of the change is not, in itself, upsetting. What is disturbing, however, is to claim to base such a decision on research results which, intentionally or not, are presented in a distorted way.

The full exploration of this case study would likely require a book-length report, so I will consider here only some examples of a school board administration's use of OISE research in a four-part document prepared several years ago by Board B.

Like any good "impact" study, this one addressed administrative, organizational and educational aspects of immersion, as well as the research base for a decision to phase out early immersion in favour of a middle immersion program as already noted. Given the multiplicity of factors involved, such a decision may be warranted, though it is always difficult to remove an established and well-functioning program.

One infers from the presentation of information in the administrator's report, that its author thought it best to emphasize the research component, to demonstrate that in fact the existing early immersion alternative was not producing expected results, and suffered by comparison to the second available immersion alternative, namely, late immersion. By extension, then, it was argued that middle immersion would produce superior results to the existing early immersion program.

Volume 3 of the Board report implies strongly that there is a solid research base favouring middle elementary starting points for immersion. It refers to a landmark study of FSL implementation in an Ontario board conducted by OISE researchers Nagy and Klaiman (1985). Consider Nagy's reaction when he was asked to comment on a presumed first draft of Board B's report. Nagy is cited, in

the report, as recommending that middle immersion replace early immersion in Wellington County and responds as follows:

You are... wrong in reporting my recommendation! In an interim report, I suggested that a delay in the start of immersion would be one way to solve demographic/financial problems caused by early immersion, and that this possibility should be discussed further. My argument was that the educational price (the difference between early and middle immersion outcomes) was reasonable in terms of the problems such a delay would solve. I never argued that middle immersion was better. My final recommendation, based in part on a financial analysis that may not apply outside of Ontario, was that immersion continue with an early start, and that compensatory staffing be provided to the regular program to make up for loss of students, staff, and program flexibility.

In support of the view that early immersion furnishes no better results than programs that begin later, Board B's report quotes at length from a province-wide evaluation of early and late immersion programs commissioned by the New Brunswick Department of Education from the OISE Modern Language Centre and conducted in 1984 (Lapkin and Swain, 1984). The evaluation involved grades 3, 6 and 9 under the terms of reference of the contract, with both early and late immersion programs to be assessed at grade 9.

In summarizing the results. Lapkin and Swain draw attention to the fact that they are consistent with those of other large-scale evaluations of the two program alternatives:

The salient advantages of the early immersion program relate to French listening skills and the perceived degree of comfort, confidence and ability in French on the part of the students. Clearly, the late immersion program is also successful, producing students who achieve as well as

their early immersion counterparts in most skill areas.

The report prepared by Board B presents this information as follows:

The researchers (namely Lapkin and Swain), who are acknowledged strong supporters of Early Immersion, cited that Early Immersion students tended to use the language much more comfortably and with more confidence than the Late Immersion students. It was curious that this was reported only at the end of grade 9 when Late Immersion students had been exposed to only three years of the language versus Early Immersion who had been exposed to the language for nine years.

The reader will recall that the contract mandate called for assessment at grade 9. Moreover, other studies cited in Board B's report bear out that the pattern of comparative findings we reported for grade 9 persists at grade 12.

On this point, in their Wellington County study, Nagy and Klaiman speculated that differences in French performance between early and middle immersion groups might narrow or disappear by the end of secondary school. Middle immersion programs are, for the most part, not yet "mature" enough for this to be verified empirically. But we can look at accumulating data on this issue from comparative studies of early and late immersion, which suggest that few differences persist in test scores in any of the four skill areas (e.g. Hart and Lapkin, 1990; Hart, Lapkin and Swain, 1989; Wesche, 1988). The only strong and consistent pattern of differences is found on self-assessment measures where early immersion students report higher levels of competence, confidence and comfort in coping with communicative demands in French listening, speaking, reading and writing.

In the New Brunswick study, comparisons were made with out-of-province data where possible (that is, in immersion evaluations using the same testing instruments) and with francophones in Edmundston. From these comparisons, Board B concludes that "the Early Im-

mersion Program is not producing the kinds of results that were initially anticipated or ... comparable with results being obtained in other areas of the country”.

In fact the findings relating to these comparisons do not reasonably lead to that conclusion as shown by the following two examples from the results:

### Case C: constructive inferences from a large-scale evaluation

In 1987 we conducted a large-scale evaluation of early and middle immersion programs in the Metropolitan Toronto area. The scope of the evaluation included an examination of the social characteris-

just over 2000 instructional hours by the end of grade 8 (though other middle immersion designs allow for accumulating over 3000 hours by the end of grade 8). The early total immersion program discussed here operates in three Metro-area public boards beginning in Kindergarten. Accumulated instructional time in French totals from 5300 to 6040 hours by the end of grade 8, with English language arts being introduced either at grade 3 or grade 4, and approximately fifty percent of instruction in French from grades 5 to 8.

The evaluation involved ten early immersion classes in three public boards and 16 middle immersion classes from the Separate board. We also had access to two classes at a francophone school in Montreal where most students were bilingual, and two classes of unilingual francophones in a Quebec city suburb.

French tests were developed for receptive (listening, reading) and productive (speaking, writing) skill areas. Particular attention was to be paid to listening and speaking skills, areas where prior research (including early and late immersion comparisons) had most consistently found program differences (e.g. Lapkin, 1986; Swain and Lapkin, 1986). In addition, we sought to make the set of tests as communicative as possible while using formats which would allow specification of psychometric characteristics. This involved using real-life materials and providing thematic links between tasks where possible. Finally, the tests had to allow for an initially unknown range of student skill levels, both between and within programs.

Full descriptions of the instruments listed in Figure 1 and the methodology of the evaluation are readily available (Hart, Lapkin and Swain, 1990). For the purposes of this paper a brief summary of the results will suffice.

Overall, early immersion students outperform middle immersion students in varying degrees in all four skill areas (listening, speaking, reading and writing). An important exception to this pattern is the ability to state and support an opinion, where because skills are easily transferred

#### Comparative Statement

- grade 6 early immersion students scored significantly lower than Edmundston francophones in both listening and reading comprehension (Lapkin and Swain, 1984).

- grade 6 early immersion students in New Brunswick achieve scores in French reading similar to those of Ottawa-Carleton early immersion groups but are somewhat weaker in listening comprehension. In speaking and writing their scores are strikingly similar to Saskatchewan norms (Lapkin and Swain, 1984).

#### Comment

- notice that this comparison involves francophones, and we would not expect equivalent performance by early immersion students in these skills until grade 8 (Swain & Lapkin, 1982).

- in one of four skill areas, available comparative data suggest that New Brunswick students may be weaker; in the three other skill areas, levels of performance are similar (notice that the Board B report cited above specifies that their early immersion results were not comparable to those of other Canadian studies).

In spite of a voluminous correspondence initiated by Nagy, Lapkin and Swain, intended to set the record straight on these and other misuses of our research, the best we achieved was to have our correspondence presented to the full Board and therefore formally placed in the public domain.

Case B serves to illustrate the close match between issues that preoccupy decision-makers concerned with immersion program implementation and issues with a long-term research tradition. Program comparisons continue to be necessary because they are multidimensional and in each case, the context has an impact. Thus, over the years we have tried to draw inferences from early and late immersion comparisons for other immersion program alternatives. And as relevant data accumulate, our inferences grow firmer. Thus, although the final word is not in on early and middle comparisons, insights from large-scale evaluations (such as the one presented below in Case C) may help administrators faced with a decision on how best to organize the delivery of two immersion alternatives at the senior elementary or junior high level.

tics of the program populations (Hart, Lapkin and Swain, 1988), but the focus here is on French language outcomes and implications for decision-making. From an administrative point of view, middle immersion is often easier to implement since there are fewer demographic disruptions, and less displacement of regular teaching staff (Nagy and Klaiman, 1985). It is therefore important to determine if there are educational consequences that might influence a board's choice of program. This is particularly relevant for boards implementing immersion for the first time, and choosing among early, middle and late alternatives.

The central research question considered in the "Metro" evaluation is: Are early immersion students more proficient in French than middle immersion students at the end of elementary school (grade 8)? If so, in what ways? What inferences can decision-makers draw from the pattern of results?

The Metropolitan Separate School Board (MSSB) houses a vigorous "middle immersion" or bilingual program beginning at the grade 5 level with fifty percent of instructional time provided in French throughout. This yields a total of



from English to French, early and middle immersion students performed equally well. Middle immersion students perform least well in comparison to early immersion on measures of speaking ability. A second type of comparison involved measuring immersion performance in relation to that of francophone peers. In listening and reading comprehension, early immersion performance is closer to francophone standards than middle immersion. In fact, the gap is larger between middle and early immersion than between early immersion and francophones.

Now let us consider program differences in terms of average class scores rather than individual student scores. This has the advantage of revealing the impact of differential class effects. Figures 2 through 7 present visually the range of class average scores by program for selected measures. There is a consistent pattern in the results. In general, the strongest middle immersion class achieves a mean that differs little from that of the strongest early immersion class; in fact in the case of reading comprehension the mean of the strongest middle immersion class exceeds that of the strongest early immersion class (Figure 6). In general, the range of class means for middle immersion is broader than for early immersion.

The information presented in Figures 2 through 7 illustrates graphically an important difference in the pattern of performance among classes in the middle and early immersion programs. Early immersion classes generally produce a "tighter" level of performance, with class averages spanning a relatively restricted range. Middle immersion classes tend to scatter over a broad range of scores, representing a less consistent level of performance.

From these findings, we may conclude that the differences at grade 8 in the linguistic outcomes of early and middle immersion programs are substantial and important. Assuming a desire for homogeneity in second language proficiency levels, we expressed the view in the concluding section of our report that

overall, early and middle immersion students could not, for example, reasonably be placed together in blended classrooms at grade 9. This does not mean that the best middle immersion students could not cope with early immersion standards.

Since program design varies widely across Canada, how can such research results feed into decision-making in a meaningful way? Let us consider Case C, that of a board facing a decision about how best to accommodate two immersion alternatives at the senior elementary level. This year one class of early immersion students entered grade 7. Most non-immersion students in the board have been enrolled in an extended-core program from grade 4, intended to enable them to "step up" to late immersion at grade 7 if they wish to do so. Thus they have had 20-minute daily FSL in grades 1 to 3, 40 minutes in grade 4, 60 minutes in grade 5 and 80 minutes in grade 6, yielding a total of 720 accumulated instructional hours in French.

The question I was asked to address last spring at a meeting of principals and supervisory personnel concerned the possibility of blending early immersion and extended-core students opting for late immersion at the grade 7 level. As mentioned above, in the Metro study, we concluded that blending for early immersion students with between 5000 and 6000 instructional hours in French, and middle students with just over 2000 hours would be inappropriate at the grade 9 level.

In Board C, blending would involve early immersion with about 1000 fewer hours than the Metro instance, with "step-up" students having accumulated only 720 instructional hours. The inference is clear: it would simply not be advisable to blend at this level, unless one explicitly were willing to accept classes with much more heterogeneous second language proficiency levels than is typical of early immersion programs. If blending occurred, early immersion parents might well object, while "step-up" or late immersion parents might welcome the infusion of small groups of early immersion students into

classes where peer teaching might then be feasible.

In fact, Board C decided against blending; apparently research evidence did play an important role in the decision.

Thus French language outcomes described in the Metro study are relevant to decision-making about immersion program implementation. Results from this large-scale evaluation suggest that middle immersion will yield less consistent levels of performance than early immersion, with middle immersion classes spanning a broader range of scores than early immersion. Thus while the strongest "step-up" students might cope with the demands of a blended class, the majority would likely be left behind. Or, put differently, if the blended class teachers were to "pitch" their teaching to the majority of their students, the early immersion students would indeed be poorly served. Clearly, this constitutes only one piece of information — but one previously unavailable — among others to be taken into account in deciding whether to opt for one program alternative or the other. Social factors, demographic characteristics of particular board populations, and teaching resources must also be taken into consideration (see Lapkin and Swain, 1990).

## Conclusion

One of the subtitles in a recent paper on ESL program evaluation by Beretta (1990) reads "Evaluation and Policy Analysis: The Need for Dialogue". I hope the cases presented here strengthen the plea for an increasing dialogue between school board decision-makers and researchers. Researchers will not always say what administrators and trustees want to hear, but research should constitute a prime component among factors that come into play in implementing immersion or any second or heritage language program. Researchers are aware of constraints imposed by other factors on decisions and sympathetic to policy-makers who must often make decisions that are unpalatable to parents, schools or community groups. If we are informed about the full range of

contextual variables, we will be better equipped to shape our research accordingly and interpret results in ways likely to be helpful to practitioners and decision-makers. □

\*I am grateful to John Bates, Jean Handscombe, Doug Hart, Bob Kennedy, Phil Nagy, Brad Saunders and Merrill Swain for valuable feedback on earlier drafts of this paper. Please note that the references to the board documents have been omitted from the bibliography so that individual boards cannot be identified. Anyone wishing more information on research reported here is invited to contact me.

This paper was presented as a plenary talk for presentation at pre-convention seminar of the Canadian Education Association on September 25, 1990.

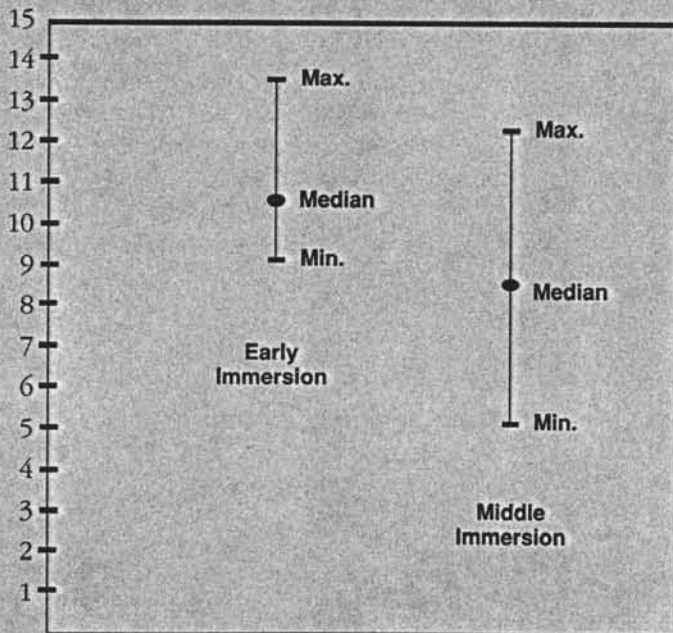
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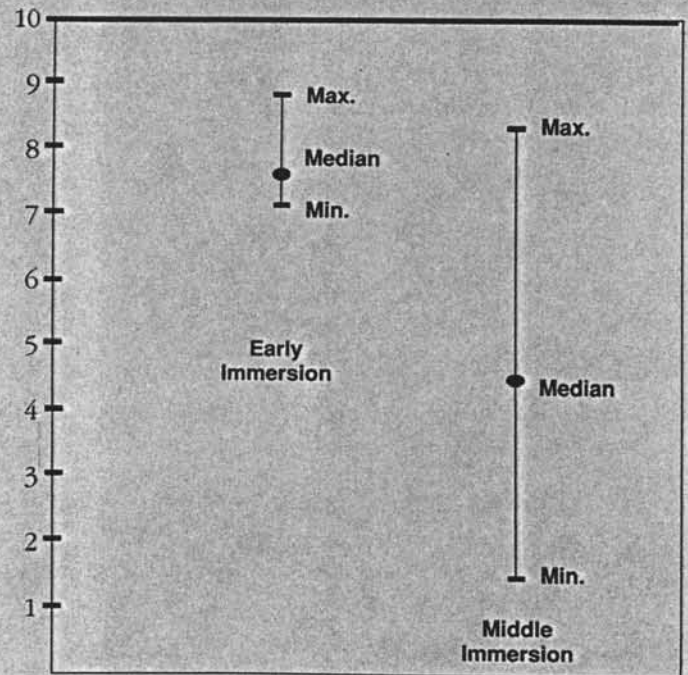
**Figure 1: A Summary of French Language Tests and Test Measures**

Test	Skill Area	Test Measure
Test de compréhension auditive (TCAC)	listening comprehension	count of correct responses to information questions
sentence repetition	listening comprehension speaking ability	global score-semantic accuracy global score-exact reproduction syntactic features phonological features discursive features (liaisons, syncopes) total count of reproduced features
open speaking task	speaking ability	task fulfillment (stating and supporting opinion) fluency
test de mots à trouver (TMTC-cloze)	reading comprehension (an integrative test)	count of 'acceptable' responses to deletions in a text
open writing task	writing ability	word count task fulfillment (stating and supporting opinion) count of non-homophonous spelling and grammar errors judgement of 'good writing'

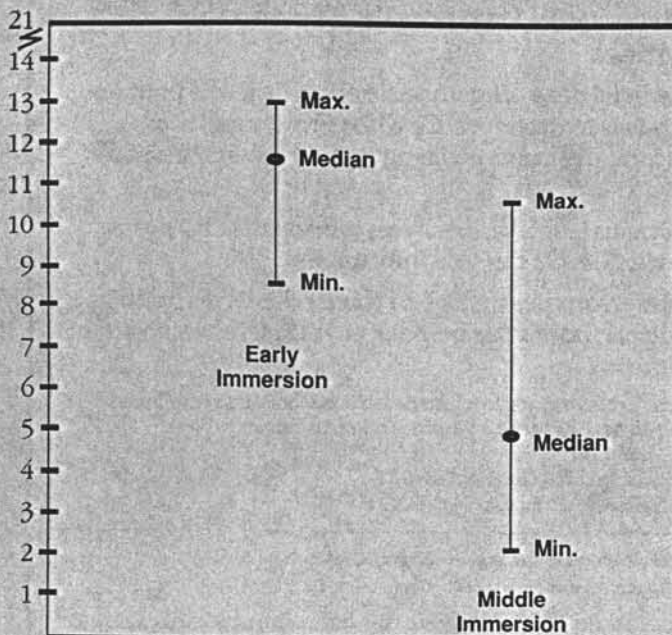
**Figure 2: TCAC Ranges of Class Mean Scores by Program**



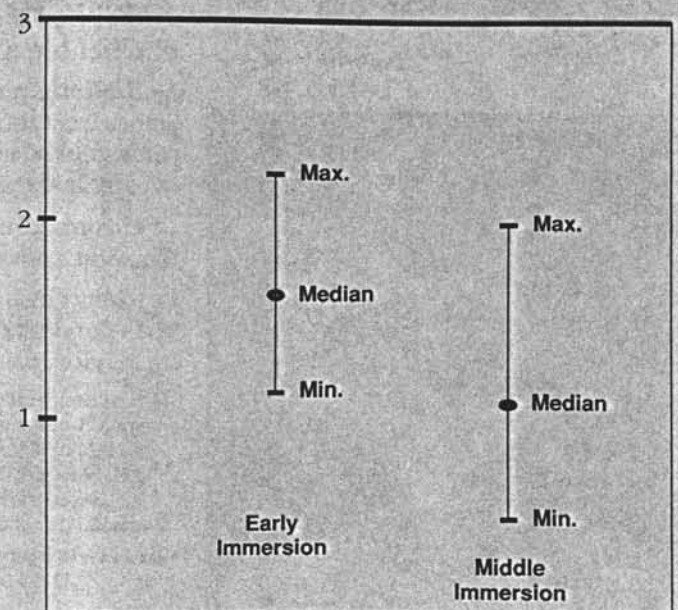
**Figure 3: Global Semantic Ranges of Class Mean Scores by Program**



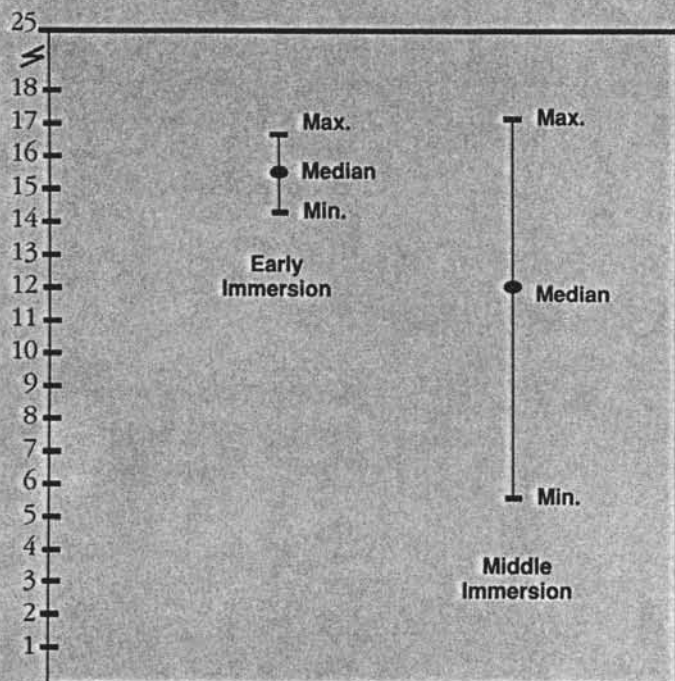
**Figure 4: Sentence Repetition Total Features Ranges of Class Mean Scores by Program**



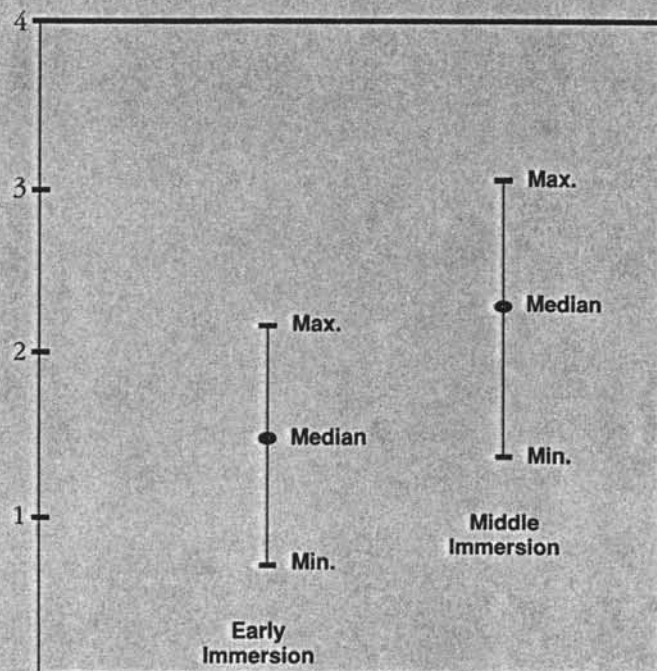
**Figure 5: Open Speaking Fluency Rating Ranges of Class Mean Scores by Program**



**Figure 6: TMTC (Cloze) Ranges of Class Mean Scores by Program**



**Figure 7: Written Grammatical Errors Ranges of Class Mean Scores by Program**



# Appendix



- ◆ Steel, Victor. “**Re-energizing a French Immersion Program: The Fort McMurray RCSSD Story.**” Originally published in a slightly different form in *French Immersion in Alberta: Building the Future: Leading the Way 2000—Conference Report*. Canmore, May 1–2, 2000. Edmonton: Building the Future Conference Committee, 2000.  
Reprinted with permission.
- ◆ ***When Should English Language Arts be Introduced in the Early French Immersion Program.***  
Nepean: Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers/*Association canadienne des professeurs d’immersion (CAIT/ACPI)*, n.d.  
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# Re-energizing a French Immersion Program The Fort McMurray RCCSD Story

VICTOR STEEL  
PROGRAMS COORDINATOR, FORT McMURRAY RCCSD

## Introductory Remarks

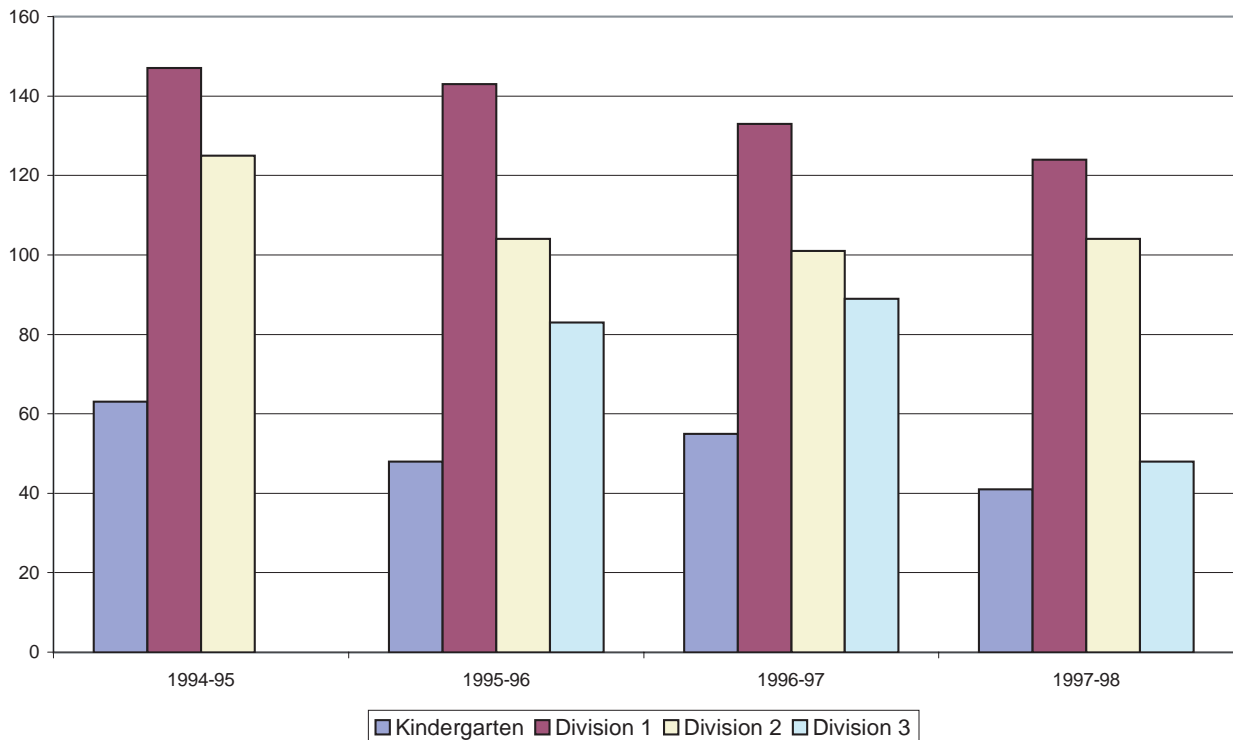
This session is process oriented. A good process is the key to effective re-energizing.

