

Learning Another Language: Manitoba's Renewal Strategy

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Language is integral to the human experience. It contributes to the cultural and linguistic richness of society, to personal fulfillment, and to mutual understanding. In an increasingly multicultural society, language competencies and intercultural understanding are no longer just optional extras; they are an essential part of being a world citizen.

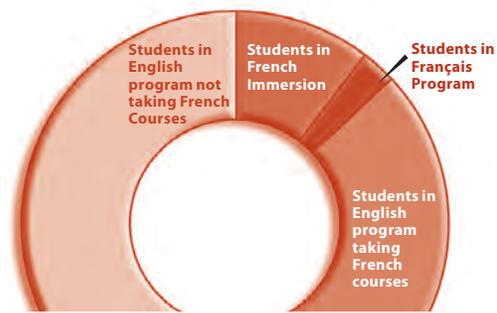
Increased international immigration and migration within Canada has led to an increase in the number of new learners entering school who don't speak English or French. Educators need to be responsive to a world where multilingualism is becoming the expectation rather than the exception, and to adjust the teaching and learning accordingly.

The Bureau de l'éducation française (BEF), a division of Manitoba Education, is responsible for French education in Manitoba. BEF is currently rethinking its theoretical foundation for the teaching and learning of French as a second language. To bring about a paradigm shift whereby learning an additional language is an expectation for all students, BEF is presently exploring a methodology for increased student success, and collaborating with educational partners to promote this renewed approach. It is our hope to engage the more than 50% of students who are not, in the current school year, enrolled in a French course or program.

Over the past two years, BEF has been revitalizing Basic French in Manitoba by organizing forums with educators and educational partners. This group is examining four priority areas: curriculum renewal; teacher education—pre-service and in-service; policies and practices; and the promotion of French as a second language. A new guide has been developed using a literacy-based approach with oral communication proficiency as its main focus. Basic French is intended to offer another venue, besides the Français and French immersion school programs, for Manitoba students to develop proficiency in oral communication and in French reading and writing.

Some students have already attained this goal through their Basic French courses, and, as a result, we have videotaped these students to illustrate and clarify expectations for educators, students, and parents. The reaction to these video clips has been overwhelming. Educators are in awe when they see how the proposed methodology can achieve amazing results for students. This is the goal for all Manitoba students, and we know that qualified, trained teachers are the key to this success.

BEF is also rethinking its theoretical foundation related to the French Immersion Program in the province. As French Immersion evolves, it is evident that students need more support in their language learning experience. They believe their French language skills are not good enough



In Manitoba, total enrolment statistics, as of September 30, 2011, show that 5,253 students (2.65% of the student population) were enrolled in the Français program; 20,490 students (10.34% of the student population) in the French Immersion program (an all-time high); and 69,979 students (35.33% of the student population) in French courses (61,586 in public schools and 8,393 in independent schools).

From a total student population of 198,100 students, 102,378 (51.67%) students were neither taking Français (French as a first language program) nor French as a second language (French Immersion program and French courses) in the 2011/2012 school year.

and therefore don't feel confident speaking French. Learning another language, though rewarding, is not easy, and the work presently conducted in this area will guide educators and students along this path.

For young people to become engaged in language learning, it is important for them to have a personal connection to the language and to see the language as relevant to their lives. For this to happen, students need to become conscious of their choice to speak and to live in two or more languages. This language learning experience needs to be validated and nurtured by family, peers, and the community. Their personal growth as two-language learners and as two-language users needs to be recognized and celebrated by everyone in their immediate environment in order for them to feel validated for having chosen this path. Students should be encouraged to talk about their language learning experience. They need to be exposed to role models—people who have followed a similar path and succeeded in living in two or more languages. Their family, peers, and community can support and honour language learning by participating in cultural activities and by organizing community events. This new thinking represents the evolution for French immersion education in Manitoba.

Through the revitalization and rethinking of French language education—both Basic French and French Immersion—in Manitoba, our goal is for students to become more proficient speakers and more aware of their own cultural identity, and to open up to other languages and cultures. This added value is complex, but life-changing: a competency for all Manitoba students, where their identity and their self-esteem are enhanced as they become proud, engaged global citizens.

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