

INTEGRATING CULTURE

IN CLASSROOMS AND SCHOOL LIFE



To support French Immersion students as they develop their identities as proud, confident, competent, engaged, plurilingual global citizens

A VISION FOR REALIZING THE FRENCH IMMERSION PROGRAM'S FULL POTENTIAL

Created following the enactment of the *Official Languages Act* (1969), the French Immersion Program is part of efforts to implement a vision of a bilingual Canada that is open to the world and promotes cultural diversity. In Manitoba, as elsewhere in the country, the French Immersion Program is dedicated to achieving this bilingual vision.

Building on its rich heritage, the French Immersion Program in Manitoba has adopted a vision (see box below) that aims to better respond to the changing nature and needs of the Immersion clientele and to realize the Program's full potential.

This vision is meant to orient the decision making of leaders, inform instruction and assessment, and guide conversations with parents and students, ensuring the full implementation of the French Immersion Program in communities.

Identity and culture play a key role in this vision.

Today, the educational community better understands how the Immersion experience contributes to the development of student identities. Immersion is not simply about studying a linguistic code. By learning to speak French as a second or additional language and by becoming familiar with Francophone culture, students develop their thinking and world view while learning to act and express themselves differently.

French Immersion students in Manitoba become open to the Francophonie and cultural diversity and develop a sense of pride in belonging to their school community. They gain confidence in their language abilities and commit to expanding the plurilingual space in their community.

THIS DOCUMENT IS INTENDED TO INFORM ADMINISTRATORS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF:

- promoting culture in schools and communities
- supporting students in building their plurilingual identities
- supporting staff with incorporating cultural references into learning environments

Implementing this vision requires a commitment by school leaders to share this project with all Immersion stakeholders: teachers, parents, and the community at large. Each has a role to play in helping students develop their identities as plurilingual citizens.

THE VISION OF THE FRENCH IMMERSION PROGRAM IN MANITOBA

"THE GOAL OF THE FRENCH IMMERSION PROGRAM IS TO DEVELOP PROUD, CONFIDENT, ENGAGED, PLURILINGUAL GLOBAL CITIZENS."

"The French Immersion Program enables students to interact spontaneously, autonomously, and confidently in French with pride and ease. They seek opportunities to engage in the Francophone community. Their identity as [global] citizens, competent in both French and English, creates lifelong opportunities and fosters openness to other languages and cultures." https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/french_imm/vision/docs/renewed_vision.pdf

CULTURE AND IDENTITY: THE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DIMENSION OF LEARNING

VALUING THE UNIQUE IDENTITY OF IMMERSION STUDENTS

Ralston Saul (2011), in promoting the learning of French among Canadian students, says that students who speak two languages have two ways of thinking, two ways of perceiving the world, and two ways of expressing ideas. Thus, they see things differently. Because they have another perspective on life, they can easily imagine that other languages exist, and that there are other ways to view and interact with the world. This allows them to become aware of their own cultural identity and to open themselves up to other languages and cultures. Students' identity and self-esteem are enhanced as they become proud, engaged global citizens.

Schools and communities must therefore validate this phenomenon and support learners in developing an awareness of the impact of the French language and culture on their learning and on the individuals they are, and in this way help them value their constantly evolving identity.

CREATING A MODERN, DYNAMIC, AND INCLUSIVE FRANCOPHONE ENVIRONMENT AT SCHOOL

For Immersion students, school is not just a place where they spend time and learn. It is also where they connect with their own unique cultural community. It is an environment they relate to and where they feel valued in their culture of origin and their linguistic and cultural development. It is a space where they play, socialize, think, and create in French. Student identities are marked by the culture they share with their school community: a unique way of thinking, living, interacting, and imagining. The role of teachers is to foster a French language environment where cultures are valued, to incorporate cultural references into their teaching, and to support students in building their identities.

ENABLING STUDENTS TO CREATE AND STRENGTHEN THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH FRANCOPHONE CULTURE

To support students as they build their identities, schools must create multiple opportunities for students to interact with the Francophone community through contact with community figures, institutions, artistic events, and, of course, young Francophones, so that students become familiar with the local, national, and international cultural references. The more they understand those references, the stronger the rapport they develop with that culture and the greater their sense of belonging to it. Language learning and identity building go hand in hand when teachers bring cultural references into the classroom.



Studying both the French language and the culture promotes sustained learning.

"French took on a whole new meaning when I was able to connect with the Francophone community: meeting young Francophones, visiting places, ordering in French, using French when traveling. All of a sudden, French took on a personal dimension for me. I began to understand the place of French in the greater Canadian context."