## The Wake-up Call

Fort McMurray Roman Catholic Separate School District has offered French immersion since 1980–81. We offer the program in two elementary-junior high schools, and a minimal program in Grade 9 at the senior high school. The parents and teachers of our French immersion program were satisfied; achievement scores were high. After 19 years of French immersion the quality of our program was not the problem.

However, despite our success our wake-up call was the declining number of students in our program. We experienced declining student numbers over the past four years, particularly at the Grade 9 level. For example, in 1997–98 we had 83 Grade 8 students, but only 38 in Grade 9.

## Immersion Enrolment



Note: In 1994-95 Division 3 students were counted in with the Francophone students.

\* Originally published in a slightly different form in *French Immersion in Alberta. Building the Future: Leading the Way, Conference Report 2000*, pp 241–252

In November 1998, a team of administrators from our district attended the first *Building the Future Conference*, at which administrators from around the province were addressing similar declining trends. Following this conference, our team met with Richard Slevinsky of French Language Services, Alberta Learning to discuss plans to address this attrition. Following this meeting our team, which included our superintendent by the way, began work on a four-part initiative to revitalize the French immersion program in Fort McMurray Catholic Schools.

The following description accounts for the process and decisions of our revitalization process.

## **Setting a Context**

### *Geographic context*

Geography affects the sociology of a city.

The physical geography of Fort McMurray is such that communities/suburbs are separated by river valleys and highways. We are a one-industry town of relative wealth and high expectations. Our population of some 43,000 is young and transient. Most parents have had a mixed school experience. Many children we teach were born elsewhere.

### *Historical context*

Our Catholic district and the public district are approximately the same size and we have a history of competition. The public board offers French immersion in one centre, but no high school program. We offer French immersion to Grade 10 in three centres.

### *The Sociological Context*

I want to tell you a little bit about the sociology of our district, but first a comment about the expectation of parents. Expectations are very high in our district and we encourage it. We want our parents to have high expectations. They do as citizens and they do as workers. People come to our town with high expectations. It's all part of the ethos of Fort McMurray.

Part of this case study is the sociological context: the people. In 1990 the Catholic Board of Education authorized administration to study the feasibility and desirability of delivering the French immersion program in a French immersion centre K-9. The study was done during the 1990/91 school year; in 1991 the results were presented to the board.



Victor Steel

But we need to keep certain sociological and psychological aspects in mind. Fort McMurray has no traditions. If you want to do something, do it. Try it. The average age of the teaching population in Fort McMurray when I arrived in 1981 was 25 years old. If you saw people walking down the street with white hair, they were visiting grandparents. They were not residents. You knew that. And every family was really one generational. Parents and their children. Or just adults, because there was a huge population of single people. In the early 1990s, probably 75 percent of our students were not born in Fort McMurray and probably not in Alberta. The population in Fort McMurray grew from 800 in 1958 to nearly 40,000 in 1978. So everybody was young. Now think of the consequences of this for the experience level of French immersion teachers or any teachers. Two, three years in the city denoted a veteran! Turnover was constant with many teachers putting in their two years to get their permanence, then moving to central and southern Alberta.

That can be an asset as well as a liability. The liability is obvious in terms of just getting and having consistencies within programs. The asset was that we could change who we were within two years. There was no tradition. You could do just about anything you wanted. Consequently it was a dynamic and changing community.

Let's look at the feasibility study and you'll get a better idea of the people we're dealing with here. The report deals with some key elements: Getting a handle on the program. The advantages, disadvantages of the French immersion centre. Where it was going to be housed. The economic perspectives. The public reaction to the concept. The options available for future growth. Insights into French immersion centres. This last was researched and there are some references there about what data was looked at for French immersion centres. And then, of course, the merits. If you would just take a few moments to read through the merits of a French immersion centre (please see Attachment). Notice that under program quality and organizational logistics there are only two disadvantages as opposed to six advantages. So you think. "Wow! It is obvious what we are going to do. Isn't it?" By the time you get to page 19, you realize there are far fewer disadvantages than there are advantages.

The report includes a summary of public input. You'd likely find that you've had this discussion in your district. Parents have the same concerns everywhere:

- Not being close to your own community so that if a child gets sick or needs a parent, they are far away
- Programs in existing schools are very high quality
- Too much time on buses
- Travelling on the bus in the dark and in very cold temperatures
- Why not move the program to St. Paul school, because that's in the growth area.
- The segregation aspect
- Parents believe the board has already decided

At the time, 1990, we were an extremely wealthy board, and that played a role. That's no longer true due to the changes to provincial equalization of school funding. But, at the time, it was an important factor.



What did the study conclude? The population projections were off, of course. In a one-industry, resource-based community dependent on oil prices, nobody knows whose coming and who's not coming. In fact, we are in that situation again right now, with a third oil sands plant having been promised. Nobody knows numbers for sure. I know you all go through the numbers game every September, but we go through it in spades! Yet the conclusion of the consultants' report was to go with the French immersion centre. But there was the back door clause, recommendation #4. That is, "Based on the results of the second round of information meetings and analysis of the data contained in this report, the board should determine whether to proceed in September '92 with the implementation of the major recommendation of the report (that is, a French immersion centre); or maintain the status quo for another three to five more years and re-evaluate the issue at that time."

What did they do? In 1992 the Catholic Board of Education agreed to maintain the status quo for three to five years. It was tough, but it may have been the wisest decision, because the indications were that if we went to a centre the enrolment in the French immersion program would have dropped.

## **Decisions**

Now a brief overview of our revitalization project. The four elements of the revitalization plan are: expansion, maintenance, communication and professional development—a four-pronged approach to solving our problem. Nothing profound.

Expansion of the French immersion program involves offering courses at Father Mercredi that allow students the opportunity to take 25% of their high school credits in the French language. Students would have French language instruction in high school Language Arts and Social Studies beginning in September 1999. We expanded at the Grade 9 level to four core subjects taught in French in the French immersion program. Students said they would stay with the program and they did.

Maintenance of the present (and past) programs of instruction in the French language from Kindergarten to Grade 8 at St. Paul's School and Father Beauregard School is essential, as is restoring the French immersion program, with four core subjects, at Father Mercredi School for Grade 9 for September 1999. Maintenance: there's that continuity again. A new element in our community, considering so much change is always happening. Nevertheless, what we're promising is that we are going to maintain those programs in the neighbourhood schools, as the parents asked.

Communication of what French immersion programs do for students and their education, along with the commitment that this school district has to revitalizing their programming, is important. Elements such as district policy, teacher recruitment, student incentives, staff responsibility and parental involvement to promote the benefits would all need to be articulated in a formal strategic plan. Communication is a continuing effort—we're trying to change the perspective that it's not an elitist program.

Professional development opportunities need to support the expansion and revitalization initiatives and should be in place at the same time as program changes, in this case September 1999. That was the last and biggest part of the puzzle, the professional development of our

teachers. Remember I said that the ethos of our teaching staff was two years in, get your permanence certificate, go teach in Calgary? Professional development of teaching staff and the resulting program stability has helped the confidence of parents. To be able to keep teachers for three and more years shows them that this is a good program.

How do we handle the financing of all of this and who decides? We are very decentralized. All of the money flows through our central office to the schools. Site-based decision-making is alive and well in Fort McMurray. We're allowed, in Alberta, to use up to 4% of funding for district administration. We have never used the full 4%. So even some of these funds go to the schools. Now that doesn't mean that we have oodles of money. But we've been able to maintain programs with small numbers, because all the money that is available is passed directly to the schools. Our central administration consists of our Secretary-Treasurer, my superintendent and me. That's it. Now we have a religious coordinator and a technology person, but those are paid by shared services, which is the money allocated directly to the schools. It is not top heavy at all. So the decisions at the high school, for example, were made by the principal of the high school. He promised that he would reshuffle the books and try to support these programs no matter how small the numbers were for the next three years, to see if we could turn it around.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the decision to maintain the French immersion program in our district as three small programs at three schools rather than at one large centre is based on respecting the context of our city's geography, sociology and our shareholder's long standing expectations of the school system. Despite the economic advantages for putting it into one centre, we have realized other advantages for maintaining a more diversified approach for delivering French immersion throughout our school district.

## **FACILITATOR: DR. ART SCHWARTZ, UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY**

The next portion of the workshop involved a facilitated exploration by delegates of the implications for practice in their own schools and districts. The result was the identification of the following learnings:

1. French immersion is a proven success. Let's build on that success and advocate that success.

Rationale: A track record of success proves better than anything else that it can be done.

2. Involve all partners in ways that value and recognize their long-term concerns and commitment (12 years for parents).

Rationale: Recognition provides the rewards that sustain commitment, and that keep people working.

3. Cultivate strong, knowledgeable and comfortable moral and financial commitments at all levels of government, district and school administration.

Rationale: The support of both elected and employed officials is most dependable when it is given freely because people believe in French immersion, rather than because they feel pressured or compelled. We should be working to establish and sustain that belief.

ATTACHMENT

**Excerpts from Western Management Consultants'  
Report to the Fort McMurray Catholic Board of Education**

**E. Analysis of the Merits of the French Immersion Centre Concept**

This section of the report summarizes the major program quality, operational, social/political and economic advantages and disadvantages of the French Immersion Centre concept in general. It does not address the implications of specific locations. That task is completed in Section F of the report.

Program Quality

**Advantages:**

1. Everything in the French Immersion Centre is designed to serve the immersion program. As a result, the degree of immersion in the French language and culture is greater.
2. Students in French Immersion Centres demonstrate superior performance compared with their dual or triple track counterparts on several French and English language skill acquisition measures.
3. Student retention in French Immersion programs is greater than in alternate structures (i.e., fewer drop outs).
4. Locating all French Immersion programming in one school facilitates a more coordinated approach to program development, delivery and evaluation.  
  
Elimination of the duplication of library materials and instructional resources improves the quality of the French Immersion library and the breadth of available instructional resources.
6. At present many French Immersion students are required to attend their K through grade six program with the same class, since small numbers in each grade do not allow the formation of more than 1 class at each grade level. An amalgamated program would increase the number of students at each grade thus allowing students to experience a greater variety of classmates during their elementary program.

**Disadvantages:**

1. Since the French Immersion enrollment at the junior high level is usually smaller, junior high students have more limited opportunities for social interaction with students their age.
2. Segregating the French Immersion and English programs may be viewed as detracting from cultural tolerance and understanding.

Operational Logistics

**Advantages:**

1. There is more effective and efficient utilization of instructional resources.
2. Larger enrollments permit the reduction of the number of split grades in both the French Immersion and English programs.
3. More efficient deployment of teaching and administrative staff results in some staff reductions.
4. Organizing both French and English programs is made easier in that:
  - class sizes are usually more consistent;
  - scheduling and time tabling is usually easier.
5. Staff recruitment challenges associated with the French Immersion program are reduced in that only one set of bilingual administrators, one counsellor, one librarian, etc., are required.
6. Providing high quality, focussed and relevant teacher in-service training is much easier since all French Immersion program staff are in one school.

**Disadvantages:**

1. A larger number of French Immersion students usually have to be bused out of their neighborhood.

2. There are limited options for teachers wishing to have an opportunity to work in another school.

#### Social/Political

##### **Advantages:**

1. Forming an Immersion Centre is a long-term commitment to the French Immersion program by the Board.

##### **Disadvantages:**

1. Parental reaction to increasing the number of students transported out of their home neighborhood will likely be negative.
2. There is potential for backlash from English program parents who may view the formation of an immersion centre as giving French Immersion program special treatment.
3. There is potential to create disharmony between English and French Immersion program parents and students.

#### Economic

##### **Advantages**

1. Increased efficiency occurs as a result of reduced duplication of resources.
2. Increased efficiency occurs as a result of reductions in staff.
3. Increased efficiency occurs as a result of improved program coordination organization and staff in-service.

**Disadvantages:**

1. There are potential increases in transportation costs depending upon location.
2. There is potential to lose students and revenue as a result of parents not supporting the concept.

Summary

A review of current research literature, combined with the expert opinions of Alberta Education second language consultants suggests that the French Immersion Centre concept offers some significant advantages from a program quality standpoint. In addition, there are a number of significant operational advantages and economic benefits to implementing the concept.

The major disadvantages relate to the potential increase in the number of students being transported out of their home communities, negative public reaction to the disruption of schools and programs that are viewed as "working well", and the potential for the development of an Immersion Centre to have a negative affect with respect to the integration of the French and English cultures.

To completely understand the magnitude of the program, operational and economic implications of implementing the French Immersion Centre concept in the Fort McMurray Catholic School District, it is necessary to do a detailed analysis of the implications relative to potential locations. The next section of this report addresses this task. Please note that relative advantages and disadvantages identified in this section apply to all of the options discussed in the next section as well as the location-specific implications delineated.



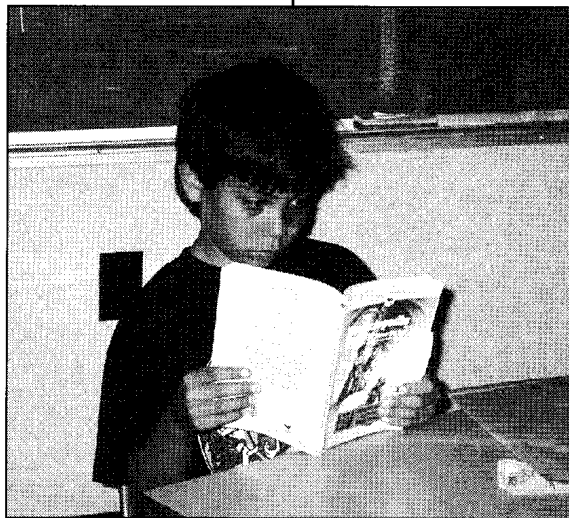
# When Should English Language Arts be Introduced in the Early French Immersion Program?



No final answer to the question of when English should be introduced in Early French Immersion programs exists as yet. The evidence that can be brought to bear on the issue thus far is limited.

## Research Not Definitive

Variety characterizes the program structure of early French immersion in Canada, particularly in the area of the introduction of English language arts. Although there has been much discussion, there has been little empirical research on the topic of when it is best for the students in these early years to be taught literacy skills in English.



The introduction of early French immersion in the 1970s inspired an interest in the sequence of teaching reading in English and in French in a few researchers whose studies were for the most part inconclusive. After that, the great bulk of research was focused on demonstrating that both the English and French skills of students remaining in immersion were satisfactory. Recently a new interest in the topic of the introduction of English has emerged and a few researchers are again investigating how different sequence combinations of learning to read affect the skills, motivation, and retention of students in French immersion programs.

It should not be surprising that there is not conclusive research evidence regarding the introduction of English language arts in early French

immersion. Cummins and Swain (1986) have described the complex interaction of variables in bilingual education settings. In such a complex environment, many years of gathering information are necessary before the field can be adequately mapped to enable specific decisions to be made based on theory. Indeed, Clark (1994) recognized the need for continued seeking out of information in his call for caution and debate.

This interest in introducing English reading in Grade 1 of the French immersion program is based on the ideas that students will read in English more easily, will transfer learning across languages, will be more confident and will be able to

move to an English program more easily.

## Sufficient Exposure to French

For others the concerns are whether the amount of time taken from the French instruction will interfere with proficiency in French and how much negative impact the teaching of English will have on the French immersion environment.

Few conclusive studies have been found that identified a threshold level of number of hours that could be taken from French instruction before harm is done to proficiency, although The Modern Language Centre at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education has in their scoring service data that suggests there may be

a threshold of instructional time necessary to achieve measurable progress in French (Hart & Lapkin, in preparation). In any French immersion program it is important to monitor and try to control the informal English that interrupts the immersion aspects of the school experience.

### Reading and the Transfer of Skills

There is some suggestion that anglophone students have a more positive attitude to reading in English. This has been used in arguments for and against introducing English language arts in Grade 1. Many studies have found evidence of transfer of reading skills from any one language to another. There is no bank of data that shows that transfer happens more efficiently or quickly either from French to English or from English to French in the early primary grades. Several studies suggest that the language of instruction is not as important as the tailoring of the instruction to the level at which the student is reading.

### Program Structures Vary

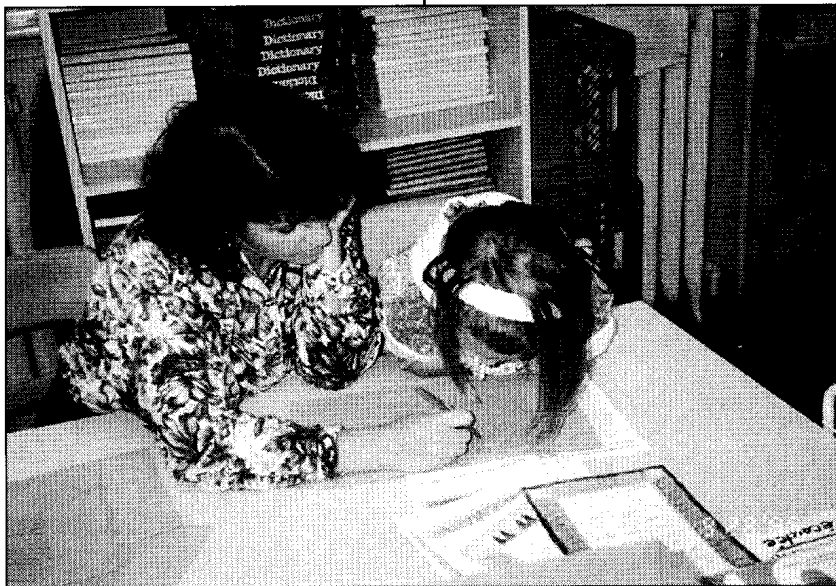
Four approaches for introducing English language arts in early French immersion are evident in the practices of Canadian school boards.

*Approach 1: Teach formal reading in French in Grade 1 and delay English language arts instruction until Grade 2, 3, or 4.*

This approach is the most popular across Canada. The majority of school boards in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland/Labrador start teaching French immersion

students to read in the second language first. Academic achievement and French and English proficiency results have been more than satisfactory according to board standards as shown repeatedly in board reports. Some recent examples of such reports are those by Fine (1992), Gaudet and Pelletier (1993), and Alberta Education (1992).

*Approach 2: Teach formal English reading and informal French language arts in Grade 1 with formal French reading introduced in Grade 2.*



Manitoba has been teaching English language arts in Grade 1 for 10 years. Manitoba has dealt with transference (learning processes applied from one situation to another) and interference (hindrance in performance due to application of a process not suitable to the situation) in their

English language arts curriculum by identifying and listing transferences and interferences so teachers can capitalize on transferences and recognize and correct interferences.

In a Saskatoon, Saskatchewan study, Noonan and Colleaux (1994) compared Grade 1 early French immersion students who had been introduced to English language arts in Grade 1 with those who had begun in Grade 2. They found that when tested at the end of Grade 3 there were no differences in the vocabulary, spelling and reading tests of the Canadian Test of Basic Skills in English and the word recognition, reading and spelling tests of the Test Diagnostique de Lecture in French. As a result of the study, the board decided not to mandate one option or the other. Schools can choose the program that suits them. This approach has also been used in at least two Ontario boards.

### *Approach 3: Concurrent learning to read.*

The Calgary Separate School Board introduces both French reading and English reading in Grade 1. The regular French immersion Grade 1 program includes one hour a day of English instruction. There are 30 minutes a day in religion and 30 minutes a day in English language arts with a focus on reading and writing. These practices were put in place in 1993 after a three-year pilot study. A group of 15 students that received an hour a day of English language arts started off slowly in the two languages but by the end of Grade 2 out performed other students. Caution must be used in generalizing from this small group.

The Fort McMurray Separate Board in Alberta and St. Albert Catholic Board in Alberta both implemented a concurrent reading program in Grade 1 and both boards are conducting a longitudinal study of the effects and results. The Fort McMurray study will be finished at the end of 1995. The St. Albert final report will be ready for publication in June, 1996.

The English outcomes of the half English and half French program of the Ottawa Roman Catholic Separate School Board were evaluated in the early 1980s. At that time it was found that the program was not detrimental to English language arts.

### *Approach 4: Teach reading in French first with informal language development in English oral and listening skills.*

The Calgary Catholic Board had this approach until 1993. Until 1993, except for an experimental class from 1989 to 1992, there were 30 minutes of English language arts oral and listening

skills in Grade 1. The results of this board's annual standardized testing in French and English have been above the provincial standard for many years. After conducting a pilot study the board changed their program to that of approach 3, in which students were taught to read concurrently.

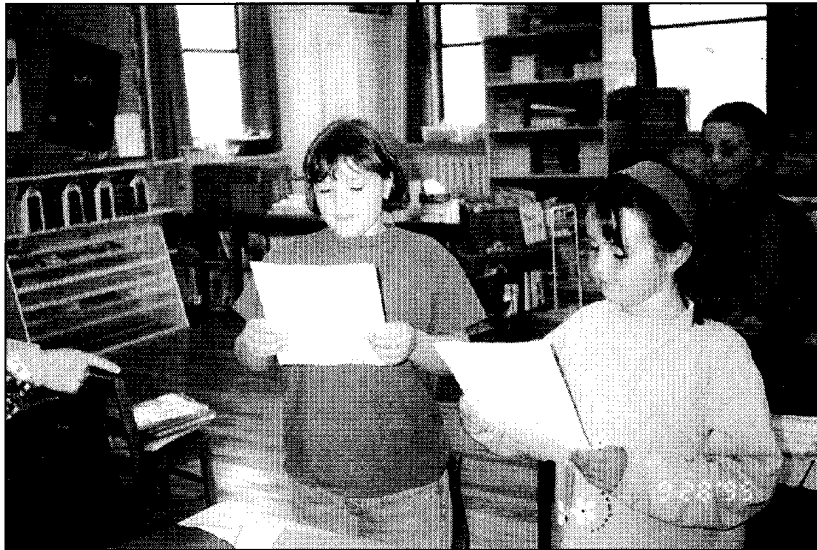
### **Remediation for Immersion Students**

For those who are concerned about progress and attrition of students in the early French immersion program there is the question of how to help students having difficulty. Remedial help in French is not always available in school boards. Many professionals have called for improved service in this area. The lack of remedial services has led some to believe that English language arts in Grade 1 could have a positive effect on retention of students because students would learn to read faster in

English and transfer their skills to French. On the other hand, some see remedial services as replacing the need for English language arts in the Grade 1 immersion program.

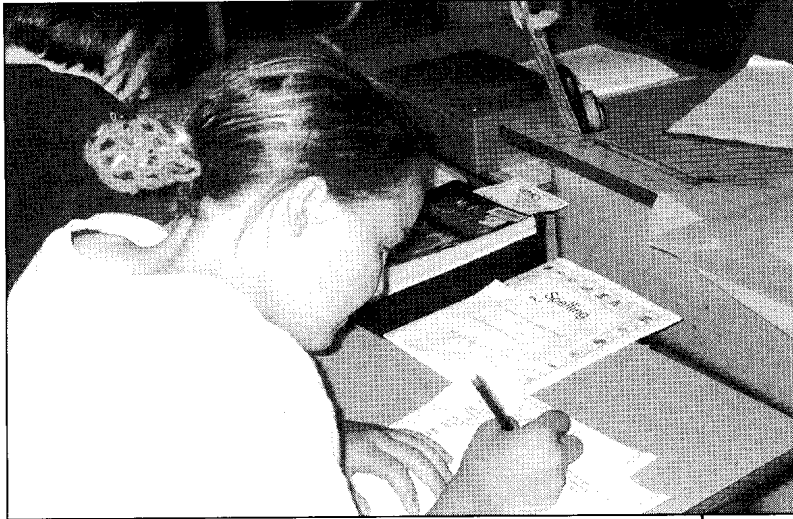
It may be that different sequences of the language used in learning to read suit different types of learners. With-

out research to illuminate this idea, a school board may need to explore what will benefit its students through pilot projects. In committing to such an endeavour, it is wise for a board to be aware of as many aspects of the issue as possible including communication, publicity, curriculum adaptation, resources, inservice, staffing, budget, monitoring the impact of the proposed change, and teacher training.



## Conclusions

More empirical studies are needed; however, the existing research literature points to the conclusion that no one approach will best meet the needs of each individual student. School boards



faced with making policy decisions might best provide the greatest flexibility possible given their circumstances. Importantly, in the decision-making process, the creation of the immersion environment can not be overlooked for its contribution to motivating young students to communicate in French, which is the primary goal of the French immersion program. Therefore, the number of hours of instruction in French and the amount of English impinging on the program need to be weighed very carefully. It is important to keep in mind that there is a large body of research demonstrating that for students who heretofore have typified the population and have remained in immersion, there is no harm to English language skills.

The full report *Introducing English Language Arts in Early French Immersion* by Dr. Nancy Halsall and Elaine O'Reilly is available from the Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers, 72 Robertson, P.O. Box 26148, Nepean, Ontario K2H 5Y8, telephone 613-727-6933, fax 613-727-8937.

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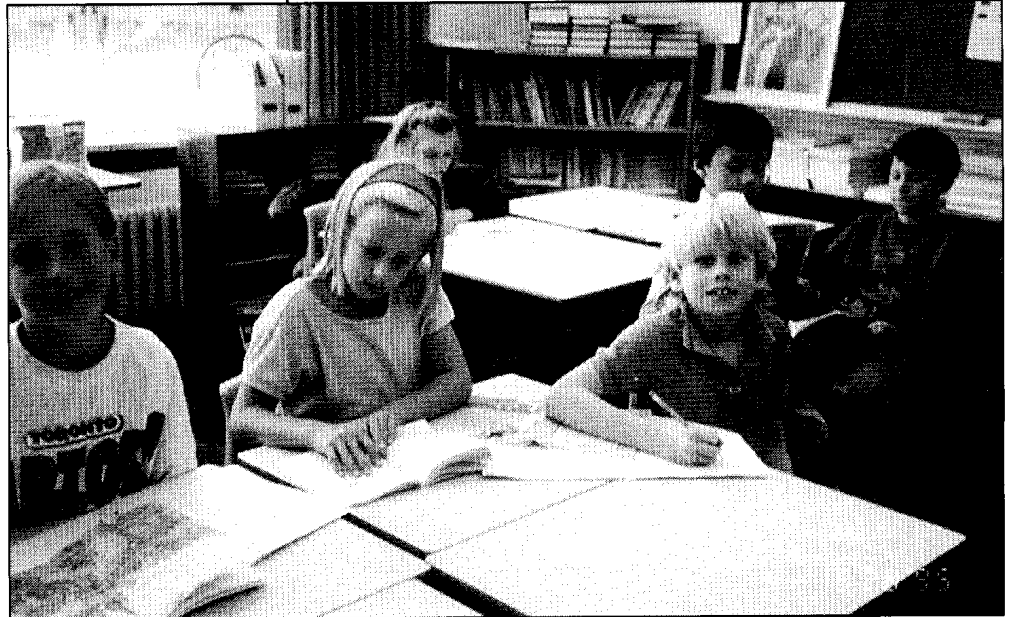
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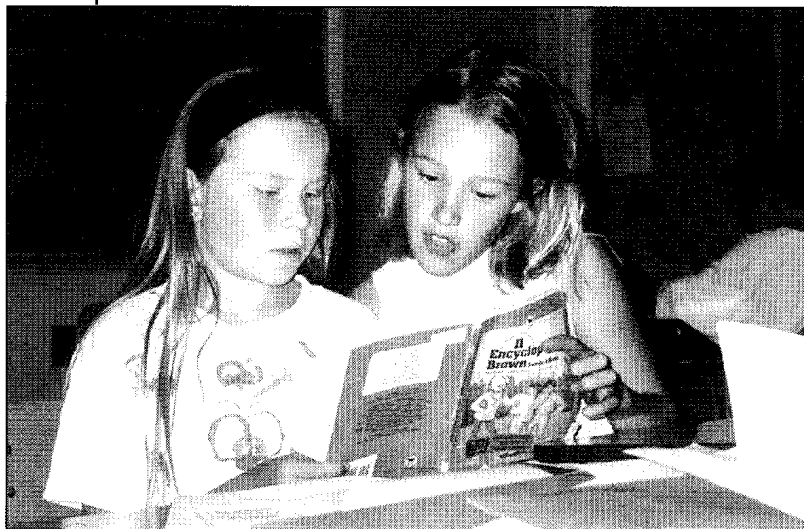
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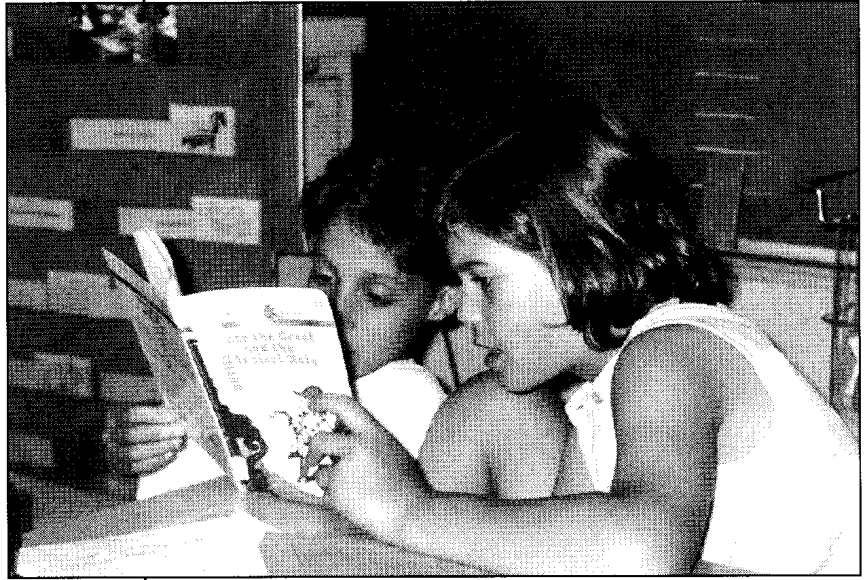


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*Photography by  
Jacqueline Gaudet and Greta Murtagh*

We would like to thank the students from  
Ecole Beaufort in Nova Scotia and Ecole Cliff Drive in British Columbia  
for their cooperation during the photo sessions.

**ISBN (Collection)**  
**0-921612-61-3**

**ISBN 0-921612-62-1**



# Appendix



- ◆ Kobasiuk, Phyllis, Brian Mitchell. “**Building the Future: The Role of the Trustee.**” *French Immersion in Alberta: Building the Future 1998—Conference Report*. Edmonton, November 19–20, 1998. Edmonton: Building the Future Conference Committee, 1999. Reprinted with permission.

## SESSION PRESENTATIONS

### **Building the Future: The Role of the Trustee**

**PHYLLIS KOBASIUK**

I am no longer a trustee. I served for nine years as a trustee in Parkland, but I am now involved at the municipal level of government as Reeve for Parkland County.

French immersion has been such a fabulous experience for my children, that even though my stay here today must be short due to another commitment, I felt I wanted to participate on the panel. I am 100% committed to French immersion programming. It has been the best thing that has happened to my daughters' education and has opened doors, cultural doors. My older daughter is in her thirteenth year of French immersion. The program has also allowed her to take German next year, possibly in Germany through an exchange program with high school.

The number of doors that learning second languages has opened has been tremendous. So even though I am no longer a trustee, I am totally committed which you will be able to tell from my comments here today.

Later, I will hand out a document [see handout following this speech] on my presentation today

What I am going to be talking about is a best practice. This is a Steering Committee that was established in Parkland Division to study French immersion for possible improvements. I think it worked well, and Parkland has promised to monitor and promote this committee's work. That's where my focus is, as I believe it to be a best practice.

School boards offering French immersion programs must respond to the needs of parents on behalf of their students in an effort to ensure sustainability and vitality of this proven program that prepares our children to meet the global opportunities of the next millennium.

Program needs are best identified by parents in concert with teachers, as student goals and successes are achieved. Proactive parents participate as executive members of individual school councils and come prepared with workable solutions identified through ongoing parent/teacher consultation.

The Parkland School Division French Immersion Steering Committee process stemmed from a level of trust, open communication, and a purposeful desire to act in a timely manner to address potential detractor from the program. Parents in the community had a sense and level of comfort that their elected trustee representatives were, in fact, advocates for the quality of education in this program that they had come to expect for their children. These parents were diligent supporters who chose to place their children in second language programs. They acted as tenacious, informed, active players in their children's education. They saw the big picture. They were broad thinkers who have a strong sense for the critical role education holds in the global context. Subsequently, the role of trustees, in support of this mindset, had to nurture a Board of

Education culture within that framework. A sense of program expectations, based on expressed parent community values, needed to exist.

Leading up to the establishment of the French Immersion Steering Committee, trustees and the board had developed a workable level of communication built on:

- Annual presentations to the board involving Canadian Parents for French addressing local interests such as upcoming sponsored public speaking events, student exchange programs and other celebrations of program success.
- ASBABE membership maintained on an annual basis, particularly as a means of keeping up-to-date on provincial or federal funding shifts or improvements.
- School council attendance by trustees to support parents and the councils, and to liaise or carry through with the board and staff.
- A formal committee structure promoting its meaningful partnership with all school councils in the district whereby parents of school councils drive the agenda.

Ongoing awareness is also nurtured through the local media about exchange programs like NACEL, whereby parents and trustees host French and other European students. A board policy should also, hopefully, be in place to promote second language, extracurricular opportunities for students. Muriel Dunnigan talked about the role of trustees in governance. Trustees can also participate and be aware of programs such as NACEL. I have brought five students from France to my home over five years, each for one month. And I think it's fabulous for your own children. The children come to learn and improve their English skills and create awareness in other people in the community.

Also, eager parents fresh to the education system with children in playschools need to be informed of the benefits and successes through a planned strategy by enthusiastic French immersion program parents. Myself, I became involved, although I didn't really intend to put my children in French immersion. But I had a young daughter for whom the program was, I felt, suitable. French immersion offered half-day programs that I believe are very good for young children. The English program, which is very close to our home, offered two full days, which wasn't suitable for a four-and-a-half-year-old child. I thought I could be involved. I sat on the executive as the vice-president. We needed to establish the program, so I become involved that way.

Parents at the playschool are the ones that need to be aware. Once their children are in Kindergarten they tend to be sort of fitting into the English program. Parents at the playschool level are very keen, interested, and open-minded to their children's education. They need to be approached by enthusiastic French immersion supporters.

So you ask the question: at what point was it deemed necessary to structure the review of possible improvements to the French immersion program? French immersion had been introduced in Parkland County in the late 1970s. By 1985, parents in Stony Plain and the surrounding rural communities were seeking closer identity and involvement with French immersion programs that were more accessible, rather than going the longer distance to Spruce Grove. There were sufficient enrolments, and commitment by parents, to work towards establishment of a viable program in Stony Plain. They wanted to see something in their own community. We have a large jurisdiction,

even more so with regionalization. We have parents that think: “While I’d like to put my child in French immersion, that means two hours busing to Spruce Grove.” Parents did do that because they were committed, but you need something a little closer to their communities than that.

Then, when the lead program in Spruce Grove began to show signs of enrolment fluctuation in 1995, parents began examining why its offshoot in Stony Plain, in contrast, was experiencing growth and sustainability. It was then that the Steering Committee was supported by the board as a means to establish a mandate for a program review and recommendations for consideration and action. It was believed that membership on the committee needed to include stakeholders who had conviction and experience in the program, and those who had eyes and ears in the community. Membership included teaching staff, administration, and Canadian Parents for French. An efficient agenda, timelines, and means to measure outcomes, according to the committee mandate, ensured that the desired results would be achieved, so that the board would be in a sound position to make the important decisions for improving the program. Committee members further agreed to follow-up once the board’s recommendation had been made. Several factors contributed to the success of the entire effort. Communication was built on a trusting partnership that, in turn, grew out of a sincere desire to meet individual student needs. The larger partnership hinged on parent support, teacher program delivery, the support of the school principal and the school council, central office administrative guidance, and the trustee/board commitment to policy and adherence to meeting client needs. By that I mean there is whole broad range of involvement, all the way from the trustees setting policy to parents’ support and commitment. That is very important.

Once this framework was established, annual monitoring by the Superintendent and the board was seen to be important to long-term sustainability and growth of the French immersion program in the jurisdiction.

In the document that I am distributing there is a list of the final recommendations of the Steering Committee, as well as a list of the final recommendations for the meeting of the board that was held in June 1998.

The board was able to follow-up in a timely fashion to meet the needs that were communicated by the steering committee process. Also, since I was a parent of a graduating French immersion student, I consulted with my daughter. We don’t always ask students how they feel about things; I think it is really important that we have a good sense of their input. They are very knowledgeable. They know how they feel about things, and when they have had a chance to observe French immersion or any other program for a number of years, they can see things clearly and with a worthwhile perspective that we as trustees should be listening to.

In this discussion, my daughter provided many insights.

Overall, the French immersion program should be an attractive, appealing program choice for students who want to participate and remain enrolled, not simply because they feel obligated to their parents or teacher to complete French Language Arts, for there are other reasons that they should feel they want to be involved in French immersion.

The high school program, of course, should offer French Language Arts, Social Studies, and Math by fully qualified instructors, whose first language is French. That is preferred, but not cast in stone. My daughter has told me that teachers who are dedicated to the success of French immersion studies are instructors of choice. Students know quality language, they value good French language skills and they appreciate teachers with these skills.

Also, planned educational tours or field trips prove beneficial for a variety of reasons, primarily because the result is the community sees the benefits, and the element of parent support and volunteerism creates enthusiasm, camaraderie and support amongst the families involved. French immersion programs of study must be vibrant and enticing for students who are keen to learn and see benefit in the challenge. We recognized that tours within Canada and in Europe involve planning on the part of the teachers and parents, but this creates a real-life bonus for students who seek second language cultural awareness. Reciprocal exchange programs involving French immersion students promote the benefit of French immersion studies.

A third point, which I believe is important, is that we need to ensure locally elected trustees support, and are knowledgeable about, the program. The community needs are best addressed in partnership with trustees, teachers and administration. On the Parkland School Division board right now there are no parents who have had students enrolled in French immersion. They need the opportunity to be aware of what the program involves, they need also to hear from the parents who are advocates and who feel this program is vitally important to the division's education system. They need to hear from parents; otherwise they won't have a full appreciation of the program. After all, it is the trustees who are the decision-makers sitting around the table. When there is a presentation about French immersion, it's really important that parents seek out trustees or that trustees seek out parents and students of French immersion and just say, "Tell me why you think this is beneficial. Explain the benefits to me. How do the students feel about it?" It's really important to gain their perspective.

Also, a high school French immersion certificate pays tribute to the commitment made by students over thirteen years of study in French immersion, and that recognition is something the education system and school board can offer students for their commitment.

High school novel study needs to be of higher calibre. The present novel vocabulary is particularly advanced in a context of storylines that are too simple. Students are seeking improved quality in the novels that are chosen, that's really important.

Most of all I believe French immersion should be fun for the students involved. The French language and culture have many benefits for students and families. Learning in French offers much to enjoy.

And with that, I will circulate these documents and conclude my presentation.

## SESSION PRESENTATIONS

### Building the Future: The Role of the Trustee

**BRIAN MITCHELL**

Well, it's been thirty days since the election, just!

I will give you some background. Approximately six years ago, when I was first elected to the school board, I was the only trustee on the board whose children were attending French immersion.

So imagine, if you will, that during the course of the first thirty days as a new trustee on the board, the administration comes to you and says, as per Policy 302, notice of motion is given that the Board of Trustees of the Edmonton Catholic School District will close the senior high portion of École J. H Picard School on completion of the 1992/93 school year. Okay, that was November 10 actually, so it was more like twenty days into the process.

Well, we had some warning that this was coming, and a deadline, of course, because of timelines specified in Policy 302.

So there we were, with this recommendation.

This was a very interesting period. In the way of personal experience, I also sit on the board of the Canadian Council of Social Development, and was in Ottawa for a meeting of that board. So I had the school board secretary fax me the package that would normally be available to board members on Friday. I spent all my spare time that weekend working on a presentation and preparing for the speech I would give at the public meeting of the board on Monday evening. Interestingly enough, the board went in camera, as a result of discussion with the board and the administration, and I was able to persuade them to consider a compromise. That compromise was that the senior high program would remain open for an additional five years only so long as enrolment increased by at least 10% annually—that was the compromise.

Policy 302 had been put in place ten years before by a board that believed that schools and programs ought not to operate if they weren't economical. I am not faulting them, I am simply saying they did what they did in their best wisdom, and you inherit what your forefathers have left as a legacy. That is something you should note, as a trustee! You may want to recommend a different course of action. But if you do, you need to recognize that what you have articulated will still impact your jurisdiction five, ten, fifteen, twenty, in some cases maybe even thirty years hence.

So, in their wisdom the board had passed that policy and the administration was carrying out their responsibility, as they had been instructed by policy. We obtained that agreement and persevered with the program for the next five years.

At the time, there were strong school councils in all the French immersion schools, not the least of which was École J.H. Picard School. Judy Buddle was involved. She was the Secretary-Treasurer. There were great debates going on with the administration about how much French

immersion was costing, and how much it wasn't costing, and how much it was costing the other students. We had school councils writing to each of the other councils saying this was exorbitant, and keeping the French immersion program open for 71 students was taking money from other programs. In fact, that year we dropped to 67 students before the year ended. So, I think the compromise was a really good one.

To make a long story short, in each of the next four years the program increased, not by 10% but, on average, between 20% and 30% except for last year, the fifth year. In fact, last year we only increased by one or two percent. And we had a review last year, because I insisted that every year we review. Since I was the one who had advocated for the 10% minimum, and understood the compromise motion, I felt it was important to review adherence to that agreement on an annual basis.

We had a review last year, and we noted that over the five-year period the enrolment had increased very, very substantially, save for the last year. And I think the current enrolment is approximately 180–200. So the numbers are quite credible.

What should we learn from all of this? We should certainly learn that when boards are setting policy, there is a very clear need to work in harmony with the constituents, with the community whom you represent.

That was the beginning of a very interesting process, because it dealt with the French immersion senior high program. Given the input of the parents over an extended period of time, it still is an interesting process. Not because the board passed a resolution saying five years, 10% etc., but because the parents came forward, said they wanted it, and supported it.

You are all familiar with all encompassing policy manuals. You know, covering everything from soup to nuts in one binder. We had one, too. So, of course, we had all kinds of policies, and they had all been devised as a result of issues that had cropped up in the schools. Fair enough, that is the way policy-making is done. And it was all with good intentions. I'm not denigrating what was done.

In any case, I think we might be reinventing the wheel here. I hope not, but in some ways I think so. Over a period of five years in Edmonton Catholic, in fact, prior to 1992, the board was taking a look at their what responsibilities were, what their role was, and how to carry out that role and those responsibilities. They had gone beyond the school and said we were a corporate entity, a unique organization. We developed our organizational bylaws, and they were approved at the end of the 1989–1992 term by the board of the day. It was a good step, because it allowed us to stop our tampering with the other processes and procedures. We then, of course, looked at that as a guide for us as trustees at the time, because in addition to the policy manual, we now had this organizational bylaw that was much more manageable. We started to work ourselves through the policy governance process.

Some of the time it was a case of two steps forward, one back. Developing our mission statement and customizing our policies under the policy governance model were quite thorough, and it took a long time to do. But under the current policies I can't tell you the same thing wouldn't have happened to the French immersion program because according to our policies, it would be the

responsibility of the administration to be coming to the board and saying, “Look, this situation is not in keeping with policy.” There is no doubt in my mind, though, that I wouldn’t be that far removed anymore and I don’t think the board would, because we would know that there were concerns out there and that our constituents represent a vital sounding board.

We moved on. A public relations team—community relations and marketing—works within SWAC [System-Wide Advisory Committee] now to promote the program. I think we’ve got some additional work to do on policies. This is our policy governance handbook now, by the way, which replaces the binder. It is about 25 or 30 pages long and some of those pages are blank. There is one policy to turn to if you wanted some ideas on French immersion for example, and it talks about parents and students. It is an executive limitation; there are four categories to policy governance, as some of you probably know. The header on that policy says, “With respect to interactions with parents and students, the superintendent shall not cause or allow conditions, procedure or decisions which are unsafe, unfair or disrespectful, undignified or unnecessarily intrusive, or which fail to provide... etc., etc.” So, if a decision were going to be made about French immersion, that kind of decision would be made in consultation with the community and we have no problem interpreting that consultation would occur. So, under those kinds of circumstances, under those criteria, they should never involve political lobbies, so to speak.

It has been a long process, to get to the point of using policy governance as a model; this was approved last February. Now we are learning to live with it. We are all in this together. School councils are on-line now; SWAC is there. We have multiple opportunities to get feedback. The demand is there. We can adjust it if we choose. We are a service industry. We are responsive to the customers.

I am running overtime, so I’ll stop there.





# Appendix



- ◆ Brault, Aline, Marcel Lavallée, Robert Martin, and Alain Nogue. “**A French Immersion School Culture: The Foundation for Success.**” *French Immersion in Alberta: Building the Future 1998—Conference Report*. Edmonton, November 19–20, 1998. Edmonton: Building the Future Conference Committee, 1999. Reprinted with permission.
- ◆ Hampton, Wayne, Emilie Keane, and Donna Waraksa. “**Building the Future: The Role of the School Administrator.**” *French Immersion in Alberta: Building the Future 1998—Conference Report*. Edmonton, November 19–20, 1998. Edmonton: Building the Future Conference Committee, 1999. Reprinted with permission.
- ◆ Wurst, Anita, and Bill Brownlee. “**Creating English-French Immersion Harmony in Dual Track Schools: Canadian Rockies District Task Force.**” *French Immersion in Alberta: Building the Future: Leading the Way 2000—Conference Report*. Canmore, May 1–2, 2000. Edmonton: Building the Future Conference Committee, 2000. Reprinted with permission.
- ◆ Mayne, Lise, and Wayne Hampton. “**Understanding the French Immersion Teacher: Implications for Training, Hiring, Supervising, and Supporting Your French Immersion Staff.**” *French Immersion in Alberta: Building the Future: Leading the Way 2000—Conference Report*. Canmore, May 1–2, 2000. Edmonton: Building the Future Conference Committee, 2000. Reprinted with permission.

## BACKGROUND

# A French Immersion School Culture: The Foundation for Success

### General Considerations

Schools offering immersion programs differ from regular schools in that they require children to learn concepts, skills and attitudes in French at the same time as they are acquiring the language itself. In immersion, the second language used by children to negotiate and structure meanings becomes a primary focus of the teaching-learning process. This significant difference between regular and immersion schooling must be accounted for when defining, planning and creating the school environment. In other words, the culture in a school offering an immersion program cannot be a carbon copy of the culture that exists in a school where the language of instruction is the language of the home and of the community at large.

In the context of this presentation, school culture is defined as the interplay of elements, forces and people that constitute an effective learning environment. The immersion school culture must enable children to be and to learn in a meaningful, rich and secure second-language-learning world. A person learning a language in the real world is encapsulated, so to speak, in contexts that provide meaning, and support his learning. An effective immersion school culture must compensate for many of the elements and forces that naturally define the normal language learning process. It is precisely because second language learning in a school offering an immersion program is so often confined to activities organized by the teacher and occurring in the classroom that planning and creating an effective immersion school culture becomes so important. Because of the nature of immersion schooling, there is a need to create a more natural language learning environment.

In order to create a culture that will foster learning, of both the second language and the subject matter, it is important that school trustees, and district and school administrators reflect on the factors that affect second language acquisition. These factors can be summarized as follows:

1. *Relevance:* Learning French must be perceived as pertinent by the learner. Learning French must be valued by persons who are perceived as important by the learner.
2. *Meaningful communication:* Learning French is most effective when the learner is placed in authentic learning situations, situations approximating real life.

3. *Interest:* Activities in French must be of interest to the learner. They must capture the student's imagination.
4. *Security:* Learning French is most effective in a safe and caring environment where the learner perceives that he or she can take risks without fear of ridicule.
5. *Confidence:* Language learning is most effective when the learner is confident that he or she has the wherewithal to tackle the task at hand and that he or she will be successful.
6. *Interaction:* Learning French is most effective when the learner is given opportunities to interact with persons who are important to him or her.
7. *Exposure:* Hearing and reading the same words and idiomatic expressions in different contexts and situations reinforce and enrich the learning of a language.
8. *Models:* Learning French is most effective when the learner is exposed to good and consistent French language models.

These eight factors are at work every day within the classroom. The degree to which teachers are aware of them and plan their teaching and student activities accordingly greatly determines the level of linguistic and academic achievement reached by their students.

If these factors are true of the classroom, they are also true of the whole school. Indeed what takes place in a school determines much of the implicit curriculum of that school. Announcements over the intercom, school activities, teaching methodology and staff interactions are some of the factors that determine what students learn. Theoretically, it would be possible to infer many of the language learning outcomes in a school offering an immersion program from an analysis of the practices in that school. For instance, in a French immersion school where announcements are made exclusively in English, the immersion students learn that speaking about what goes on in the school is done more effectively in English. If learning activities are teacher-centred and rarely involve interaction in the target language, immersion students learn that learning French is an academic pursuit. Similarly, when French immersion students hear the immersion teachers speaking among themselves in English, they learn that French is not very useful in the world outside the classroom.