*Luke Loewen,
young bilingual worker*



INCORPORATING CULTURE AND CULTURAL REFERENCES INTO LEARNING

Teachers play a key role, because they are often the students' main point of contact with Francophone culture. Teachers foster a climate where learning of language and culture is valued by providing students with opportunities to interact with Francophone culture on a daily basis.

To engage students in building their identities as global citizens, teachers can:

- **integrate cultural references with subject matter by prioritizing relevant, contemporary references that can enrich the Immersion experience and the learning of school subjects.** That means using references from local and other Francophone communities, which also promotes the valuing of references from other cultures. Examples: explore a science theme by comparing the pathways of French-speaking scientists with those of other scientists; make a timeline representing the history of Immersion schools in Canada.
- **celebrate diversity so that each student feels recognized and valued.** Examples: conduct research on children's songs from all cultures represented in your school community; recognize the different varieties of French spoken in Canada.
- **increase opportunities for interaction with the Francophone community to provide context for why studying French is important to create opportunities for students to contribute to the community's vitality.** Examples: participate in Francophone community activities; create citizen action projects with students; mobilize students to undertake projects that help grow the bilingual space.
- **enrich the school's and classroom's cultural environment.** Examples: encourage students to organize cultural activities at school and choose contemporary French language cultural products; use French in all school interactions; and ensure bilingual signage on the electronic panel in front of the school.
- **forge ties with local, regional, and national Francophone communities.** Examples: increase opportunities to invite community members to the school; stock the classroom library with books by French speaking authors and multimedia products from a variety of Francophone communities; explore community resources.
- **encourage students to reflect on the advantages of learning several languages and on the place of French in their identity as learners.** Examples: help students recognize and celebrate their progress; discuss the value of knowing more than one language; develop transfer strategies between the two languages.

CULTURAL REFERENCES:

Elements and attributes characteristic of a collective culture (e.g., individuals, achievements, gatherings, traditions, lifestyles, and historical and contemporary events)

"Thanks to school, I got excited about French and immersed myself in the Francophone community in university. My world view: thanks to the education I received, I have a foot in two worlds: the one I was born into and the Francophone world."

Bailey Palamar,
university student

- **encourage the development of intercultural and transcultural skills so that students learn how to be culturally sensitive, how to interact in diverse cultural settings, and how to play a proactive role in an inclusive society.** Examples: get students involved in discussions about language learning with students from other schools; develop an awareness of social issues in the community.
- **engage students in authentic and meaningful communication experiences.** Examples: have students express their views on important issues through art and media production; forge ties in French with students from other schools through sports, science, and/or cultural activities; participate in Francophone community events.

TRANSCULTURAL SKILLS:

The ability to incorporate into one's own culture values from other cultures that are related to world view and beneficial to all cultures involved. It is also the ability to strengthen one's social conscience and act as a cultural mediator.

CULTURAL LANDMARKS:

Cultural references used by individuals to define their own personal culture and affirm their identity.



HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR TEAM AND ENSURE THE REALIZATION OF THE VISION

The French Immersion Program offers a renewed vision, one in which school is a positive experience and where French culture and openness to the world are valued. Parents, students, and staff all have a shared responsibility in realizing this vision. **All stakeholders, whether they speak French or not, have a role to play.**

As an administrator, your role is to support the realization of the vision.

Strategies:

- Initiate a dialogue with staff on ways to foster the learning of Francophone language and culture among students in your specific school setting. Set goals with staff.
- Support staff in their initiatives to foster cultural learning in the classroom; encourage cooperation and action research on ways to incorporate Franco-
phone cultural references into authentic learning situations.



REFERENCE

SAUL, John Ralston. "French Immersion Students: Proud, Engaged, Global Citizens." 2011. *French Immersion Students in Manitoba Conference*. Friday, March 18, 2011, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Looking to provide teachers with guidance on strategies to incorporate culture and cultural references in the classroom and at school? The Bureau de l'éducation française (BEF) offers professional learning sessions throughout the year.

Email the BEF at bef@gov.mb.ca or call them at 204-945-6916 or toll-free at 1-800-282-8069, extension 6916.

- Engage all staff, including teachers in other programs, in promoting French in the school environment.
- Encourage parents to play an active role in validating their child's French Immersion experience. Offer them suggestions on how their child can participate in French-language activities outside school and online.
- Forge ties and partnerships with the Francophone community.

"I'm proud to call myself an Immersion school graduate. My success in French is due to a simple but winning combination: my parents' commitment to French language education, the calibre of my teachers who modeled their French culture, and finally a strong personal attachment to the language. My life today is richer for having made French a big part of it."

Heather Brydon, teacher