Creating an effective immersion school culture will require the bridging of the gap between the informal or implicit curriculum and the formal curriculum from Alberta Education. In order to achieve this goal, trustees and central office and school administrators, in close cooperation with teachers, will need to take a good look at the school environment and use of French in the school. This presentation will examine the school environment, the potential of optional courses, and the integration of technology in the teaching/learning process as they relate to an effective immersion school culture.

## The Environment in a School Offering an Immersion Program

What is the difference between an ordinary meal and one that immediately catches your attention and whets your appetite? What is the difference in environment between an ordinary immersion school and one that immediately catches the students' attention and whets their appetite to learn more? What is the difference between a good immersion program and a great program you'll be proud to promote?

These are three questions that fundamentally share a common response; one must pay very close attention to not only the *what* but also to the *how* of what we do. A chef will pay close attention to the variety of ingredients used in a dish and to their presentation. A good chef will not be afraid to use ingredients we may not know or to use familiar ingredients in a very original way. And what about the setting? Restaurants spend impressive amounts of money to design or redesign room settings conducive to an enjoyable eating experience in 1998.

Is the task of an immersion school administrator all that different from that of the chef and restaurateur? Not really. The French immersion administrator will want to establish a school environment that catches the students' interest and nourishes their enthusiasm, and will want to communicate in words and in actions that the French immersion program is an important and valued facet of the school. The French immersion administrator will implement practices and policies that demonstrate, unequivocally, support for his immersion staff as they implement classroom practices that support effective learning of the French language, effective acquisition of the curriculum, and effective understanding and appreciation of the French culture.

What are the unique challenges facing the school administrator of a dual track school? Is such an administrator at a disadvantage when compared to the administrator of an immersion centre? Should the policies and practices of single and dual track schools differ?

Which policies should trustees adopt to ensure that the students entrusted to their district's care are given an education second to none? How can central office personnel provide leadership as well as assistance in issues related to planning, staffing and professional development?

Effective teaching and learning is not just a matter of the classroom but of the whole school. What are those tried and true practices of successful French immersion schools? of school districts where immersion is doing well? What are those little but so important, yet too often overlooked things that can make such a huge difference? How can students, teachers, parents, administrators, guidance personnel, reading clinicians and central office personnel contribute to the creation and maintenance of an effective immersion school culture?

French immersion has been part of the Canadian experience for the past 30 years. Those years have provided an abundant crop of ideas, strategies and practices. This workshop will spotlight some of them.

## **Communication and Information Technologies**

Computer technology has become an integral part of schooling. Teachers and students alike are becoming increasingly literate in the use of computers to accomplish a variety of tasks, to communicate and to access information. Because this technology is dictating much of what goes on in schools, it is having a profound impact on the school culture. The computer revolution is happening so rapidly that one of the new challenges facing education decision-makers is to ensure that the technology will serve the purpose of education. This challenge takes on a new twist in schools offering immersion programs where administrators and teachers have to ask the question: How can communication and information technologies contribute to an effective immersion school culture?

In order to answer this question, a number of related issues must be addressed:

- the availability of appropriate software in the French language,
- offering instruction on computer use and providing assistance in French,
- the identification, evaluation and sharing of French language web sites,
- the use of computers as a learning tool for subjects taught in French,
- the use of computers for distance learning in French,
- the establishment of networks to encourage students to communicate in French with students across the province, across Canada and around the world,
- the use of computers to deliver in-service activities for teachers.

## **Fine Arts and Physical Education in a School Offering an Immersion Program**

Although music, art, drama and physical education are widely viewed as options and are excluded from Alberta Education's achievement and diploma testing programs, they play an invaluable role in the education of all children. Because of their very nature, these optional subjects cater to children's multiple intelligences and are responsive to different learning styles. In fact, the better informed core subject area teachers are borrowing freely from the pedagogy in these optional subject areas. By integrating movement, music, and art in the different subject areas, teachers are better able to respond to individual differences.

In a school offering a French immersion program, music, art, drama and physical education take on an even more important role. If one reflects on the role of the social environment on first language acquisition, it is easier to understand the importance of providing maximum exposure to the French language in a school offering an immersion program. Much of the English language learning in Alberta results from the constant exposure to television, radio, family activities, private lessons, team sports, etc. In French immersion, offering these optional courses in French can compensate somewhat for the powerful English language environment that supports the acquisition of the first language. These subject areas provide contexts that

approximate real life situations, where students can learn French vocabulary, idioms and structures without feeling obliged to concentrate on acquiring the language. Offering these subjects in French provides the exposure so necessary to the development of language spontaneity.

In addition to the cultural dimension, the music program offers many opportunities for students to absorb French vocabulary, idioms and structures almost effortlessly through songs. French folk songs will expose students to vocabulary that may not be included in themes covered in regular subject areas. For instance "les chansons de métiers" describe logging, hunting, farming, fishing, forging, going to the market, etc.

The drama class has the potential of becoming one of the most promising language learning settings. It provides opportunities for students to associate body language and French utterances, thereby making them more meaningful. When words, idioms and entire sentences are supported by facial expressions and actions, they are easier to interpret, recall and use. The drama class provides opportunities for the teacher to work on French pronunciation and intonation without appearing critical of the student's competence in French. Finally, the drama class could very well motivate students to switch to the French language television channels, thereby increasing the overall exposure to the French language

Offering art and physical education in French exposes students to much of the vocabulary that is necessary to talk about the world they live in. In art class, students are required to discuss abstract concepts in the French language. In physical education class, they are given opportunities to use everyday vocabulary and expressions in talking about equipment, facilities, training, sports, etc.

Aline Brault, Consultant, Edmonton Catholic Schools, Edmonton  
Marcel Lavallée, Edmonton  
Robert Martin, Assistant Principal, École Frère Antoine, Edmonton  
Alain Nogue, Assistant Director, Language Services Branch, Alberta Education,  
Edmonton

## SESSION NOTES

# A French Immersion School Culture: The Foundation for Success

**ALINE BRAULT, MARCEL LAVALLÉE, ROBERT MARTIN, AND ALAIN NOGUE**

The following summary was prepared from notes taken during the session by a volunteer recorder, and from any other written records of the session as may have been kept on flip charts or work sheets. The summary was reviewed by the session presenters and printed with their agreement.

### **Content Overview (Alain Nogue)**

*(Questions, Answers and Implications)*

- Q: How is French immersion schooling different from regular schooling?
- A: Learning French while using it to negotiate, structure and communicate meaning in other subject areas is a primary focus of the teaching/learning process in an immersion program.
- I: Because of its role in determining academic success, French language learning becomes a major priority.
- Q: How is learning French in an immersion environment different from learning it in a French speaking community?
- A: Forgetting for a moment what the learner learns, the major difference is in the context in which language learning occurs. Whereas family or community activities are natural and for the most part spontaneous with the language learning as a by-product, the school's context is artificially created and maintained for the purpose of learning the target language.
- I: In the school environment, the context has to be nurtured and massaged to bring it to approximate a natural context as much as possible.
- Q: What do we mean by a school culture?
- A: The context in a school that impacts on learning. The context results from the dynamic interplay of the different elements that make up the learning environment. It determines much of the implicit curriculum in the school.
- I: Stakeholders need to be aware of the interplay of the different elements that make up their school's culture. They also need to understand their role in creating and maintaining an effective school culture.



- Q: What do we mean by an effective immersion school culture?
- A: One that supports learning generally and French language learning specifically. One that contributes to the students' motivation to learn French and to learn in French. One that gives credibility to the immersion option.
- I: Decision-makers need to realize that, because of the mandate of a school offering immersion, its culture should be different from that of a "regular" school.
- Q: What needs to be done to create an effective immersion school culture?
- A: It requires a clear understanding of what immersion is and what it is not. It requires a commitment on the part of the decision-makers. This commitment should be reflected in a clearly expressed mission statement for the school and should be evident in the schools' practices. For instance, exposing immersion students to activities specifically designed to create/bolster the immersion school culture should be a matter of policy. The enlightened French immersion administrator has to be able to respond to those who argue in favour of limiting French plays, films, concerts, etc. because such activities exclude the non-immersion students.
- I. An effective immersion school culture is everyone's business.

## Immersion Culture Through Physical Education and the Arts (Aline Brault)

This presentation specifically dealt with how, at a classroom level, the non-core subjects are fundamental in creating a French immersion culture.

*Why is there a need to go beyond the core subjects?*

The child's mother tongue is constantly enriched at home by influences such as nursery rhymes, family outings, fishing, camping, television, radio, music lessons, dance lessons, movies, concerts, commercials signs, restaurant menus, and individual and teams sports to name but some.

There is no equivalent contribution to the acquisition of the French language. The schools can imitate the richness of the English environment to some extent by providing as many subjects as possible in French.

*Exactly how do the Arts and Physical Education help develop the child's French?*

These non-core subjects are invaluable in two ways.

- A. They provide a **variety of learning situations** which develop the multiple intelligences and respect different learning styles.

Taking one at a time, it is interesting to note the scope of the learning situations each subject presents.

### *Music*

- While a student is singing she is **using correct and—often very many—more-complex sentence structures, and richer vocabulary** than she would use in conversation.
- Children are very tolerant of **repeating** songs and games over and over, whereas they are unlikely to be repeating a **correct sentence** in conversation more than once.
- Students **utter far more French sentences** while singing than they would in a half-hour period in a classroom.
- **All students can be singing simultaneous** in French, so there is more practice time for the correct and rich vocabulary than in a regular class setting.

### *Art*

- Because the creative process involves a high level of personal meaning, children will often relate to the event or object in French.
- There is a story of a child returning from Québec who recounted her experiences in English to her parents until she fell upon a toy she had made with her friends. Upon pulling the toy from her suitcase, she broke into French, talking to her toy with great emotion.

### *Drama*

- Like music, drama affords the opportunity to express oneself in an excellent quality French. Memorized texts add the element of learning to use expression and proper spoken intonation.

### *Physical Education*

- Attaching movement to language reinforces the learning for many students.
- The emotional element of team sports and personal goal setting can provide a deep sense of accomplishment which, when related to French, helps anchor the value of using the language.

B. These subjects expose students to a greater quantity of areas of language which will be referred to as the different **domains of language**.

Each of the subjects provides an opportunity to develop new areas of vocabulary as well as a technical or professional vocabulary.

### *Music*

French folk music is incredibly rich in vocabulary.

- There are songs about working: logging, fishing, black-smithing, etc
- Students learn to sing descriptions of landscapes, events, and people, all of which expose them to excellent syntax.
- Music is also a direct source of history-related folklore which students often memorize.

Technical vocabulary such as the names of instruments, the elements of music, scores, conducting, expressions, phrasing, etc. are learned in English through private lessons and other contacts such as television and friends. In French they would most likely only be learned in a classroom setting.

### *Art*

Art requires that students learn to express their personal opinion and tastes. The many specific phrases needed to accomplish this become very useful later when, as teenagers, students want to express their ideas and points of view.

The technical language of art depends on the projects and therefore will likely cover a broad spectrum of vocabulary over the years. Art would include discussion of medium, colour, shapes, composition, perspective, technique and representation.

### *Drama*

Depending on the type of experience, students will learn to talk of improvisation rules, and develop a language of negotiation to accomplish putting on a play.

Technically, students learn the vocabulary of costuming, make-up, moods, scripts, and roles.

### *Physical Education*

Drilling and cheering are both very repetitive and require very rich idiomatic expressions.

Learning to state rules and negotiate referee calls also teaches specific sentence structures.

Technically, all the sporting equipment, motions, positions, and plays provide students with the very common vocabulary necessary to carry on an informal conversation in any bilingual setting.

### **What is the value of learning French?**

Students will ultimately want to speak French if it is useful to them. While the core subjects provide vocabulary for a broad range of topics, these only become useful when they are used in expressing a student’s ideas, opinions and feelings. Music, Drama, cheering and Art are all opportunities for students to learn the sentence structures that enable them to express themselves at an emotional level.

### **Who is the greatest proponent of the value of French?**

Just as Klein wanted to hear from parents about the cutbacks as opposed to listening to the teachers whom, he claimed, were too partisan, students are often very impressed by the teachers who value and promote French, but who do not teach French Language Arts per se. When the Math teacher or the Physical Education teacher thinks French is “cool” the message is very clear.

### **What affects our long-term memory the most?**

Emotions and relationships! When asked what they remember of their Grade 1 experience most adults relate an emotional anecdote or describe a personal relationship.

We need caring teachers who demonstrate their passion for French and who model a consistent use of it, regardless of the emotional circumstances. Who better than the teachers of the arts and Physical Education, who often have wonderful relationships with their students?

Many of the most precious things in our lives are things that cannot be measured. The creation of an immersion culture is such a thing in that it is immeasurable and achieved outside the core subjects. The French learned in this setting will likely outlive any formal tested knowledge. As an Hungarian once said; “We all studied Russian for years without much motivation, as it was the imposed language of our oppressors. I forgot everything, but for some reasons I still remember the songs.”

## Information and Communication Technology (Robert Martin)

There are two types of curricula in French immersion schools:

- stated curriculum, Alberta Education
- hidden curriculum

Some factors that affect language acquisition:

- relevance
- confidence
- meaningful communication
- interest
- security
- interaction
- models
- exposure

In order for the student to succeed in such a unique program, the hidden curriculum must:

- demonstrate that the administration is convinced of the value of French immersion
- support teachers in every way possible in terms of resources
- demonstrate the implicit valuing of the language in all areas of the stated curriculum
- provide for cultural activities where the language can be reinforced

### *Communication and information technology*

By using the language acquisition principles previously mentioned, a number of arguments can be made for providing a French technology experience:

Exposure: hearing and reading relevant material in context and in French reinforces language learning

Meaningful  
Communication: French is valued when all of the working tools are in French

Interest: although English is the predominant language in technology, French is the second language of the Internet  
it is a vibrant and developed language in the technology world.

Relevance: learning French must be perceived to be pertinent by the learner

Security and  
Confidence: computers contribute to student-differentiated learning  
learning French is most effective in a safe and caring environment where

- risk-taking may be done without fear of ridicule
- there is excellent French software that can assist differentiated learning
- Interaction: learning French is most effective when a positive relationship is created between the outside world and the students' activities  
in this way, interaction is accomplished in a meaningful context
- Models: learning French is most effective if the learner is constantly exposed to the language in all domains

*Some obstacles:*

- perceived lack of available resources
- funding of resources
- English-only technicians
- districts that believe that having some programs in French is sufficient
- dual track schools
- teacher resistance

*Bridging the gap:*

In summary, to create an effective immersion school culture using technology, the school must:

- integrate French in all areas of learning
- link the stated and hidden curricula
- be convinced and endorse its value
- offer all resources in French
- realize that all obstacles can be overcome

## **Role of the principal (Marcel Lavallée)**

### *Planning*

- Institute a planning process and administrative procedures that are respectful of the needs in each program.
- Purpose of planning is to enhance accountability.
- Leading a dual track school is an excellent opportunity to put into practice the dynamics found in an officially bilingual and culturally diverse country.
- Planning to focus on the educational needs of each group of students.

### *Role*

- Not speaking French is not necessarily a reason for a hands-off approach by principals; principals are not helpless because they do not speak the language, just like they are not helpless in a senior high school with many specialties, just like they are not helpless in a school that may have programs for special needs students; a hands-off approach is not so much a result of a lack of training or expertise in a specialized area as it is a manifestation of his or her personal attitude towards a program.
- Provide facilitative leadership, formative evaluation of staff.
- Ensure that clear goals have been developed consensually by all representative groups.
- Encourage professional development: support attendance at conferences, subscriptions to *Vie Pédagogique*, membership in *Conseil Français*, Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers, Canadian Modern Language Review.
- Visit the classroom, observe the students, talk to them, find out what they can and cannot do, discuss their achievement and progress with the teacher.

### *School Councils*

- Provide opportunities for all parents to have significant input and involvement in the realization of the objectives of each program.
- Identify what they would like to see achieved in each program.

### *Conditions for success*

- Strong leadership by the principal and the school council.
- Recognition that there are common needs for all students and other needs specific to each program.
- Program-specific needs are identified and solutions found by parents and staff involved in the specific program; common needs are addressed by everyone.
- Recognition that each program is different, and that different activities, different measures are required to address program needs. When the specific needs and program goals are well identified and articulated, it becomes much easier to explain variances in approaches and decisions. What is good for one program might not necessarily be so for the other program.

- Important for all parents to feel that the objectives for the program their child attends are being fully met.
- School council would have representation from both programs.
- Good communication is a more valuable practice in most situations than formal policies, rules or meetings.

#### *External*

- Visible presence of the two programs when you enter the school.
- Attractive features of both programs, and details about each program are featured in the school's handbook and publicity.
- General feeling of respect for differences.
- Open communication about programs, and general understanding and acceptance of each program's needs and activities.
- Sharing of resources between programs (some resources could enrich the FSL [core French] program in a school; cross-program teaching especially at the secondary level).
- Communications could be made first in French, then in English.
- Both languages are commonly heard in the environment.
- French staff are free and welcome to speak French, with French speakers switching to English when necessary.

#### *Building a shared school culture in dual track schools (70%)*

- Establishing a shared school culture does not imply that schools should embrace a single culture or give up the identities of their individual programs; it implies that common goals, norms, beliefs and practices might arise amongst all the myriad sub-groups that exist in a dual track school. This result further develops positive relationships and better learning in these schools. and brings the French and English program participants together.

#### *Climate factors*

- Many factors are common to good schools: mutual respect, good interpersonal relationships, strong administration and staff, good communication, high expectations.
- Equality of programs and practices. Equity and excellence go hand in hand.
- Focus on nurturing the parts and having the parts become whole.
- Strong parental involvement.
- Leadership that deals well with the diversity. Need specific plans to deal with diversity. Harmonious relations, integration of programs and people will not occur spontaneously simply as a result of good intentions and good will.
- Institute practices that demonstrate equality of treatment and fairness.
- Tolerance for diversity, viewing subculture formation as natural as long as it is developed within the overall norms and goals of the school.



### *Practices*

- Having students from all programs together in certain option courses (7 to 12).
- Communicate to the parents on a regular basis that the program is doing well.
- Believe that difficulties can be overcome. Collective confidence and belief in program is necessary.

### *Leadership at the district level*

- Guidance and leadership must be provided at the district level to ensure team effort and a sense of purpose; otherwise, individual teachers' efforts are overwhelmed by a pervasive sense of isolation and aimlessness.
- Design workshops to help non-French speaking principals with how to evaluate their French immersion teachers; point out that there are many commonalities—good teaching is good teaching; linguistic expertise should be dealt with at the interview.
- Evaluation should look at not only process, what the teacher does, but also at the students' learning progress and achievements.
- Teachers should have a personal plan to maintain and enhance their proficiency as French language speakers and writers.
- Providing a complement of support services : special education and remedial programs.
- French curriculum leadership.
- Although most boards have few or no bilingual administrative staff, they act as if it were business as usual.
  - How does the school as an organization react and adapt to the introduction of French immersion?
    - Staffing and professional development
    - Program promotion
- Clear information regarding the intents of the board in program implementation.
- Policies and practices to monitor and improve the district's or school's immersion program.
- Administrative belief in the program
  - What are the policies re: admission to the program, transfers, staffing, provincial and federal funding, students with special needs, field trips, cultural exchanges?
  - How are board policies affecting the nature of the program, accessibility to it?

### *Threats*

- That the immersion programs, once established, lose their strength of innovation, of enthusiasm,; need visionary educators, administrators and parents.

A lot of research in immersion has focussed on the cognitive aspects. The other areas have received little attention.

## SESSION PRESENTATIONS

### **Building the Future: The Role of the School Administrator**

**WAYNE HAMPTON**

I'd like to thank the conference organizers for the opportunity to share with you this afternoon.

I don't think I have anything very earth shattering to share. I'm sure many of the things I'm going to say you will have heard. What I'd like to do in my ten minute time is to begin with an overview of the demographics of our French immersion program in Lacombe, because it is a small rural program. Then, I would like to talk about: my belief system in terms of my role as an administrator of a dual track school; some best practices that have worked for us; and some issues and challenges that have arisen with the French immersion program, and how we have dealt with them.

The French immersion program in Lacombe is in its fourteenth year of operation. We had our first Grade 12 graduates last year. There were nine students in the graduating class and approximately 235 students in our K to 12 French immersion program.

Our school structure in the town of Lacombe is probably the most bizarre in the whole world, and I think it is important that you have an appreciation of that. But it does work very well in spite of sounding somewhat bizarre.

We have a Kindergarten to Grade 2 dual track school with 463 students. Of these, 82 are in French immersion. In a second building, my building, we have grades 3 to 6 with 400 students, 83 in French immersion. Then, in the junior high building we have 535 students—and since we have experienced the same trend as many other French immersion programs throughout Alberta and across the country—about 35 of those students are enrolled in French immersion. So, you can appreciate how, in a school of 535, the immersion program is small in terms of the number of students, but it is very important in our hearts, and we are committed to it. In high school there are approximately 750 students, with about 30 in French immersion. I am sure you can see some challenges there at the secondary level. In my building, we have split four–five and five–six classes, and of course there are split classes in the junior and senior high as well.

I've been intimately involved with the French immersion program the past nine years as an administrator and the past seven years as a parent.

To explain my belief system. The beliefs I'm going to share with you this afternoon are fundamental and apply whether you have a single track English or single track French school, or a dual track school. Many of the ideas and best practices I will share dovetail very nicely with the session yesterday on creating a school culture for French immersion programming. I think it is really important for us as administrators—and please understand I have absolutely no fluency in the language, except my high school French. My daughters in grades 6 and 4 make a great deal of fun of me and we have a great time at supper, when I start to speak French. If you want your children to start speaking French simply say, "You know you could be saying a lot about Mom and Dad

right now, and we wouldn't even understand:" that really gets them rolling. We have lots of fun with that, and when I try to use my French, too, it is pretty brutalizing to the language, let me tell you. But I believe that as administrators it is not enough to simply tolerate a program. I think we have to be intimately involved in it. We can't let the teachers fend for themselves. This is probably true in English or French, whether it is French immersion, special needs resource, or whatever. But probably because some of us don't have a fluency in the language, there might be a tendency to say, "Well, we'll hope that the teachers can make it fly." I don't think that is sufficient. As an administrator, I believe we have to be actively engaged in all aspects of the program to ensure that the program, the students, and the school fair well. Even if we don't have fluency in the language, we need to be intimately involved in the day-to-day and long-term planning and operation of the program. As administrators, we must guide and be directly involved in all the aspects of the program. Passivity is just not good enough.

We also need to be sensitive at all times to the complex political realities and implications of French immersion. Especially if you come from central Alberta—I know it is not unique to central Alberta, but probably true for many communities across our province—being sensitive to those political realities is very important. If we are not, it may easily lead to conflict in both the internal and the external school environment. We need to be seen as actively supporting all programs: English, French immersion, etc, etc. We need to be supporting the programming, the planning and the activities that go with it. The bottom line is that we need to be seen as very proactive with all programs.

A good example: seven years ago our numbers were falling a bit and in my school we had 16 students in the Grade 6 French immersion class but we had six English classes, one of them with 34 students. You know what happens when situations like that arise. We had to move towards split grades. It is very important that staffing be seen as fair and equitable across the board. We had discussions with parents and we demonstrated to them how split classes could be very successful. We went with split classes the following year, and they have, indeed, been very successful.

We need to be open and accountable. There is a perception that French immersion programs and students get substantially more funding than all the other programs. I dealt with that often seven or eight years ago. I don't deal with it anymore, because I think with the move towards site-based decision-making parents see exactly what the funding is. Yes, in our situation we get \$91 per student for French immersion, so it is an extra \$7,000 for our budget. But it is not a significant amount. Parents need to see and understand that. I had a parent recently speak to me about funding and she was really embarrassed when she found out my own children were in French immersion. I said, "That is no problem. I'm glad that you asked and I'm glad that you brought it forth." So being open and accountable is really critical.

Also, when we do activities in our school for the French immersion program that we are very proud of, we go out of our way to try to include the English program students and staff. For example, we include the English students in cultural activities such as our *Cabane à sucre*, or any cultural performances that we feel that the English students will be able to get the gist of, and enjoy. If the activity involves a lot of language, which many of them do, it's not fair to include the English students because they won't understand what is going on, and will just become restless.

In the last few months we had an issue to deal with, and we dealt with it as we do in all instances in our school: as a team. In September, each of our two split classes had an enrolment of 28 students. We met as a French immersion team, discussed it, and decided to just leave it and see what unfolded. We got a couple more students and it pushed both classes to 29. We sat down and discussed it once again. We were very fortunate to be able to do this; we were in a position to hire a .2 full time equivalent French immersion teacher, who now comes in one hour a day to teach the Grade 5 students. This extra help gives the grades 4 and 6 teachers one hour each day to be alone with the grades 4 and 6 students. We felt that was the best solution in view of the circumstances. I think it is really going to help everybody: staff and students. Parents were also very, very pleased that we were proactive. We do the same thing in the English program, if we find that there is a situation arising where we need to address staffing: we work as a team.

In our school, we have dual signage throughout. When you walk into our school you will see “welcome” in both French and English. You’ll see our mission statement in a very large frame in French and English. Our team and care models are displayed in French and English. Every room in the school—computer room, library, etc.—has both French and English mission statements on display. I think this dual signage sends a really important message. I never have to deal with complaints, if you can call them complaints, from English parents saying, “What is this nonsense about having to have French language on the signs?” I think it is actually appreciated, now that we have done it. The only place in the school we don’t have dual signage is on the front of the building, which believe me, is a really big political issue. I tried to get dual signage on the front last year but it didn’t work out. Another thing that we do at least once per week is to play “Oh Canada” in French, on the basis that French immersion makes up 20% of the school.

We do not counsel students out of the program. Now, let me just expand on that a touch. We have, on occasion, counselled some students out. As recently as three weeks ago, we had a student tested. This is a frustration I sometimes feel when, if your central office doesn’t have a person who is experienced with immersion, which is our case—I’m not criticizing, that is just a reality—there tends to be a knee-jerk reaction to move the child into the English program. In my mind, and I think that the research supports me, that is the wrong thing to do. You also create a certain degree of animosity in the English program and hear comments such as, “They can’t succeed in the French program, so let’s dump them into the English program.” With the student we had tested recently, we sat down with the parents and teacher, and set out a plan about how we were going to address this student’s needs right in the French immersion program. The only time we don’t make an effort to avoid having the child leave the program is when a parent comes in and says, “I want to take my child out of the program.” I will always ask them what their reason is and if there a problem, but sometimes parents just don’t feel comfortable. We have had that happen on occasion, but not often. Our attrition from Kindergarten to Grade 7 is largely caused by families moving away. In our mobile society, families are moving away and we don’t gain as many children in French immersion as in the English program. For the most part, our attrition in our programs is not caused by “dropouts,” although there may be a few more in junior or senior high.

Something else that is highly valued and very important, which I’ve alluded to earlier, is the teaming. We have umpteen teams throughout our school: grade level teams, program teams, French immersion teams. I believe that the strength of a team comes from its diversity; the success of a team comes from its ability to work together.

We need to maximize the involvement and inclusion of all stakeholder groups whenever and wherever possible: staff, parents and even students. At Lacombe Upper Elementary, our teams are very abundant—technology team, budget team, physical education program teams, on and on and on. Because of my lack of fluency in the French language, in our school one of the French immersion teachers acts as a liaison, and communicates a lot of information to the French immersion team of three teachers and one French speaking teacher assistant. We have French immersion program meetings, which I chair, and they are in English. I think it is very important that that type of support be demonstrated. We have an ongoing dialogue; we schedule formal meetings throughout the year, but we do have an ongoing dialogue. Also, because of the fragmentation of our program in the town of Lacombe, we have a K to 12 French immersion team that meets monthly or bi-monthly. Normally all the teachers attend, and as many of the administrators as possible. I try to attend them all. The purpose of those meetings is to create a dialogue: talk about how things are going, plan in-services, and plan our cultural activities (particularly *Cabane á sucre*).

Supporting and working with the Canadian Parents for French local chapter is also critical. CPF is a wonderful vehicle for program promotion. I really believe that potential French immersion parents need to hear it from parents who have experience with the program. They don't want to hear it from educators, because the teacher does not know the parent's perspective. Even mine, although I am an immersion parent, is not the perspective they need. They want to hear from a non-educator who has placed their child in the program.

Our CPF chapter has had an interesting history. It was originally created when the program started 14 years ago. It was a very powerful group—the lead group and wonderful parents. However, they just couldn't agree on things, so the chapter folded. We revived it last year because the parents expressed an interest in it. Our motto is “we are going to go slow to go fast.” I think it is going to work wonderfully.

I think the most powerful thing CPF did last year was to have the chapter President attend the ECS parent information meeting in May. She talked about the French immersion program, and what it is like to have a child, or two children, in French immersion. As a result, we had ten students move from English ECS into French immersion Grade 1. Now, that does create some problems, because there is no doubt their level of French is going to be lower than the level of the children who experienced the French immersion ECS program. Parents were anxious, too. I had many parents express concerns about having made the right choice. We all have self-doubts. We need to do as good a job as possible of communicating that, in time, the child will do wonderfully.

Another thing that we've done has been to take advantage of the French monitor program. We had a French monitor for three years. We weren't approved for one this year, but we hope to be again in the future. The French monitor is wonderful for bringing additional French cultural experiences to the students. We also used that person in the English programs to try to instill a better understanding and knowledge of the French culture.

Resource room assistance is another issue that comes up with small programs, particularly because we don't have the money to hire resource teachers. Our program at one time had a .5 FTE resource teacher, then it was reduced to .3. When we went to site-based decision-making, we sat down, talked about it, and decided to delete the position. Instead we hired a full time French speaking assistant, which has been a true success story. I mean that so sincerely. We use that

person to work with every single Grade 3 and Grade 4 student on a weekly basis. She takes every child for about 15 minutes to work on their French Language Arts reading. In grades 5 and 6 her focus still tends to be on French Language Arts, but if a student is having difficulties in Math, she'll work on that. As an administrator, I get really upset when we have teachers' aides doing bulletin board displays and things like that. I believe we should maximize the time with the students.

We also implemented a home reading program, which is a must for Grade 3s, Grade 4s and some of the Grade 5s. As part of the Teacher Assistant Program, the Teacher Assistant assigns students a certain reading to practice four times over the course of the next week, before she sees them again. It is wonderful! Our daughter gets out the books and reads to us. Of course, I never try and correct her, because I don't have any fluency. I don't want to get her going in the wrong direction. But she is reading French very, very successfully.

I believe that the enhancement of French immersion in Alberta lies with our ability to create a strong network of all the stakeholders involved. If we can work together as a team, communicate and share ideas and frustrations, I think we will be very successful. Our program is a real success, but there certainly are some challenges. And attrition is probably the biggest one right now.

Thank you.

## SESSION PRESENTATIONS

### **Building the Future: The Role of the School Administrator**

**EMILIE KEANE**

Thank you all for the opportunity of addressing you this afternoon and of sharing with you the way St. Albert provides programs for our French immersion students.

Our program is approaching its twentieth anniversary in the spring and we were looking forward to that celebration. I'm in a grades 7 through 12 school. We will be graduating our eighth class in the spring and we are very excited about that. I'm going to speak about the St. Albert Catholic experience rather than the experience of Greater St. Albert, our district after amalgamation, because the two experiences are different.

In St. Albert Catholic, French immersion classes were organized within French immersion centres, or single track schools. We have two elementary K to 6 schools and one junior/senior high, 7 to 12 school in our district in St. Albert. Mine is the junior/senior high school, Sainte Marguerite d'Youville. Twenty-five percent of our division's total student population is enrolled in French immersion in St. Albert Catholic, and we are very proud of that. But it hasn't come without a lot of hard work, and some creativity and innovation on the part of our schools and our division.

When French immersion programs were initiated some twenty years ago, the federal political climate promoted being bilingual in terms of opportunities for employment and advantages it would give students. More recently, we have seen a change in that political movement, and certainly a decrease in federal funding and the political importance given to bilingualism. So promotion has become something that we have worked on ourselves.

We have worked hard at promoting our programs with the message that being bilingual is an important advantage for students. We started at the elementary level, encouraging as many students as possible to begin French immersion at Kindergarten or Grade 1. We educated parents about the long-range possibilities of French immersion. Being able to see an entire program from K to 12 available within a community gave parents in our district a sense of confidence in its future. And, at Kindergarten registration evenings, some graduates from our high school, and even some of junior high students, have been invited to address parents on the advantages they have been given by staying in the French immersion program.

Our goal is to encourage students to stay in the program all the way through, once they register for Kindergarten. We know that doesn't always happen, but it has certainly been our experience in St. Albert Catholic that they stay to Grade 10. Our attrition rate at Grade 7 is almost non-existent. We keep almost 100% of our students. When we lose them is Grade 10, because then they leave for social reasons, thinking the grass is greener on the other side: "A big high school will surely provide me with greater opportunities for program choice, more friends, better athletic opportunities...." and a variety of other, similar reasons. Interestingly enough, in the last month I've had three of those students come to me and say, "Can I come back? I don't like the big school." There are some advantages to small schools. We generally keep 50% to 65% of our junior high students for high school.

We promote our grades 7 to 12 program on just that basis: the small school advantage. We have only 436 students in those grades, so we promote the facts that they have more teacher attention and that we have a strong academic program. We look at the things that we can provide. We work hard to be competitive in all aspects.

Technology is a big thing today and in some of the big schools technology is, of course, given a very high priority, so if we don't give it equal priority in our schools certainly we lose our students. So we've become creative. Last year we implemented a dual platform technology system within our school. We run both Macintosh and IBM— two separate labs all networked. That was quite a challenge.

Because our school is a French immersion centre, one focus of our program has been the opportunities for students to develop oral language. We expect that when you come to our school, when you come to the front office, when you come to the library, and when you address a teacher in the halls and the classrooms, you will use French. Most of our staff are Francophones. We hope that through this focus on using French, our students will develop a higher level of competency in French.

One good practice you may want to look at is formally assessing oral French. We've had various competitions where students participate in oratorical contests. We took away the contest part and for every reporting period students must give their teacher a tape of their oratorical skills. They can choose any topic they want. We use tapes instead of speaking in front of a group because we want to take away any shyness or nervousness. We want our students to strut their stuff so to speak. The students, with their Language Arts teachers, have devised a rubric for evaluation, so they know exactly what they are being assessed on. They know what kind of content is being graded, how we mark diction, pronunciation, masculine and feminine accord, and they know what to include in their presentation. We also do fun things like having them present their favourite sport or their favourite recipes in class demonstrations. These presentations have been very popular with the students—anything that helps them to speak.

In our school, because we are single track, it has been easier for us to promote the philosophy of French immersion—to have a unique mission statement that our staff and our parents follow. We have spent a great deal of time and effort to educate our parents about French immersion. At our orientation evenings we take the opportunities with a crowd of parents there to talk about how students learn in French immersion, so that the myths and their fears about immersion education can be removed. We tell them, for example, that learning a science concept—because, of course, Science and Math are the areas at the secondary level where the parents are often most leery—is the same in French and English. The language of instruction doesn't matter. We help parents to realize that students leave our program after Grade 12 with the same knowledge base as an English program student and that they can go on to an English or a French university program with the advantage of having the bilingual opportunities available to them. We bring back our graduates from universities, NAIT or SAIT, Grant MacEwan College and other programs to talk to our parents and to our students about their experiences. We ask them to be honest. They are, and usually in a positive way.



We put aside a healthy budget for promotion, and we advertise in the papers, send letters home to parents, etc. Sharing information is vital. People don't want to be a part of something that they are not fully aware of, or informed about.

In Grade 9, one of the things that we've tried to do to increase the number of students who stay for high school in Grade 10 has been meeting with individual students in Grade 9 to help them plan their programs. We are very direct with students who could be good students at the high school level in French immersion, who could be strong academic students: "You should really consider staying here. This is a good program for you. You would do well here." We tell them that because sometimes if they don't hear it, they don't think about it. Then, if a friend decides to go to another school, off they go. So we tell them that they should be staying. The other thing that we do is to look for those student leaders who, if they stayed, would entice other students to stay. We do active promotion and, I'm not ashamed to say, it does work. We have kept more of our students. We've also surveyed our students, to find out what kinds of things they want in high school, and what it is we don't have that they would like to see. Most often, the only thing that we can't give them is a larger student body.

We run a full French immersion high school program. Our high school population is about 128 students, or five classes. We teach only English Language Arts in English. All of our sciences and maths are taught in French. Because we want to be able to offer a spectrum of courses to both those students who are a little less academic and those who are more academic, we've had to put our creative juices to work. We hired a part-time teacher (.25 FTE) whose job it is to offer distance learning programs to students. That teacher's role is to monitor and follow their progress, to make sure that students who begin a correspondence program follow through and finish it. As well, she offers instructional assistance to students. So in classes or in grades where we don't have enough students to offer a Math 23 course but we have students who could use that, we do it through our distance learning program. For some of our gifted students it offers some flexibility, too. We have students who are taking psychology and a variety of marketing and economic courses that they are enjoying and would not have access to in most schools.

I was asked specifically to address what we do in our school for learning resources for those students who have learning difficulties. We do have a variety of students with learning problems. Because we have been keeping 100% of our students right from elementary, we have a broad spectrum of students. We have a student this year in Grade 12 who has autism. He is going to graduate in the top three percent of his class. We have another student in Grade 11 who has obsessive-compulsive behaviour and organizational and fine-motor problems to the point where he must use the computer because you can't read his handwriting. We have another student in junior high with Tourette syndrome. Those are the more severe cases. We have varying degrees of problems, from students who have temporary learning problems because they've missed one concept in math to those with long-term problems in reading comprehension, or math, or the like.

So, again, we have a part-time teacher (.25 FTE) to coordinate the individual program plans (IPPs) for these students, to work with classroom teachers to develop the IPPs, and then to provide a variety of strategies for both the students and the teachers. We have grade level meetings on a regular basis. At these team meetings we look at the students who are having problems and develop different strategies that we can try as a team. Our students move from teacher to teacher for each of their courses because we hire subject specialists, so it is not unusual for a student in

Grade 7 to have seven or eight teachers. If, as a team, we can approach their educational programs with a consensus and with similar teaching strategies, we're more likely to be successful.

The other thing that we do is meet with the students and their parents, and try to teach them metacognitive approaches. Students, I believe, need to know that they have learning problems in some areas and they need to know how to address them directly. You can't hide the difficulties under the carpet; if you do, you are not going to be successful in addressing them. If students can't address their difficulties themselves, they're going to have problems later in life, especially those students who have confirmed learning disabilities. We have a teacher aide as well, who works with that team.

We've become more adept at identifying the needs of students, but sometimes we do ask or recommend that a student leave our program. Occasionally we have tested a student and found that their lack of success in the program is due, in fact, to a language disability. It is very difficult, in a secondary program, if a student has a language disability to offer the level of remediation that would be necessary to make them successful. In addition, I think that when students through junior high/senior high are having learning difficulties, their personal level of stress, their self-esteem, is more fragile because they are teens and going through hormonal changes. I think that we have to be very conscientious about the decision we help them make. Sometimes the recommendation to go to a program where there is only one language reduces the student's stress so that they can be successful. In the end, every decision we make for a child's program has to help them be successful. It has to help them stay intact as a person; this is very important.

We also provide a program for gifted students. We've done the regular identification through intelligence testing. The teacher responsible for the IPPs is also responsible for what we call the EPPs or Enrichment Program Plans. She also maintains a system where she provides resources and possible activities for teachers in the classrooms, so that they can coordinate their subject area and content with some possible resources and approach for the students. So we meet the needs of our gifted students as much as possible within the classroom, with opportunities for them to come together occasionally for special activities.

We also use a lot of assessment tools. Assessment has been a focus of our school division for the last few years, and we have become very cognizant of the fact that our French immersion students do well on Provincial Achievement Tests and on Diploma Exams—higher than the provincial level. We do brag and boast to our parents, but it is more important that they understand why these students do better. Because in explaining to them how language learning complements anything that they may be learning in terms of content, how it makes them better learners overall, we can give parents and students more confidence in the program, so that the students will stay, we hope, until the end of Grade 12.

One of the other things that we do in our school that has helped us in terms of program choice—because, as I said before, we are a small school and students want a lot of program choice—is to schedule several option courses all within a schedule block, so that students have a variety of courses that they can choose from within that period. Block scheduling enables students to have more choice and has worked well for us too. In addition, our French Language Arts teachers have initiated a program called “auto-correction,” which means the students are self-correcting; we do it in English as well but more so in French because it is their second language.

The focus of auto-correction has been to help students improve their writing skills. Sometimes they don't take the time to review what they know about grammar, what they know about syntax, etc; they make careless mistakes. Auto-correction done on a regular basis helps them to be good writers more consistently.

One of the issues that I would like to mention is the fact that sometimes we have a difficulty at the secondary level finding specialized staff. Faculté is doing a good job educating teachers. But we may not have enough students going to Faculté, especially for the secondary level, to supply our needs for specialized teaching staff. Having the right staff is the key to having a successful program, but it is sometimes difficult to get them, and I would assume that it is much more difficult for outlying areas. In St. Albert, we probably have more ready access to young teachers than you would have in other places.

Thank you.

## SESSION PRESENTATIONS

### **Building the Future: The Role of the School Administrator**

**DONNA WARAкса**

Good Afternoon.

Do you know how difficult it is to follow two people who are so excited about their schools and not to be able to talk about yours? I have been asked to talk about something other than my school: our system-wide French immersion principals group.

I'd like to begin with a bit of history about this group of principals in Calgary. In the early '70s, when the French immersion program began in the Calgary Public system, the supervisor of second languages was Dan Davies. The first principal of the first French immersion school, which was housed in the McDougall Centre downtown, was Budge Burrows; Budge retired two years ago. I imagine that the early meetings were probably pretty informal: Dan and Budge sitting there talking about the issues of French immersion in Calgary. But before long the program grew, and grew, and grew. Soon there were many schools offering the program and more central office support; at one time, we had a team of about five people and a secretary.

Then the principals of all the schools offering the program began meeting. These meetings helped to respond to the special issues and needs of these principals as they supervised their French immersion programs. Some of them were French speaking and some of them weren't, so the meetings were always held in English. The meetings were called and run by the second languages team at that time.

Now I am going to show you some contrasts between how this group worked thirty years ago and how it works today. I interviewed a friend who was one of the early consultants. Her name is Elizabeth Bourges and she is still a teacher in Andrew Davison Elementary School in Calgary. She identified some of the issues that would have hit the agenda at the principals' meetings: registrations with overnight line ups and enrolments accepted on a first-come, first-served basis; busing costs; and opening of new centres.

I found it interesting because it was the opposite of the situation with which we are faced today: attrition. There were people just bounding forth and coming into these programs. What would we do with all these students? We were spending time then identifying schools with space available for these programs. We were also meeting with school communities and promoting the program. That part hasn't changed.

Budget was a big thing then as it is now, but instead of a lack, there was lots of money to spend; the discussion was how to spend it. Selecting and distributing resources, providing professional development for teachers, and knowing when to lend assistance to teachers were some other issues of the day. There was a lot of need for personal assistance to teachers who had come from Quebec and didn't speak a word of English: helping them through the cultural shock, sometimes helping them find housing, encouraging them to network with the other teachers, and familiarizing them with the Alberta curriculum expectations. Just finding French speaking teachers

was a huge issue then. I can remember, even at the time that I was a consultant, the supervisor would fly to Quebec to interview and hire teachers.

Another issue was accountability. I think that will always be on the agenda. The supervisor at the time made many presentations to the board of trustees and senior administration, explaining and reporting on the program. I can remember we used to do immersion weekends for French administrators out at Rafter Six Ranch, and other places where the team would go and help administrators to learn some French and just feel connected to their program. The program wasn't really seen as a regular program at the time. It was seen as an extra, a special program, like GATE (Gifted and Talented Education), maybe even a competing program. Now French immersion is a regular part of the system.

Also on the agenda of the principals' group of that time would have been the promotion of French immersion programs, the importance of second language learning, and ways of working with and responding to the needs of the parents—who were taking big risks themselves by putting their children in a program that hadn't been tried.

How does the agenda look today, all these years later? We still have the principals' group but we've changed our name to French Leadership Group to be more inclusive because sometimes it's the principal who comes, sometimes it's the assistant principal or vice principal or someone on staff who represents that school at the meeting. We also have a Francophone school in our system, so the principal of that school comes as well. We have our one remaining central office specialist attending our meetings. We also have attending one person who is responsible for the selection and evaluation of system resources for French. We have an open invitation to our staffing person from central office who assists with staffing French immersion programs. And we always have invited guests for special topics. These guests might include Alberta Education staff, senior administrators, the chairperson organizing *Le Conseil Français's* conference, and so on.

Our meetings continue to be held on a monthly basis, but a sign of the times is that the Second Languages Team no longer provides lunch for us. We each dig into our pockets for the forty dollars, for the year, to pay for our lunches, and also to do some supportive things, like buying gifts for the members of our group.

What else is different? No longer is this group run by the Second Languages Team. Each year, we choose from among ourselves two or three people who will coordinate or chair the group. They share the role; they set the agenda, and send a draft by e-mail to everybody in the group so we can see whether we want items to be added. They invite agenda topics, facilitate the meeting, invite guests that pertain to the topics on the agenda, take the minutes and distribute the minutes. At times, depending on the issues, we set up *ad hoc* sub-committees to study an issue, perhaps write letters, and so on. Last year, for instance, we set up a sub-committee to draft a vision, mission, and purpose statement for our group. I didn't bring a copy of that so if anyone is interested you can ask me for that.

Sometimes we write letters. One we are writing right now is in response to a very negative article in a local newspaper. We also send a representative of our group to the French immersion liaison group set up by Canadian Parents for French in our city. It includes a senior administrator, a

trustee, two or three teachers, and a couple of principals. This group also discusses some of the same issues as our group.

Our French Leadership Group meets in a senior high school, so we don't have to pay for a meeting room. We start the meeting over lunch. We eat and chat, and then we start the business portion right at one o'clock, so that we have finished by the end of the day. The system is supporting us, as this is done on Board time. There aren't any costs involved, apart from that forty dollars that we dig out from our own pockets. So, if you want to do something like this in your district, there aren't a lot of costs.

Today, many of our issues are the same, many are not. Budget now is about how best we can spend our dwindling dollars, how we can obtain our resources, and what resources there are. The politics—we talk a lot about how much senior administration support we have. We talk about promoting our programs through staffing, and the preparation of future administrators for our schools. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find administrators who are French speaking and who are supportive of the programs; we are working hard on that. We compare our enrolments, and discuss trends like declining enrolments and attrition. We share information about *Le Conseil Français* and the monitor program. This fall we celebrated our 25<sup>th</sup> year of French immersion programs in Calgary. For all of us, this group means taking a lot of information back to our schools. We sometimes share professional development opportunities for teachers, articles, books, and papers, as well as information from conferences like this one.

In conclusion, I'd just like to say that this is a networking group that's supportive and collaborative, and we're trying at the same time to be very proactive.

Thank you.

# Creating English-French Immersion Harmony in Dual Track Schools Canadian Rockies District Task Force

**ANITA WURST**

**SCHOOL COUNCIL CHAIR, LAWRENCE GRASSI MIDDLE SCHOOL (CANMORE), CANADIAN ROCKIES SD**

**DR. BILL BROWNLEE**

**DEPUTY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS, CANADIAN ROCKIES SD**

The following is an edited transcript of the presentation(s) and includes relevant overheads and handouts where available. This material has been reviewed and approved by presenter(s) for publication.

**[ANITA WURST]**

I'd like to say how proud I am of the work this committee did in response to trying to address the many issues that arise from having a dual track school.

The division was very brave and pro-active to invite the stakeholders to become involved in this committee. The committee was composed of parents, staff and administration from both programs in hopes of educating one another on the needs and challenges facing each program. There were some myths and misunderstandings by both and a great need for all to realize how much one program impacts the other. There needed to be an understanding that although we offered two distinct programs our resources need to be shared equally for the benefit of our children.

**[DR. BILL BROWNLEE]**

We began our task force work by identifying the issues and our approach.

Equity of opportunity was of major concern to the committee as French immersion was seen to be getting special attention, giving those students an apparent advantage over the English program students. Specific issues were class sizes, field trips and other extra-curricular activities.

We examined the statistics and, while French immersion generally had smaller classes in the early years, recent class sizes were quite comparable. With regards to field trips, we sought the advice of a Calgary French immersion school and found that their extra-curricular activities were not put on by the program.

Funding. The issue here was a perception by English program parents that French immersion was receiving additional funding. While this was the case during the start up of the program to provide French language resources, at present these funds are placed in the instructional budget and are not isolated for French immersion in particular. Canadian Parents for French has

1. Identify issues
  1. Equity of opportunity:
    - a. class sizes
    - b. field trips
  2. Funding
  3. Special needs students
  4. Elitism
  5. Transfers and attrition
  6. Classroom location
  7. Myths and realities
  8. Communication

provided funds for additional French resources for both French immersion and the French as a second language program.

Special needs students. The concern with special needs students was the speed with which students were seen to be transferred to the English class, when problems were experienced. While there was no assistance provided for learning assistance in the early years of French immersion, recent resource personnel have introduced new guidelines and procedures. However, parents still need information and support.

Elitism. A teacher was accused of having told a parent the “smart students” enrolled in French immersion. When we investigated, it turned out that it wasn’t the teacher, but perhaps a parent of one of the French immersion students, who made the comment. It was very difficult for us to address or deal with it, but it certainly made the rounds of the community with some effect.

Transfers and attrition were another problem. Enrolment in French immersion classes tended to drop off, as cohorts moved up through the grades. The Grade 9 class and the high school program were down to one group of students, so we weren’t able to offer a full French immersion program. At that particular time, we could only offer two subjects in the high school program in French; the rest were taken in English. Many students were dropping out, and there is a certain amount of truth to that. They dropped out as they got older. The feeling seemed to be that they wanted to take their high school courses in English, because they felt that the instruction would not be there for chemistry, physics and so on. They preferred to enter the English program at that particular time.

The location of the classroom seems a small but important issue. In at least one of the schools, the French immersion classes were separated completely from the English classes. They were in different wings. There was no intermingling of the classrooms. That was seen as a problem. However, in that particular case the parents originally decided and were part of the decision to set the school up that way. Yet it was still seen as a problem.

Myths versus realities was another area that we had to address. There were a great many myths out there about what went on, how classes were conducted. What was the reality of the situation?

Finally, communication was an important issue. We heard many times that parents weren’t fully informed of all the things that went on, that there wasn’t enough contact.

Those were the concerns that we had to deal with and address through this committee. We undertook them one at a time. In all, we had eight meetings of this committee. We addressed each concern and obtain general agreement on whether or not it was a real issue. When we had addressed each of the issues, we decided what we would recommend to the board.

However, before we get into the recommendations, I want to mention that we identified, as we went along, a number of other issues. For one thing, FSL (core French) offerings within the three schools was an interesting phenomenon. There was certainly a feeling that FSL programs were not offering a viable program, a viable alternative to French immersion.

We offer French from Grade 1 through high school, but the time allotted is limited. For instance, we have three half-hours a week for FSL. The FSL teachers and the English parents



felt that this was not adequate. So it seemed to us that we also needed to be doing something with the FSL program.

We started by looking at the limitations of the program, for example, what timetable problems arose. What we found was that FSL classes were being used as preparation time for the English teachers. It worked out very well that during those three half-hour periods, the French instructor would go in to relieve the English teacher, who would then have their prep time.

1. FSL program
  - a. Limitations of programs
  - b. Timetable problems
  - c. Focus
  - d. Financial implications
  - e. Entry points
  - f. Need for specialists
2. Possibility of separate French immersion school
3. Desire for other languages
4. Reactions to French by a portion of the public

We also found that the time allotment required in different subjects in Alberta, as many of you know, are variable. For instance, if you have language arts, there's a range of items you can offer, but you must offer a minimum. Much of the extra time in a total timetable day, then, is taken up by things like extended time in language arts, math or some of the other core subjects. Increasing the time for FSL, then, was a tough problem to address. The response of the central administration: increasing the time for core French would require additional staff and, therefore, a larger budget. Our position as a committee was that, while they do not establish a firm amount of time for FSL, Alberta Learning does recommend some minimums. The committee simply recommended that the system meet those minimums. That problem with its financial implications is still with us.

Our FSL teachers were also concerned about entry points. They were finding, for instance, that their classes would have students who had been in the program since Grade 1 as well as students who began only in Grade 6. The high school teachers would find that there were some students who started French in junior high and others who were just wanting to start. So the entry points were a concern, and we made some recommendations that would eliminate some of these difficulties.

We were also concerned with the lack of specialists in the teaching of FSL. Occasionally in FSL, someone who wasn't a specialist was chosen to teach it. That had to be addressed.

Another issue that came out was the possibility of a separate French immersion school. Could we solve our problems by running a separate, single track school rather than a dual track school? However it turned out not to be feasible.

There was also an expressed desire for other languages. What about Spanish? What about Japanese? What role could our system play in the teaching of these languages? We concluded that we were too small to do it.

And, of course, there was the reaction to French by a portion of the public. There's no doubt we had to deal with that. Some of our public have an enmity towards anything French and part of our criticism came from there as well.

These were the kinds of issues that emerged. What we did, as I said before, was to examine each issue. We then had a look at another dual track school to see how they were doing and what they were doing: École Varsity Acres School in Calgary. This dual track school was running very well, very smoothly. Everyone was happy with it. Parents from the English program as well as French immersion parents were enamoured with the whole school and the way it ran. It was great for our people to have a look at it, to see a situation that went very, very well, to glean many ideas for use in addressing some of our issues.

We made several important observations. For instance, they mixed their classrooms. At Varsity Acres, the students were mixing all the time. If they went on field trips, everybody went. The odd time they specialized with just sending the French immersion classes or just the English classes, but for as many things as they possibly could they mixed them all together.

That was the basis for what we wanted to do. We wrote our report and made a number of recommendations. Before the report was released to the public, each of the dual track schools had a chance to respond. The superintendent also had a chance to respond.

The district administration hasn't agreed with every recommendation. The financial recommendation in particular was a concern to them. We believe there may be ways, other than an increased budget, to resolve the issues, but we haven't got to that point yet.

However, as a result of all this action, the noise appears to have died down. We seem to have quelled a lot of the enmity. Both sides are beginning to say, "Well, maybe that is the way it appeared. Maybe we needed to do something about it." And, "Yes, we are beginning to understand where the other side is coming from, what their complaints are, and maybe we can begin to address them."

It's our hope that the French immersion program will continue to prosper and grow and be an effective part of our school programs. There's no reason why not. We hope that the dialogue that has started, and by clarifying the facts and the myths, that we have a better understanding.

**FACILITATOR: DR. ART SCHWARTZ, UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY**

The next portion of the workshop involved a facilitated exploration by delegates of the implications for practice in their own schools and districts. The result was the identification of the following learnings:

1. Importance of harmony, respect, team work and collaboration between French immersion and English tracks, from the beginning and at every occasion which arises.

Rationale: This would be the ideal state of affairs, in which suspicion and resentment within schools and school districts would have few chances to raise their heads.

2. Clear and open communication by French immersion and about French immersion is crucial in order to counter misperceptions.

Rationale: This should be self-evident. The best way of making sure that non-French immersion interests do not become anti-French immersion interests is to be open about what we are doing and about the resources we consume in doing it.

3. The challenge is to sustain commitment in order to extend French immersion into the high school grades, with high achievement levels.

Rationale: French immersion is now sufficiently widespread at the elementary levels to be a fact of life in Canadian education. While we cannot afford to become complacent about the presence and success of elementary French immersion, it nevertheless has a presence and momentum across the country which can be sustained without the same degree of effort it took to build it up and spread it out in the early years. It may now be time to shift resources to winning acceptance and penetration for French immersion at the secondary level.

# Understanding the French Immersion Teacher Implications for Training, Hiring, Supervising, and Supporting Your French Immersion Staff

**LISE MAYNE**  
PRINCIPAL, CALGARY BOARD OF EDUCATION

**WAYNE HAMPTON**  
PRINCIPAL, WOLF CREEK SD

The following is an edited transcript of the presentation(s) and includes relevant overheads and handouts where available. This material has been reviewed and approved by presenter(s) for publication.

**[LISE MAYNE]**

Good morning, everyone; it is my pleasure to be here.

While I am currently a school principal, I spent a year as a teacher recruitment consultant with the Calgary Board of Education as well as being involved in recruitment as a central-office Specialist for Second Languages.

In the Calgary Board of Education, recruiters do the central office work of screening the candidates and, at the school level, the principals do the next level of screening to find the appropriate staff for their schools. We feel that choosing their own staff is very important for the principals. Usually we have a team of people on-site to do the interviews. The principal, the assistant principal, and perhaps a teaching partner would be involved.

The principals began to express concern about the language proficiency of our interviewees. A person's own assessment of their language proficiency may be quite different from what is really expected in a French immersion classroom. We also had some people who would say, "Well, their French is good enough for Kindergarten." This concerned us, of course, because we feel that French needs to be of high quality through every level. At Kindergarten having an excellent model is crucial. We had to spend time explaining to colleagues not familiar with the program that the teacher is the only model of language, so their French needs to be of a very high quality.

We principals brainstormed the criteria that we should be looking for in teachers for the French immersion program. We looked at linguistic skills, second language teaching skills, and knowledge of second language practice. We looked at knowledge of culture, and not just francophone culture, because there are many forms of culture. It could be French culture in France; it could be a French culture in Alberta or Quebec. So we looked at knowledge of how French cultures fit with our culture in Alberta and in Calgary, particularly, because that's our area. Then we considered knowledge and beliefs about immersion.

I developed about ten questions that I would ask, besides the typical screening interview. In addition we also asked candidates to give us a written example of their writing, right on the spot. That was a criterion I put in place: that candidates not take the writing question home, look things up in the dictionary and then come back or fax it in. Some people found this quite

nerve wracking. I explained that we were not expecting perfection, but just getting an idea of how they would be writing in the classroom on a daily basis. A high level of proficiency in writing skills, I explained, was necessary for correcting the children's work. I found some people had good oral proficiency, but their writing skills were too weak.

As a recruitment consultant for the Calgary Board of Education, I was responsible for interviewing all French immersion candidates, K–12. When looking at what the teacher has to have to be a successful teacher in immersion, the following aspects would be necessary. French immersion teachers have to be able to provide realistic and meaningful tasks, have a good sense of culture and be able to provide that culture through songs and stories. They have to provide all strategies and objectives for language learning woven into all aspects of the curriculum, into all subjects.

The teachers we want at the CBE would understand that a student's self assessment is really important and that students need to be involved in looking for their own errors and correcting their own errors. Recent research on the French immersion process shows that some practices we have used for years are really not that sound. For instance, echoing back to the children is not the best way of correcting errors. It's more effective to do other things. So one of my questions was, "When a child makes errors, how would you go about correcting those errors?" Some candidates would respond by saying, "Well, I'd try a couple of times and if they didn't get it, I'd say it in English." What do they believe about French immersion? What do they understand about immersion? Through asking the kinds of questions that you know are important in second language learning, the responses will tell you a lot about the candidate's strategies.

Think about giving candidates scenarios. Give them examples of the kinds of things that may happen: "You're teaching a science lesson and the students just don't seem to be understanding that you're teaching a concept about aeronautics. What would you do?" They might reply, "Well, I might say it three times and if they didn't get it, I'd say it in English." They wouldn't say anything about vocabulary development or scaffolding. They might not give you any idea about all the pre-learning skills needed to understand the concept they are trying to teach. Also, the error correction strategies have to be emphasized. They have to understand that scaffolding is really important. That it is a second language teaching skill. They have to understand they are building on the base, asking the students what they know, what they see, even what the word *avion* means. The teachers have to understand that giving students a vocabulary base is really important.

A teacher said to me that the new math curriculum is so language rich and heavy that she believes it is more important now to start teaching the concepts in English. The reason it's language rich is that we are developing language. I asked, "If you're not going to use that language in French because it is too hard for them to understand, what do you need to do?" I explained that you need to go backwards and give them lots of experience. A concept such as "time" is hard for young learners to understand even in their first language. If you give them a worksheet to do with the words *dîner*, *déjeuner*, or *petit déjeuner*, without ever giving them any kind of experience, any kind of activity to help them understand what those words mean, it becomes even more complex.

Because the math program now is very language rich—that’s one of the beauties of the program and it’s really going to contribute to a lot more language development for our students—we have to be looking at the motivation of the teacher and the learner. The teacher has to believe in French immersion. There are teachers who believe that it’s more like an FSL (core French) program. You have to scratch the surface and find out what they really believe about French immersion. What was their background? How did they learn a second language? What do they like about teaching a second language? What’s exciting about it to them? What do they expect?

Some teachers who are native francophones, who come from a background where their own second language skills are not that strong, do have very high expectations of their students that may not be totally realistic. We have to help them understand what our culture is here. Explain where our students are coming from, and what they may expect. It is up to us to give them that background about our students and about our school. So when you, as an administrator who is not bilingual, go into the classroom to see how the students are learning,



Wayne Hampton, Lise Mayne

you can see that they are on task and that they seem to be engaging in French. You can see that they seem to be following what the teacher is saying and everything is going along fine. But you have to know the right questions to ask about what the expectations for language development are and how the objectives are assessed.

Focus on linguistic skills development. Students become very fossilized in their errors, if they are not getting proper instruction in the language and that has to be done explicitly. Once our belief about French immersion was

that to immerse them was enough. We believed that they would stop saying “Je suis fini”, but they don’t. There is much in French that needs to be taught explicitly. Ask teachers how they develop vocabulary. Look around the classroom. Where are the words posted? Kids need to be bathed in the vocabulary. In the Grade 1 classrooms that I have in my school right now it’s just amazing. Words are everywhere and the students know where to look for them. The students’ journals are full of really rich vocabulary.

You can ask the teacher to show you students’ journals or other work, but how do you respond to written work? If you see a workbook or a journal full of red ink, is that a flag for you? The research says that correcting and correcting errors in red ink is not solving the problem. The students are not understanding what’s happening and they continue to make the same errors. Teachers need to highlight the phrase being learned that week and work on that phrase only, not everything else under the sun, because learning this language is very complex and it takes time. This is an area for professional development.

Are the teachers pushing the students? Ask them that question. There’s much research that says you need to push, you need to enhance. If they are teaching aeronautics, have they developed the vocabulary or are they speaking the equivalent of “baby talk” to the students?

Have they measured the vocabulary against, for instance, something like the provincial achievement tests, so that they know that the words they are teaching them are listed and that's the kind of vocabulary and level that they're expected to use?

Are your teachers providing authentic experiences for the students? Ask for an example of a field trip they've been on in French. Get an example of a guest speaker that they have had? What kind of films do they watch in class? Are all of the films English? If they say they can't find any films in French, offer to look into that with them. It's easier, obviously, to find the English speaker, the English field trip, or the English film, but you can find some things in French. You can find resources in French that can enhance the program.

How are parents involved? Some teachers don't believe that parents should come into the classroom, because it disrupts the learning or because they are only speaking English. But parents need to be involved. They can be our greatest advocates. They could be doing many things, even if they don't speak French. It's important to ask if parents are involved.

Are they communicating with the parents? Yesterday Judy Gibson spoke about that in her literacy presentation (please see "Literacy Development in a French Immersion Program", page 199). I think that it is really important. A teacher recently said to me, "How often do I have to say this to the parents? I said it back in September and October." Well, if it's now May and you're on a new unit, you do have to explain it again, because parents need that background and understanding about why you're doing this field trip or why you're doing the spelling program this way. As Judy said, you can feel very desperate as a parent, when you are at home and you receive a homework sheet all in French and you can't read it. You feel like you can't help your child. Then you start questioning if your child should be in French immersion. So the teacher has to be the key to keeping that communication open. That's how you'll keep your program vital. As we interview, we need to be asking questions that reveal how the teacher will be working with the parents to develop second language skills and a love of learning in French.

How are teachers using technology? Many excellent Web sites use French. As was said yesterday, French is the second most used language on the Internet. Students should be using those Web sites. Are they doing things in French on the computer?

These are the aspects that are really important as you recruit and support your French immersion teachers. Find a strong mentor in your school or in another school that's close by. It is really important for beginning teachers to work with that person to develop all these special skills and qualities. Support and opportunities for professional development are required to enhance the skills of teachers hired to work in the French immersion program.

**[WAYNE HAMPTON]**

I want to address the recruitment process, the training process, and supporting French immersion teachers. A colleague from Red Deer, Doris Swensrude, should also be here today, but was unable to attend due to a family illness. As we are good friends who have worked together, I will cover her presentation as well. My comments are based on my involvement with a small rural K-12 French immersion program in Wolf Creek School Division in the town of Lacombe where I have been principal for the past 13 years. I will share my perceptions, observations, and experiences combined with Doris's involvement as a teacher in Red Deer.

When I think about the 11 teachers involved in our French immersion program, I realize we really haven't had to do much recruiting. We've enjoyed a high level of stability and retention. That has worked very well in our favour, as you can well appreciate. Of those 11 teachers, one has been with the program more than six years, two for more than ten years; four have been with us 3–4 years; three are in their second year, and one is new to the profession and to the program. Three of our teachers are graduates of French immersion programs (K to 12 and teacher education) in Alberta.

Probably the key variable, or one of the key variables, to retaining a teacher in the program is the sense of belonging to a community and being a member of the school. Certainly as a school we have a big role to play in creating that sense of belonging. One thing that we do in our school is teaming. I'll talk about that a bit later to give you some specific examples. Teaming gets people working together: you don't work in isolation; you feel like you are part of the whole with a desire to take on the ownership of the program and to stay with the program.

The idea of belonging and being a part of the school, the program and the community is really important. But the bottom line is, no matter the program, the primary goal of any recruiting process is to come up with the best candidate to do the job. Since we recruit on a team basis, the fact that I do not speak French is not a hindrance. My assistant principal has marginal French, and we always involve a lead teacher from our immersion program in the interviewing and selection process. Their primary role is to question the candidates to assess their language skills in French. We need good English skills too, because our French immersion people teach the English component, with formal introduction of English beginning at Grade 3. My assistant principal and I can assess their English skills quickly through the interview process etc., but the French immersion lead teacher's role is to help us out with their French language skills. We also have candidates do a written response to assess their writing skills.

The tendency, and this is just an observation, has been to hire anglophone French speaking teachers in our program, although we do have two francophones from Quebec who have been with the program a long time. The hiring of anglophones perhaps occurs because of the nature of our community and because these folks are involved in teaching the English language part of the program. It's an important consideration. Recruiting out of the province, which is not something that we've had to do so far, brings with it a certain feeling of temporariness by the candidate.

But, as the recruitment of French immersion teachers becomes more difficult, more out-of-province recruiting will be necessary and we're going to have to become a lot more creative in helping new teachers become an integral part of the community. Integrating is difficult if you have family elsewhere in Canada. You may think that you will go to Alberta for a year or two, but chances are you won't make a long term commitment. I think we're looking for people who can stay for a period. The real but longer-term solution is for our training institutions to attract the best students possible and to give them the best training, so that when they leave, they are committed to French immersion and have the skills and expertise necessary to allow them to be successful as French immersion teachers.

Based on my experiences with our programs over the last thirteen years, and as a parent with children in the French immersion program, I think the first thing that needs to happen



when we begin training teachers is to create a mind set. We need to create the mind set that when a student comes into French immersion that is the only option available to students. I see a tendency to move a student into the English program if they are not doing well. We want to avoid this unless it is absolutely necessary, especially in a small community like ours, where, in the town of Lacombe, only 10 percent of our 2,300–2,400 students are in French immersion. Nor do we want to create the perception that the English program is the dumping ground for students who are doing poorly in immersion.

Another observation that I've made over the years is that French immersion should be open to everyone. It is not for the elite. The parents in our communities who register their children in the French immersion program are generally of two categories. There are those parents who are well educated, very involved, very dedicated and committed to the best education possible for their child. And there are those who register their children because they are exceptionally gifted and the challenge of a second language program will be really good for them. That could be true, but it is often that child with whom the French immersion teacher experiences some frustrations. And it is usually in the form of behaviour problems. The tendency in our teacher training programs is to focus on the cognitive domain or academic excellence, but I'm not sure that teachers are well enough prepared to deal with the behaviour issues. So the French immersion teacher may let misbehaviour go for a while and then decide that this child might be better in the English program. Let's face it, the child's behaviour is not going to change because they move over to the English program. So I think it is important to keep that in mind when training teachers. The cognitive preparation is important, but teachers need to have skills, strategies and expertise in dealing with the affective domain, the social-emotional behaviour of these students. Because these children are generally very bright, they can learn the language but they can be disruptive to the rest of the class because they are not fully engaged. French immersion is not intended to be just for gifted students.

Other areas that I think our training institutions could be focussing on are greater inclusion strategies. Teachers need more training in how to deal with students who require resource or Learning Assistance Centre (LAC) support, because in small schools such as ours, we're not able to hire a resource teacher or special education teacher. Assistance must be provided in an inclusive way. However, I think we have been creative in that area. We have a 1.2 FTE LAC teacher in our English program; pro-rated based on the size of our French immersion program we are entitled to a .2 FTE teacher for resource/LAC-type assistance. We did that for one year, but found .2 FTE was relatively ineffective. So the immersion team recommended that rather than .2 FTE teacher we should hire a teacher assistant. We hired a French speaking teacher assistant who has been in our school for five years now and does an awesome job. Her focus is mainly with French language skills. She also works with them in English language skills at the Grade 3 level, because that's when English is formally introduced, but her primary focus is French reading and oral skills. She takes each Grade 3 student every week for about 15 minutes and reads with them. They also have a home reading program that she coordinates. This TA runs programs after school to help them in their language skills. This has been a real success and complements our program at a relatively low cost.

Another area that teacher-training institutions need to be sensitive to is the fact that most of these people are going to be teaching all of the subjects. There is no such thing as a math specialist and a science specialist. They teach everything, and in our case they teach the English

Language Arts too. We need to be sure they have the skills to handle all of that. Music is a really tough one for us because our music teacher—who is phenomenal—is English speaking, so the immersion teachers teach Music to the immersion students.

This is what teachers said when I asked for their opinion on what teacher training institutions need to address more fully:

- Greater opportunities to meet with and watch practising immersion teachers at all levels for learning about strategies for delivery, classroom management, how to encourage French in the classroom and so on.
- More familiarity with the curriculum and available resources was another issue.
- Having the time to walk through all curriculums and not just one or two.
- Strategies for inclusion and offering resource assistance support in the classroom setting.
- Greater knowledge and training in second language acquisition.
- Children’s French literature courses.
- Enhanced training in acquisition of proper or correct French grammar and syntax. More strategies to help students with distinguishing between spoken and written French.
- More strategies to help the student master cultural aspects of the language such as idioms.

So those were some suggestions that teachers in our program said the training institutions should focus on to better prepare them to take on a French immersion job.

Our support strategies can’t stop once the teacher joins our staffs; we need to support both the French immersion teacher and the French immersion program. We need do more than simply tolerate the program. It doesn’t matter whether I or any other principal speaks French. We are there as a principal to support every program that we have, English or French. If a principal is not prepared to support a particular program, then we either need to get rid of the principal or get rid of the program; I hope it’s get rid of the principal. Principals have to be actively engaged in all aspects of the program to ensure that the students and the school fare well. I mentioned earlier that I have no fluency in French, but that doesn’t keep me from being intimately involved in the program. One thing that I do is have a lead teacher take responsibility for coordinating the immersion program along with me. The lead teacher makes sure that the immersion team has all the materials that come from Alberta Learning and so on. We have team meetings where I’m involved as the chairperson and they have team meetings where I’m not. It’s important for me, for any principal, to understand that teaching French is different from teaching English as a first language, particularly in specific grammar. Teaching grammar in the French language is important and as an evaluator I may not realize that. If I go into an English language arts program and the teacher is spending a lot of time teaching grammar, I will probably get a little edgy and nervous and upset. To get around that, we’ve used a mentoring/peer coaching/teaming system. If we do get a new teacher on staff, I’m involved in the evaluation, but our mentor teacher is also involved in working with the teacher to make sure that they are approaching the language correctly and to keep me well informed on how the teacher is doing in that area—not behind the teacher’s back but as a collaborative process.

As administrators, we have to be available for guidance and assistance, to be directly involved in the program at all times. We cannot afford to be passive and uninvolved. We do need to be models and risk-takers for our students, and this is probably an area where I fall

down. I'm very shy about trying to speak the language, because I'm a shy person. I'm very timid about my pronunciation and I know it is an area where I could do a better job of risk-taking because the kids would love to help me along. That's something that I'm going to focus on in the future.

We also need to be sensitive to the complex political implications of French immersion. For those of you who attended the session on the Canmore experience with dual track schools, with Bill Brownlee, yesterday, I think that we've done a marvellous job in that area. I've lived in the Lacombe area for almost 18 years. I remember some comments that were made in the community, when French immersion first started. In the 13 years I've been overseeing the program, I have never had a parent come in and say, "You just favour the French immersion program." I think we have been successful because we treat all programs as equally important. The French immersion parents appreciate everything we do for them, as do the English parents.

Similarly, when it comes to dealing with parents, I find that parents of French immersion students are more involved. But if their children weren't in French immersion, they would be just as involved. They tend to be the parents who are involved in your school council. This year is the first one in eight or ten years that half our school council executive is non-French immersion parents: two parents from the English program and two from the French program. Usually they are all from the French immersion program. That's never been a problem, because they've always been very sensitive that they are there to represent the whole school and whatever decisions we make impact the whole school, not just one program. So they've been very good about that. But we need to be there for the teachers, when parents get anxious, when Johnny's gone home and said, "The teacher's not teaching me the right French. My teacher doesn't know how to speak French, etc, etc." We have to be there to support the teachers.

We also need to be creative and sensitive to the challenges faced by a teacher teaching all the subjects. It can be a lot of work, and when you compound that with split grades, it becomes even more work.

We need to maximize the inclusion of immersion students in all school activities. Involving the children in school-wide activities, involving them in team activities and mixing up the French immersion students and the English students helps. Since we have such a small proportion of French immersion students, 90 out of 450, segregating them would be easy. Designating a wing of the school as the French immersion wing would be easy. Nevertheless, we don't do that. They are mixed throughout the school—classrooms and school-wide activities. We need to be seen as always proactive.

Some key strategies that we employ to address these areas in our immersion program are what I call teaming, teaming, and more teaming. We need to be together as a team. I believe that the strength of a team comes from its diversity and the success of a team comes from its ability to work together. In order for a team to work together, we have to create opportunities for them to get together and do some work. In our school we have most teams with site-based decision-making. We have a budget team, a technology team, a phys. ed. team, program teams, grade level teams. That's one area where our rather bizarre grade form works to our advantage. We have 200 Grade 6 students in our school and at this time of the year, when achievement

tests are nearing, seven teachers have an opportunity to work together preparing their students for the achievement test, planning their programs and so on. So our teams are very important.

We have a French immersion team at our school, which meets two to four times per year. We also have a K–12 French immersion team that meets every two months. This year, as part of our school education plan focus, each team chose a program area to focus on to address what was provincial goal number one - excellence in learning. On staff meeting days, we dismiss at noon, have a very short business meeting at one o'clock, perhaps for half an hour or forty-five minutes, and then the teams get together. The French team gets together and they focus on their goal. You would not believe the dialogue it has created, the talk it has created about teaching and learning. We involve our teacher assistants in those meetings, too. We feel it is just as important though they're not the professional, not the trained person. They need to be involved in the team meetings.

Another program that we take advantage of is the French monitor program. We've had a series of them over the years. We involve them in the meetings, too. So we have the staff teaming. We have our program teaming. One of our French immersion teachers functions as a liaison or a lead person in passing on any of my thoughts or concerns. As well, we do meet periodically where I chair the meeting and we talk about our program. It's really successful. We have a very strong program. I think if you talk to anybody who has experienced our program or come to view it, they would agree that we have a really strong program. It's small but it's mighty.

Our K–12 team focuses more and more on professional development and less and less on planning specific activities such as cultural events. Mrs. Lutz, the assistant principal at J.S. McCormick with the K–1–2 program, coordinates the K - 12 team and she and I work together on it. At meetings when it gets to the PD part, we are welcome to stay, but the teachers speak in French. I think that is so important, to give our immersion people an opportunity to be together to use their French at an adult level, not just at their grade level.

Another key strategy for the success of our program and supporting the French immersion teacher is PD, PD and more PD. I am so proud of the opportunities that we give teachers and support staff in our school for PD experiences. Money is available. One of the concerns of our French immersion teachers, when I sought their opinion in another school, was that they didn't have any PD money to take in some of the PD for English program courses they teach. That isn't true in our school. Our teachers can take advantage of PD for French as well as for English. As an administrator, I'm committed to PD. We allocate about \$750 per teacher for PD, which in my mind is generous. So money is available to support teachers' attendance at workshops, conferences, and inservices and any of our school education plan team goals, such as visiting other programs, etc., to cover sub costs. It's all there. We have always applied for the federal in-service grant in conjunction with Wild Rose School division. For next year, I am excited and pleased to say that Red Deer Public, Red Deer Separate, Wolf Creek and Wild Rose are going to submit a joint proposal. We'll probably get more money, which is fine, but the other beautiful thing about it is, it is going to get more French immersion teachers together on a more regular basis, to give them an opportunity to dialogue and attend in-services. That will be a very positive experience.

Other areas that our French immersion teachers suggested that we could do to support them as French immersion teachers, some of which we have control over and some we don't, include:

- Eliminating the curriculum lag. I know that's an Alberta Learning issue, but it is an issue that annoys people. The lag time is consistent. When we implement a new curriculum, French immersion's waiting for resources. Waiting and waiting. It is annoying. I think that's something that needs to be addressed, as well as ensuring that resources are available to teachers to teach the curriculum. We're struggling in some English programs, let alone some of our French.
- Bringing in French cultural performances. We do bring a number in over the course of the year.
- Buddying up new teachers. We do this in both English and French. Whether they're new to the profession or new to our school, I think it is important for them to have a mentor or somebody to turn to, somebody to whom they can say, "What do you do here? How can I get through this one?" The whole peer coaching and teaming concept works very well.
- Taking advantage of the French monitor program.
- Providing resource room assistance for French immersion students. That's a tough one, because of money. I would appreciate having a half-time teacher, and perhaps that's one disadvantage of not having our K-6 program under one roof and one principalship. Perhaps then we could have a half-time teacher.
- Engaging students and involving parents in a home reading program. That's been ongoing in our school and is appreciated by the parents and by the teachers.
- Working with and supporting our local CPF chapter. I have usually been the administrative liaison with our CPF chapter. It started up when the program started 15 years ago, and the first group of students who went through was a powerful group of students. I'm glad I had the chance to teach them. After a few years, the chapter folded because of internal disagreements they weren't making any headway. Two or three years ago, I suggested the reestablishment of a Lacombe CPF Chapter to some of the parents and there was interest. They've done very well since.
- Continued support of PD activities, continued support of teaming, maximizing opportunities for teachers to get together with other French immersion teachers (simply involves providing the cost of sub time). I don't mean it needs to happen regularly, because you need to be sensitive to the students' programs, but giving teachers a chance to get together to visit other programs, especially where we're at in a small program, is so important.
- More extensive early reading intervention. This was a concern that hasn't been expressed at our level.
- French resources for computers that are compatible with the Windows NT system. At the junior and senior high level, they felt that was seriously lacking. Of course, the Telus site provides a fair bit of material.
- Greater availability of French resources.

I'd like to conclude by saying: If a school is going to offer a French immersion program, support it the same way that you would support any other program. It's a wonderful program. I think that being principal in a school that's only an English program school would be mundane. A dual track school is so much richer and it is so much more fun. My daughters, who are in Grades 5 and 7, have had nothing but positive experiences.

French Immersion is an excellent program with an outstanding track record. We can be justifiably proud of the program's accomplishments since its inception some 30 years ago. It's a program open to all students; it is not elitist; it is not a program for the gifted but an opportunity to enrich the lives of Canadian children.

**FACILITATOR: LISE MAY**

The next portion of the workshop involved a facilitated exploration by delegates of the implications for practice in their own schools and districts. The result was the identification of the following learnings:

1. Alberta Learning should provide some guidelines for hiring teachers in the immersion program which would serve all boards in the province. The universities and teachers should also be involved in establishing these guidelines.

Rationale: Administrators lack information regarding the guidelines for hiring in the immersion program. Many of them do not speak French and they do not understand what is required of efficient immersion teachers. It would help to have a list of questions for use when interviewing teachers, with appropriate answers identified. At this point, it is up to every school board to determine the guidelines and many do not know what these guidelines should be.

2. More support is needed for teachers. Provide time in the calendar year for professional development. More support is needed for principals. Provide more workshops and more preparation to fulfill their role.

Rationale: Many school boards feel very alone and therefore without any support to help the teachers and the administrators who are involved with the immersion program. This presents a major problem for the small school boards who feel very isolated and also forgotten. Alberta Learning has a very important role to play in organizing workshops for everyone involved.

3. To help staff the rural schools, encourage student teachers to do their practicums in smaller centres using subsidies as incentives.

Rationale: Rural schools find it very difficult to encourage student teachers to do their practicums in rural centers. It would help if there were subsidies which could be used as an incentive to find these teachers. Presently, student teachers prefer to work in urban centers where more choices of schools are offered and where more job opportunities exist.

4. Have a university representative come and talk to Grade 12 students to encourage them to register in the education faculty. Also provide information on available help for those students, such as bursaries.

Rationale: Everyone agrees that we do not have enough immersion teachers to fill all the positions. The future is very bleak. We need to encourage our high school students to register in the education faculty. One of the ways would be to have a university representative (i.e. Faculté Saint-Jean) visit the schools and explain the several job opportunities that exist at the end of their studies. It seems that too many students do not go into education because of a lack of information.

5. Administrators should make it a point to support their immersion staff and to look after their welfare. They should be very sensitive to their special needs.

Rationale: Administrators have a double challenge when they work in an immersion school. One of their many duties should be to make a point of supporting their staff and to look after their welfare. This would possibly encourage their teachers to remain in their school. Unfortunately, too many administrators forget to do so because they do not understand the very special heavy work load that their immersion staff face every day.

6. There should be a course offered at the university level that would talk more specifically about the difference between the French and English cultures.

Rationale: Teachers and administrators do not always understand the difference between the French and the English cultures. The best way to solve this problem would be to offer a course that would explain these differences. At this point, we assume that people will get the information by themselves but it is not always the case.

# Appendix



- ◆ Parnell, Rick. “**Marketing French Immersion in Alberta: A Conceptual Framework.**” n.d. Unpublished.  
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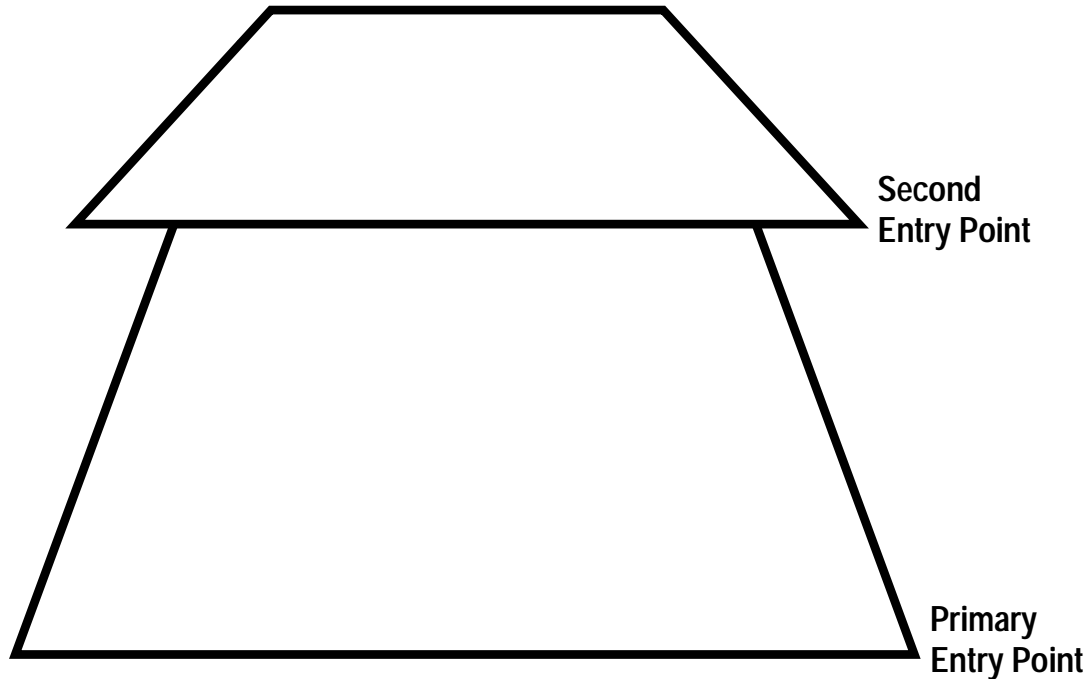


**Marketing French Immersion in Alberta:  
A Conceptual Framework**

**by**

**Rick Parnell M.B.A.**

## Recruitment and Retention Profile For French Immersion Programs



The diagram above represents the pattern of enrolment in French immersion programs, up to and including Grade 9. In essence, there are two entry points for customers of French immersion. The first point is at the start of elementary school (*early immersion*), with the second point at the start of Junior High School (*late immersion*). Though there may be some activity in recruiting for preschool programs, recruitment strategies are focussed on these two main entry points. Once enrolment has been achieved, there tends to be a gradual attrition of enrolled students as students and their families opt out of the program during succeeding years. The reasons for this attrition are important determinants to the success of a particular immersion program.

In addition to the importance of recruitment, one of the key arguments I will make in this paper is, that for long-term success, the recognition of the critical importance of customer retention, and the true cost of each enrolment that is later lost must be addressed as part of an overall marketing strategy for French immersion.

## **What is French Immersion, and who pays for it?**

Federal Funding regulations recognize kindergarten and elementary programs that provide instruction in French for 75% of the school day as being eligible for French Immersion grants. For Junior and Senior High schools the requirement drops to 60%. In Alberta, a French immersion program is often defined as one in which the French language is used as the language of instruction according to these percentages. French immersion programs (i.e. those meeting the Alberta guidelines) are available in approximately 160 schools in Alberta.

In addition to the French immersion grants, the funding framework for education in Alberta provides a basic amount for each student in the province, which is accessed by whichever public school the student attends. In addition to this basic grant, students also activate funding sources through initiatives such as Early Literacy funding, Special Needs, etc. In districts where all the funds available to individual French immersion programs are based on student numbers, there can be a considerable incentive for individual schools to attract and maintain a full capacity of students in order to ensure the highest returns through economies of scale. Of course, retention relies on the optimal mix of students and staff, both in terms of numbers and commitment.

In the 1998/99 school year, fewer than 27,000 students were enrolled in French immersion programs at all levels in Alberta, representing something in the neighborhood of 5% of the total available school population for that grade. The recruitment rate at the ECS level for French immersion has gradually dropped from 7.7% in 1992/93 to 6.6% in 1998/99. Grade 6 enrolment in 1997/98 was about 5% of the available school population for that grade level. Grade 7 enrollment in French immersion programs was also around 5% of the available school population in 1998/99 (suggesting that relatively the same percentage of the school population chooses to join late French immersion as choose to discontinue French immersion after Grade 6). The percentage of the Grade 9 school population still enrolled in French immersion as of 1998/99 was about 4.7%.

## **The Market for Education**

"Going to elementary school is the only activity that is compulsory in Canada. For that reason, elementary school enrolments are the one area where demographics can predict the future with tremendous accuracy." (*David K. Foot in Boom Bust & Echo 2000*)

According to Statistics Canada's 1996 Census, about 7% of Alberta's population were between the ages of 0 and 4. This means that between 1997/1998 and 2000/2001, some 195,000 students could be expected to enter the school system, or on average about 48,750 each year. Based on Government of Alberta education statistics, the average enrolment in Alberta for Grade 1 for 1997/1998 to 1998/1999 was 44,450 students, implying that enrolment could be over 50,000 for each of the 1999/2000 and 2000/2001 school years.

## **The Market For French Immersion**

French immersion is a subset of the total market offering for those seeking an education. This is a critical point to keep in mind, because the potential customer for French immersion is first and foremost someone who is seeking a quality education for her or someone in her guardianship. A parent or guardian who makes a choice "not to use" the regular programs offered by the public school system program offerings does so because she perceives some positive differentiation, and an advantage to be gained through a French immersion program.

One of the first questions that must be asked therefore is: "What are the base educational requirements that must be exceeded in order to draw a potential customer during the recruitment phase?" One might ask: "What are the basic product attributes that must be present for any education offering; and how is immersion perceived to affect the value (or contribute to an added value) of that basic education offering?"

These questions which impact on both the recruitment and the retention strategies go to defining the market segment most likely to seek out or "buy into" the French immersion concept. With primary education, the decision-makers are extremely unlikely to be the consumer of the product. The "consumer" of the education product only affects the decision through the parent or guardian's perception of her needs and abilities. The greater influence on the decision will likely be found in the decision maker's background, including: the education decisions that were made for them and their perceptions about the value of those decisions (which includes and is affected by their experiences and the experiences of their peer group with French language instruction); their perceptions about the world around them and what skills are needed for "success" now and in the future; and their economic position and the impact of the education decision on their other lifestyle choices.

For some, child rearing will be viewed as an opportunity to "recreate" themselves. However, I suspect that the majority looks at child rearing with an optimistic view toward creating a "better" life and the greatest of possible opportunities for their children. Whatever the criterion the decision-maker uses to define ultimate success in child rearing, education must be looked upon as a key input in the production of a complete human being. The parent or guardian's definition of "complete" will initially determine the education supply alternatives they examine and the choices they make. The success of their choices will be continually measured against that definition, though the definition of "complete" may be altered to varying degrees by changing circumstances and perceptions over time.

## **Factors Affecting the Education Decision**

In January of 1999 the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages published a paper entitled "Motivations for School Choices by Eligible Parents Outside Quebec." The study was based on the opinions of 81 parents interviewed in four Canadian cities (*including Calgary*) through a total of eight facilitated group meetings. The study divided the factors motivating the education decision into six categories: Technical, Psychological, Demographic, Economic, Political and Cultural. While the study was aimed at parents who have the constitutional right to have their children educated in French (*under Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*), the findings might be helpful in determining the motivations for the education decision generally, especially as it relates to language. Although the focus of this paper is on the decision as it relates to immersion in the public schools (*which do not involve Section 23 rights*), I have been able to draw some insights that may be helpful in developing marketing plans for immersion programs.

### **Technical Factors**

The study labelled all those factors that create the opportunity for choice in the education decision as "technical." An example of a technical factor would include the mere existence of an accessible alternate school program. The technical factors establish the size of the overall target market from which an individual school might hope to attract students. For example, each school will have a geographic region from within which the school is more or less accessible. Transportation related issues, such as busing, are technical factors, which in part, determine accessibility.

Just as with any other product or service, technical factors must be addressed before a school can be said to be making an education offering to market. A school must have a program of instruction that meets established standards and at least matches the quality of instruction available in other competing schools. Furthermore, it must provide a pleasant and safe learning environment, with extra-curricular activities comparable to those available in alternative learning institutions. Finally it must have physical access by the community or communities it wishes to serve.

One of the important issues that affect French immersion (*and all non- traditional school programs*) in the public school system is in the physical space made available for such programs. Rather than taking the most positive and productive approach of locating programs in the communities with the highest market demand or potential for success of such programs, school jurisdictions will purposely locate these programs in "empty" schools. These schools are often in the oldest buildings with high maintenance needs and the lowest levels of modernization. As a result these programs are likely disadvantaged from the start, facing much higher costs associated with meeting the basic technical factors.

### **Psychological Factors**

The psychological factors affecting the education choice are more intangible and more difficult to measure than are the technical factors. However, these factors are extremely important in positioning a language education offering. For example, the self-esteem of both guardian and student combined with their perceptions about the benefits associated with the acquisition of two languages (*and French in particular*) will have a critical impact on both the initial education decision, and on the potential for success within a language differentiated education system.

An immersion school program must make its offering conscious of the many psychological factors that might come into play, and intent on differentiating its product offering and positioning it within the psychological factors that will come into play for its target market. For example, the critical student mass required for the success of an immersion program located in a mainly unilingual English neighbourhood may be purposely suited to attract students whose parents speak no French at all, and will structure its marketing materials as to allay any fears that parents may have about sending their children through French Immersion. Another program, whose strategy involves attracting fewer students and providing more focussed instruction to improve the odds of academic success, may discourage enrolment of children who do not have at least one parent or guardian with a working knowledge of French. In either case, the strategic direction of the immersion program must be a conscious one, and the image to be achieved in the community in which the school operates must also be a conscious one.

### **Demographic Factors**

Demographic factors are going to have the greatest single impact on the education decision. Such demographic factors will include the level and form of the decision makers' education, the family's linguistic background, the age of the parents/guardians, and the family's geographic and economic stability.

The 1996 Statistics Canada Census suggests that just over 2% of Alberta's population consider themselves to be either French or bilingual in French and English. This figure in itself may have an effect on the psychological factors affecting the education choice. If guardians perceive Alberta as their "world," French might be viewed as unnecessary or unimportant. However, factors such as the family's geographic and linguistic history, education, and work experience may have a significant counter balancing impact on this perception.

As outlined earlier, age demographics will, of course, affect the number of school age children available within a particular region as well. Extrapolating from the average expected annual elementary school enrolment of more than 50,000, minimum new enrolments in Francophone programs alone over the next few years should average more than 1,000 students per year, assuming French and bilingual parents are predisposed to choosing French language education and assuming school age children are evenly distributed across the population. A particular school may choose to broaden its access to market by appealing to a wider demographic group, or pursue a strategy that narrows the demographic with a hope to create a higher quality product and/or secure a longer-term loyalty and market retention.

The fact that enrolment in French Immersion at the Grade 1 level has been in the range of 6% to 6.5% in recent years, suggests that immersion programs do have a wider appeal and a perceived value to families who do not view themselves as bilingual in French and English. In effect, the desire for bilingualism and the perceived value in multilingualism and multiculturalism makes French Immersion marketable to a broader demographic. However, the further removed are the factors of linguistic and family background, the more important other factors will become in the education decision. To put it another way, if families do not feel an intrinsic pressure to choose some form of "French" education, then the education decision will be based on factors other than language. Marketing efforts that put an emphasis on "French for the sake of French" will be less successful in attracting these families.

Other demographic factors that are likely to affect the education decision, especially with respect to the question of language, may include the educational background of the parents/guardians, the age of the decision-makers, and the gender of the main education decision-maker. The family's geographic stability may also be important in relation to the perceived ease of transference from one school program to another. In this regard, the issue of standards within different French Immersion programs may also be significant.

## **Economic Factors**

The perception of future economic return from the education decision is likely to be an important element for some parents or guardians. Much has been written and said about the importance of multilingualism in the developing global economy. To compete in world markets, Alberta companies will likely have to hire or train multilingual staff and consultants. Therefore, It seems likely that, all else being equal, businesses would be willing to pay some premium for multilingual workers. Certainly, current evidence suggests that bilingual Canadians earn about 3% more than their unilingual counterparts. However, little can be stated definitively in terms of future individual economic benefits and marketing material is best to deal with the subject through a more subtle value-added approach. In other words, one might assume that if the parent or guardian perceives that a student is better prepared for the world through multiple language education, then it stands to reason that such a student would

stand to be better rewarded, economically and otherwise. Marketing strategies that attempt to affect the perception of economic benefits will have to be balanced carefully with materials that are aimed at other psychological and political perceptions.

### **Political Factors**

Similar to Economic factors, political factors, as they are defined in the study, seem to be more factors of psychological perception than factors that can be defined and used from a marketing perspective. However, in Canada political factors also deserve some special mention since the temperature of the national unity debate will likely affect the decision making for some of those considering French immersion as an education option. For some decision makers political factors are rooted in demographic factors such as linguistic heritage or psychological factors concerning the perceived benefits to be gained through knowledge of French. Some others who perceive a value in any second language may be persuaded to choose or reject French on the weight of political factors.

One could argue that it is dangerous to pursue purely political factors when positioning an education offering, because any French immersion program requires long term customer loyalty to be effective, while purely political motivations are more akin to fads. There would almost certainly be considerable erosion of the student population if the expectations of the person making the politically motivated decision do not materialize. The continued motivation and sense of belonging on the part of the student may be one means of converting the political short sale into a long-term customer.

The politicization of the "French language issue" can also have a detrimental effect on demand for immersion schools. Some rational adults, who might otherwise perceive value in multilingualism, can be dissuaded by the heat of politically motivated arguments. This resistance, once begun, can be difficult to overcome. Some parents will go to considerable lengths and expense to have their language education objectives met without French immersion.

### **Cultural Factors**

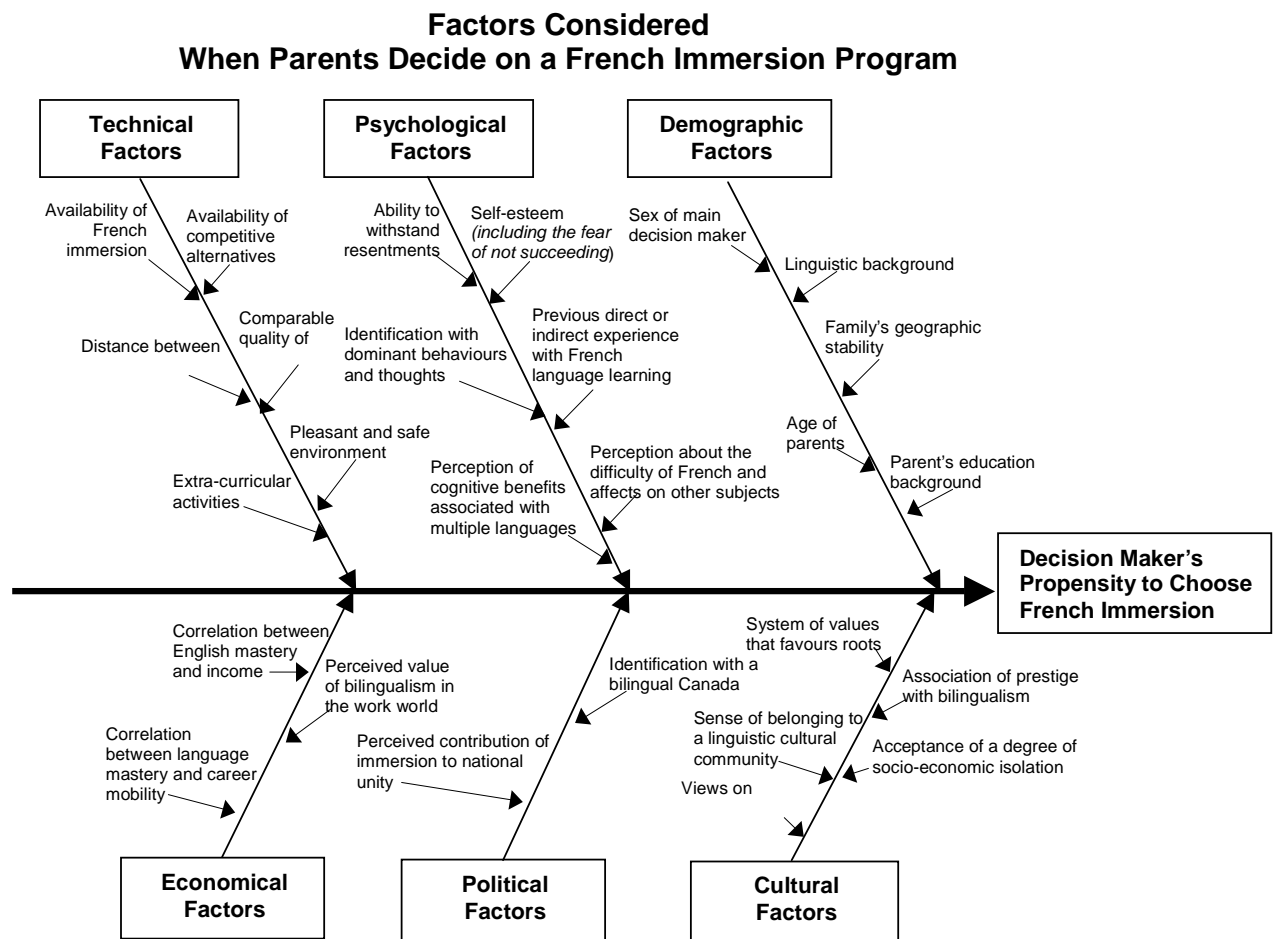
While cultural factors may also be argued to be a subset of psychological and demographic factors, they are significant enough to the education decision to warrant specific consideration. The psychological elements of cultural factors go to the sense of belonging or need to belong to a distinctive cultural community, and the level of associated prestige with bilingualism. The demographic elements of cultural factors are to be found in the cultural and perhaps even linguistic heritage of the family and on their values concerning the linkage to their roots. (*Many individuals consider -themselves to be of French heritage, though they may not have rights under Section 23 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.*) The marketing strategy will have to be aware of the significance of these factors within the targeted market, with a conscious decision made with respect to the commitments made to address these values.

Canadian culture, more broadly, might be thought to raise questions about the value and effect of multiculturalism, as well as a more universal prestige in bilingualism or multilingualism. Views on these factors and on the future of "Canadian culture" will likely have a significant impact on education decision- makers, regardless of other roots. In fact, I

spoke with one family whose background was English and based in the Maritimes, but who had along family tradition of sending children through French immersion. This cultural heritage strongly valued multilingualism.

### The French Immersion Education Decision

The following diagram, adapted from one produced in the Federal Government of Canada study, suggests a model for viewing the education decision, as it will likely exist in the mind of the decision maker(s). The strength of the various factors will likely vary from individual to individual, but a French immersion program must understand and be prepared to describe its offering with respect to each of these factors. Furthermore, since there is no direct financial consequence in choosing a French immersion program over a regular public school program, these factors establish the perceived value of an immersion offering.



### Recruitment Strategies

The question that must be raised from the recruitment perspective is: "What is a reasonable, achievable and sustainable market share for French immersion in Alberta?" Should schools be satisfied with the 6% to 7% achieved at the elementary level over the last decade, or is the success of the program important enough to warrant the additional marketing effort necessary to push enrolment up above 10%. Some might even suggest that a stretch target of 20% is both attainable and desirable. Assuming that between 40,000 to 50,000 students enter the

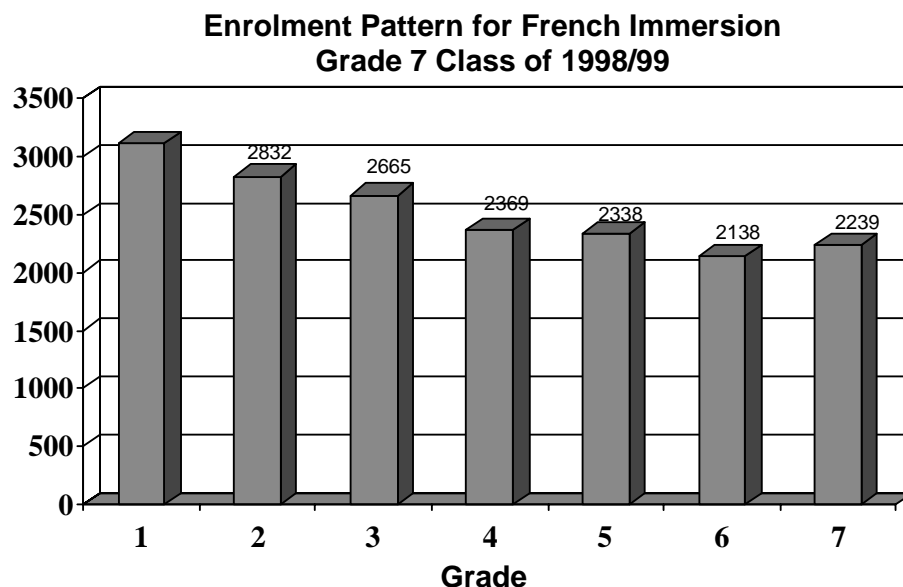


system each year for the next few years, reaching the 10% market share of new recruits means attracting 1,600 to 2,000 additional students. In other words, enrolment in French immersion would have to increase by 60% to 70%.

Since current levels have been achieved with (*as I understand*) virtually no marketing effort, it is reasonable to assume that recruitment can be significantly increased if the Alberta regions pursue combined and independent marketing efforts. Just as Universities recruit in high schools, French immersion programs should be bringing their messages to the parents of children in neighbourhood day-cares, local "swim and gyms", and other settings where parents of preschool children might meet. An aggressive marketing program might even reach parents or potential parents many years in advance (perhaps even at pre-natal or post-natal counselling) to ensure adequate planning.

### Retention versus Recruitment

The diagram below charts the enrolment pattern for the group of students that began with French immersion in Grade 1 in 1992/93, through to the class that completed Grade 6 in 1997/98, and was then augmented with new recruits for Grade 7 in 1998/99. The diagram suggests a loss of nearly 1,000 students, or 30% of the original enrolment by the completion of Grade 6.



The implications of this enrolment pattern cannot be overstated. For one of three students who start an immersion program, the program fails to deliver the expected results. Assuming that there is one child per family in each grade, by the end of Grade 6, there are 1,000 families with a negative experience in French immersion speaking with their friends and neighbors about what they've learned.

This "negative marketing" is increasing and will continue to increase the costs associated with recruiting each additional student. By negatively impacting the psychological factors that affect the main decision makers, through the past experiences of their peers, past program performance significantly impacts future recruitment efforts. Because there are limited entry points, immersion programs depend on the commitment of the families in order

to maintain class sizes through each year of the program. First and foremost, therefore, the programs must show commitment to the students and families that are recruited, and must be ready to deliver the product promised and implied.

Marketing cannot be accomplished independent of the product. To be effective, administrators and teachers will have to work together to deliver a product that consistently meets or exceeds the expectations and values of the families recruited. Without this recognition, market share is not sustainable and recruitment efforts will become increasingly more expensive.

## **Conclusions**

"Language education generally could be well positioned to take advantage of current perceptions regarding globalization and the implications that this has for education in Alberta. However, French immersion in Alberta appears to be failing a significant share of its existing market, while not capturing its appropriate share of enrolments each year. There appears to be a need for better customer communications and planning to ensure the success of the program in the future.

An effective plan for promoting a French immersion program will oblige school administrators to carefully consider each of the decision factors discussed in this paper. For example, the image of a French immersion program might be greatly enhanced if it were included in the plans for new school facilities in new or growing neighbourhoods. A proactive approach would be to lobby and work with local policy setters and even developers to ensure ease of access to immersion programs.

School districts might also consider working together, perhaps with support from companies with international operations, to affect the perceptions of potential customers through public forums and advertising. Individual schools should certainly consider the post secondary model of recruitment, accessing and informing the decision makers prior to the decision being made. For elementary schools, this means actively seeking out and communicating with parents or guardians of preschool children. For late immersion programs it means communicating with elementary school students and their parents or guardians.

Some commitment to marketing and to better meeting expectations will be required at each level (*school, region, and province*) to ensure a higher and more sustainable market share for French immersion. Each school and region should set specific market goals and take the necessary planning and implementation steps to ensure these goals are achieved. The future fate of language education in Alberta will depend on the actions taken now.

## BACKGROUND

### **Program Promotion: Generating Interest and Involvement**

Two jurisdictions (one urban/one rural) were rewarded with significant growth in French immersion enrolment (up to 30%) after implementing a marketing plan. Using the attached planning matrix, each jurisdiction developed a plan to meet its unique needs. In this hands-on workshop, participants will learn about this planning model and apply it to a mock scenario to develop a marketing plan for a jurisdiction with lagging immersion enrolment.

#### **An Example Of How It Works**

##### *Situation*

Enrolment in the district's French immersion kindergarten program had dropped significantly. As kindergarten was the prime entry point for the district's French immersion program, a drop in enrolment was not a good portent for the health of the overall program.

##### *Response*

Concerned with the downward trend, the jurisdiction's French immersion coordinator Pierrette Messier-Peet approached the communications coordinator Suzanne Lundrigan with the problem. The two worked with an already established French immersion steering committee, which included parents, teachers and administrators, to develop a plan aimed at increasing the registration in French immersion. With a broad spectrum of stakeholders represented on the committee, it served as a focus group for identifying target audiences; developing messages for those audiences and developing strategies to deliver those messages.

##### *Outcomes*

The committee developed a schedule of activities that ran throughout the year. Enrolment increased by approximately thirty per cent. Morale improved.

#### **The Keys To Success**

##### *Research*

At the outset, the committee devoted time to conducting a thorough and honest self-appraisal of the challenges that it faced. This examination of conscience helped the committee identify the two key strengths it would promote as well as the two key weaknesses it would

focus on improving. The committee did not spread itself too thin. This informal environmental scan guided decisions about where to focus resources.

#### *Clearly articulated goal*

The committee agreed to a clearly articulated achievable goal—something we could measure. Again the committee made sure not to bite off more than it could chew. We wanted to taste success; not feel that we'd fallen short of our goal.

#### *A planned systematic approach*

The team carefully planned every initiative and knew well ahead of time what piece of the puzzle should fall into place when; who would take care of getting it done and how we would evaluate our efforts. The publicity campaign crescendoed in the weeks before registration. Note: a lot of less glitzy hard work was done well in advance—booking an expert in French immersion learning for a parent evening; opening the classrooms so parents could have their child have a kindergarten experience, etc. Thanks to careful planning, promotional tools like brochures and posters were ready well ahead of time.

Recognizing that parents needed time to interact with teachers to feel comfortable about enrolling their children in the program, limited advertising dollars were focused on promoting opportunities for face to face communication, such as the test drive French immersion opportunity and the parent information evening.

#### *Involvement of all involved early on*

Teachers, parents and administrators became committed to turning the downward enrolment trend around because they recognized the deleterious effect it would have on the program, their jobs and the children's education. As a result the work was shared across the committee instead of being left to one or two individuals—this built a broad base of support for the initiative and meant the same messages were being delivered consistently.

#### *Internal people understood and accepted the role they had to play*

In fact, addressing the internal issues first was a key to the success of this initiative. When we moved to work with the public audience, everybody was well prepared and able to play their part.

#### *A commitment to evaluation*

Each activity was measured for its impact. How many people came to the parent information evening? How many tear-off information slips were removed from the posters? And of course, the ultimate evaluation—the number of students that registered in kindergarten.

Suzanne Lundrigan, Manager, Communication Services, Alberta School Boards Association, Edmonton

Pierrette Messier-Peet, Teacher, École Notre-Dame, Edmonton

Carmen Mykula, Second Language Facilitator, Parkland School Division, Stony Plain

**Goal**

**Definition:** No more than 30 words; Realistic; Measurable; Simple language

**Example:** Enrollment in our district will increase by 5 per cent.

OBJECTIVES	AUDIENCE	MESSAGE	STRATEGIES	RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINES	BUDGET	EVALUATION
By the end of June, our parents will be aware of our jurisdiction's successes and prepared to serve as active advocates for our program.	Parents with children in the system at key transition points: Kindergarten Grade 7 Grade 10	"Our district offers students academic success."	1. Develop list of parent advocates who could serve as references to new parents. Share stories of academic success with these parents. List them as references for the system.  2. Each school will have at least two academic success stories in the local media.	Suzanne  School representative	Before the end of June  Before the end of June	Time  Time	How many calls did our advocates receive? Did they feel prepared? Feedback from new parents. Did "sales" occur as a result of this contact?  Is each school featured twice? Are the stories about academic success?
<b>DEFINITIONS</b>							
These are the milestones we have to hit to achieve our goal.  <b>Criteria:</b> No more than four Set deadline Measurable Specific	This is whom we have to reach to achieve our objectives.  <b>Criteria:</b> Choose audiences you can impact Be specific Define your audience thoroughly: - Size - Background - Attitude - Influence - Accessibility	This is what these audiences have to hear to act in the way we wish.  <b>Criteria:</b> Keep them simple Motivational	How do we get this message to this audience?  <b>Criteria:</b> Consider the audience Consider the content Capitalize on existing opportunities Explore all your options: - Face to face - Promotions - Publicity - Advertising	Who will take the lead?  <b>Criteria:</b> Share the duties	When will strategies, tools are put into place. Track progress.  <b>Criteria:</b> Be specific Be realistic	Money and people	How will we know that our efforts have succeeded?  <b>Criteria:</b> Be specific Quantitative Qualitative Measure objective/strategy

## SESSION NOTES

# Program Promotion: Generating Interest and Involvement

**SUZANNE LUNDRIGAN, PIERRETTE MESSIER PEET AND CARMEN MYKULA**

The following summary was prepared from notes taken during the session by a volunteer recorder, and from any other written records of the session as may have been kept on flip charts or work sheets. The summary was reviewed by the session presenters and printed with their agreement.

### Communications Planning

St. Albert Protestant Separate School District saw a 38% increase in Kindergarten enrolment after the first year of the implementation of a communications plan. In Parkland County, Kindergarten and Grade 1 enrolments increased.

In order for a communications plan to work:

- listen to what your communities are saying
- ask tough questions
- be open to what you might hear
- realize communication is not a one time thing
- realize it is not a one person job
- start from a listening position
- involve representatives from across the whole system: administrators, parents, teachers, etc.

To gather information on communities contact Statistics Canada and Databook

Conduct a SWOT Analysis: identify Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

Identify audiences

Establish messages: simple, motivational, unique to audience.

Select tools: open houses, thank you notes, radio shows. etc. Do not use just written tools for reaching audiences.

Ask what success would look like when the objective is reached—how can it be quantified, qualified?

[Delegates were then presented with the following scenario from which to work in building a communications plan.]

Welcome to "C'est Beau School District". This will be your reality for this afternoon's workshop.

#### COMMUNITY PROFILE

- District serves 8000 students in mid-size city (50,000) and surrounding rural communities.
- Japanese-owned pulp and paper mill employs 65 per cent of people in city. Recent expansion - booming economy.
- Military base re-opened last year.
- Served by daily newspaper/three rural papers/two radio stations.
- Prosperous farmers surround the city.

#### THE FRENCH IMMERSION PROGRAM

- French Immersion offered for 14 years.
- Dual-track program -- offered in schools in the city. Bussing not an issue. Community school is equidistant to the FI programs.
- Two graduating classes so far (75 per cent of graduates attend university)
- Two FI graduates received 1998 U of A gold medals for top marks in Pharmacy and Arts
- Kindergarten enrolment dropping steadily over last five years --down two to three students each year. (16 students this year)
- Kindergarten/lower elementary teachers enjoy the smaller classes and question merit of publicizing too much. (18 to 21 students this year. Elementary teachers skip French Immersion meetings.
- Overall program maintains low profile -- There was only one article in the paper last year -- and that was about a drop in achievement test results.

In fact this was the first time in five years the marks had been that low. Typically FI students scored well above provincial average, but no one had shared that information with the reporter.

- That one article has been damaging. People still calling district office asking why kids were doing so bad in French Immersion.
- Elementary program housed in district's newest school (dual-track program). Students have access to all the best technology.

#### PARENTS

- Very supportive and vocal. Committed to seeing their children bilingual
- Since the newspaper article about the marks wondering about University achievement - especially in Sciences.

#### TEACHERS

- Most teachers with the district for more than 10 years
- 65 per cent enrolled in Masters programs
- Very supportive of creating extracurricular French experiences for students:
  - Grade 6 students go to Falher
  - Grade 9 to Quebec
  - Grade 12 to France

#### DISTRICT CONTEXT

- Dollars are getting tighter Principals from other schools grumbling about small class sizes at French Immersion -- calling for grades to be mixed.

- English classrooms are jampacked as a result of recent influx of military families to the new base -- many from Quebec -- parents tend to place children in English program -- fear students won't learn English.

#### **SCHOOL BOARD**

- Previous board had been strong supporters.
- October 1998 elections brought three new faces to the five-member board table including one board member who had campaigned on having the district offer a Japanese program. She pointed out influx of 300 Japanese families (new mill employees)
- Board wants status report on French Immersion program by December 12.

#### **THE SUPERINTENDENT**

- Generally supportive of FI program. Authorized \$5000 in advertising expenditures for last summer's Kindergarten campaign. Didn't work.
- Superintendent has allocated \$10,000 for campaign this year but has indicated the board wanted a full accounting of what would be done with the funds -- and that there had better be results or else.



## **SWOT Analysis**

### *Strengths in regards to scenario*

- no competition
- growing community
- newest/modern school
- busing not a problem
- teachers supportive of creating extra curricular activities
- supportive parents
- \$10,000 for campaign
- teachers upgrading
- good academic results (75% going to university)
- program established
- stable staff
- supportive superintendent
- small class sizes (seen by some as a strength and by others as a weakness)
- dual track (seen by some as a strength, by others as a weakness because of use of English)
- 65% of teachers enrolled in Masters program
- new board, 3 new out of 5 members (seen by some as a strength and by others as a weakness)

### *Weaknesses*

- bad publicity, one bad article
- low profile with the press
- internal sabotage, teachers not attending meetings
- low enrolment
- principals complain of budgetary cuts
- split classes, not seen as positive
- dual track (seen by some as a strength and by others as a weakness)
- small classes (seen by some as a strength and by others as a weakness)
- Kindergarten enrolment low
- 65% of teachers in Masters program costly
- marks down in achievement tests
- military moving in
- new board, 3 new out of 5 members (seen by some as a strength and by others as a weakness)

*Opportunities*

- more native Francophones with military
- number of media opportunities
- status report to Board—there is interest in knowing what’s going on
- supportive, vocal, strong parents
- \$1000 from Board for a campaign
- booming economy
- successful grads
- small classes (can be negative also)
- high enrolment in English classes
- influx of Japanese families

*Threats*

- board wants status report by December 12
- one board member who wants immersion Japanese program
- 3 new board members (could go either way)
- dollars are getting tighter
- competition: small French immersion classes vs large English classes
- increasing need for English-as-a-second-language

This whole process deals a lot with perceptions

*Four objectives were chosen (prioritized) from SWOT analysis by presenter:*

1. Elementary teachers will understand the necessity of promoting the immersion program  
 Audiences: teachers, principals
2. Japanese parents will be aware of French immersion program  
 Audience: Japanese parents  
 Key influence people/advocates (convince one, he then goes out to promote program):  
 the employer or recruiter of Japanese parents  
 real estate agents/welcome wagon
3. New military parents will be aware of French immersion program  
 Audiences: communications officer  
 military  
 real estate agents  
 CPF  
 military parent on committee  
 mothers (they usually make schooling decisions)  
 day cares
4. Current parents will not be prepared to advocate on behalf of the program  
 Audiences : positively committed parents, experienced parents

[Delegates then broke into groups to work on each objective. The following tables are samples of what delegates came up with.]

OBJECTIVE	AUDIENCE	MESSAGE	STRATEGIES	RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINES	BUDGET	EVALUATION
Elementary teachers will understand the necessity of prompting the immersion program		Promotion of the French immersion program benefits you (the teacher)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-meet with staff leaders</li> <li>-do enrolment projections</li> <li>-meet with the whole staff to share the facts or the problem of low enrolment</li> <li>-use professional development day to meet</li> <li>-involve staff in generating strategies for dealing with decline in enrolment and/or promotion ideas</li> <li>-have teachers develop individual team action plans</li> </ul>		Nov. 30 professional development day	\$0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-10% increase in number of staff showing up for future FI meetings</li> <li>-pre/post attitudinal survey of staff</li> <li>-teachers more positive about program around school</li> </ul>
(A second group discussed the same objective)	Teachers Principals	Teachers are important to success; success won't happen by itself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-staff meetings</li> <li>-professional development days</li> <li>-one on ones</li> <li>-listen to them, get ideas</li> <li>-celebrate successes</li> </ul>	Administration and informal leaders in the school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-monthly</li> <li>-one on ones to get ideas</li> <li>-professional development days</li> <li>-ongoing</li> </ul>	\$0, maybe some for professional development days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-more enrichment</li> <li>-teachers meetings</li> <li>-second one on one</li> <li>-lower attrition from Grade 1</li> </ul>

OBJECTIVE	AUDIENCE	MESSAGE	STRATEGIES	RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINES	BUDGET	EVALUATION
Japanese parents will be aware of French immersion program	a. Japanese parents b. Employer/recruiter c. Key influence	Student benefits of French immersion: high academic achievement, globally competitive, equal opportunities, challenging program.  We will learn about the Japanese and they will learn about Canada through learning English and French	-web sites -face to face with CEO -using committed parents -multicultural night -brochure	-Superintendent with CEO -Parents to do multicultural night	-Web site before arrival of Japanese -upon arrival and according to needs	\$1000.00 for brochures \$2000.00 for welcoming	-enrol 20% of eligible students -positive feedback from company and CEO -Japanese families are involved

OBJECTIVE	AUDIENCE	MESSAGE	STRATEGIES	RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINES	BUDGET	EVALUATION
<p>Current parents will be prepared to advocate on behalf of the program.</p>	<p>-positive parents                      -key influence parents                      -CPF</p>	<p>-you are very important and very capable                      -promoting French immersion benefits the entire school community                      -the advantages of the French immersion program</p>	<p>-newsletter                      -school council meetings                      -invite the group to the school                      -media article featuring the group of parents                      -flyer/brochure                      -open house where this parent group is present as a resource</p>	<p>-parents council every second issue                      -CPF                      -principal to put on agenda                      -parents, teachers, principal/                      -administration/teachers                      -parents/school staff                      -school</p>	<p>-every second issue                      -2 x per year                      -spring                      -late fall                      -February                      -spring</p>	<p>\$0                      \$0                      \$20-50                      \$0                      \$2,000                      \$0</p>	<p>-did we meet the deadlines?                      -did we do this 2 x per year?                      -qualitative                      -upon registration: ask parents where they heard about program:                      newsletter, newspaper, flyer, etc.                      -guest book, questionnaire</p>

**Further comments by delegates**

“Communications marketing should have happened 5 years or 10 years ago.”

“Something has to be done in my district. We are not going to wait for the district. Our own school will do something. Facilitation resources will help.”

“How cheap it is. It takes a lot of manpower and commitment, but not a lot of money.”

“There used to be a government department that offered support for how to run a board meeting, how to facilitate, etc. We need a skilled facilitator to show us how.”

“There should be specialized sessions at the ATA on this.”

“Target the new teachers so that they have long-term good attitudes toward French immersion and lessen internal sabotage.”

### *Effective communications isn't:*

- A cover-up
- A panacea
- Just publicity
- A one-time event
- A one-person job

### *Establish goal*

- No more than 30 words
- Clear simple language
- Realistic/achievable
- Measurable

### *Effective communications is:*

- Planned
- Systematic
- Two-way
- Ongoing
- Consistent

### *First steps*

- **Analysis**
  - Why were numbers dropping?
  - What was happening around us:  
(Local/ Provincial/National)
- **Research**
  - Statistics Canada
  - Databook
  - Economic development officers
  - Chambers of Commerce

### *Houston.....we have a problem*

- Set up a committee
- School administrators
- Teachers
- Parents \*\*\*
- Central office staff

**"If people are your customers you would do well to know what they want and what they think.**

**Then, if you want to prosper, you'll give it to them."**

### *SWOT analysis*

- Strengths
- Weaknesses = Internal
- Opportunities
- Threats = External

### *Identify audiences*

- Influence
- Size
- Attitude
- Background
- Accessibility

### *Set objectives*

- Objectives have to be specific
- Objectives have to be measurable
- Set 4 objectives at the most
- Set a deadline

### *Establish messages*

- Messages must be simple.
- Messages must be motivational.
- Messages will be unique to each audience.

### *Identify audiences*

- Target your audiences: be specific.
- Choose audiences you can impact.  
(Grandparents impact enrolment decisions.  
Wealthy community = Snowbirds  
= How accessible in February?)

### *Choose strategies*

- Advertising
- Publicity
- Face to face



### *Choose strategies*

- What tool do we use to communicate this message to each audience?
  - Consider the audience
  - Consider the content
  - Remember existing tools
  - Explore all your options

### *Timelines and Budget*

- Specify when each piece is to be complete
- Allocate your available dollars

### *Strategies*

- Look beyond paper:
  - Face to face (ideal/expensive/time consuming)
  - Publicity (message out for free/loss of control)
  - Advertising (costs money/control message)

### *Evaluation*

- Be specific
- Quantitative
- Qualitative
- Measure against objective
- Measure against the strategy

### *Who's responsible*

- Build in systematic buy-in
- Share the load

"I sure wish I'd done a better job of communicating with GM people...there we were charging on the hill right on schedule, and many people looked behind me and saw that many people were still at the bottom..."

Roger Smith,  
CEO General Motors