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PROVIDING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP FOR FRENCH IMMERSION



Overview

All schools, regardless of the programs offered, function best when their administrators base their practices and decisions on sound leadership and pedagogical theory. Principals should take a hands-on approach even if they do not speak French. A positive personal attitude, sound leadership and management skills are key ingredients for success.

The strategies and ideas in this chapter are offered to assist administrators of the French Immersion Program. As mentioned in Chapter 2, dual track school communities represent a significant number of French immersion schools in Manitoba. With this in mind, the chapter will be of particular interest to administrators in a dual track school.

The following may serve as a general checklist:

- Do educational planning processes and administrative procedures consider the views of all? Do they recognize and respect the common and specific needs of the programs offered at the school? Is there a focus on appropriate educational planning for all students?
- Does the administration inform its school community that in a dual track school each program may require distinct activities and supports?
- 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 second language practices evident in the school?
- Do administrators regularly visit the French immersion classrooms, observe students, find out what they can do and cannot do, discuss their learning and progress with the teachers?



- Are administrators aware of the specific questions asked by French immersion parents? Do parents feel comfortable bringing their concerns to them? (See Chapter 1 and Chapter 6.)



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. Statements of the school’s vision, mission and beliefs/values as well as planning documents should recognize second language learning as a vital component of a high-quality education and reflect the values 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 school or 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 to enrich the education of all students and at the same time embrace differences.

The following strategies may be considered in creating a supportive school culture.

- **Use French as a language of communication whenever possible.** Using French in everyday situations helps to make the language more meaningful 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: a teacher, a parent, a student, or a school aide, perhaps on a rotating basis;
 - encouraging staff members to speak French amongst themselves, providing role models for the students;
 - making French evident inside and outside the school, e.g., signs (*bibliothèque/library*), displays of students’ work, and French background music or radio at noon hour; and
 - using French with pride during school assemblies and other activities, e.g., sing “O Canada” in French as well as in English.
- **Celebrate and promote cultural events that are important to the francophone community.** Encourage students and their families as well as staff members to participate in events such as the Festival du Voyageur. In a dual track setting, invite 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. For a variety of opportunities, see:

“The French language must not be confined to the classroom! It must be brought out of the classroom and experienced as much as possible to lend credibility to what the teachers are doing inside the classroom, and to validate the language for the students.”
(Slevinsky, 1990)

Cahier d'activités culturelles

<http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/m12/progcul/cahier.html>

and 233-ALLÔ

<http://www.sfm.mb.ca/233Allo.html>

- **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 the French Immersion Program. When planning a field trip to a local site, for example, teachers should ensure that the tour can be given in French. 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; and
 - creating a partnership with a local French radio or television station where students participate on the air.
- **Facilitate good working relations among staff members.** 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 (at the school and divisional levels) will help all staff members understand the program and may be an important first step to getting broader support. Principals should promote collaboration among staff members to create a professional learning community which understands the particularities of each program.
- **Promote French immersion as a program of choice for all students.** School administrators are in a position to 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 students with special needs, library resources, French language software, etc. When the necessary support systems are offered, the objectives of the French Immersion Program can be met.

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. (See Chapter 2.)

Interviewing Prospective Staff

What is their 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. Ask them to talk



about the assumptions they make with respect to learning and to learning a second language in an immersion context (see Chapter 1 and Chapter 2). These assumptions may 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 grade levels throughout the French Immersion Program. Students learn the French language, they learn about the French language and they learn through the French language (see Chapter 1).

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. (See Chapter 1.) 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 the assumptions made about language learning. There should be some discussion about the role of transfers and interferences.

How will the candidate integrate French culture into their teaching? One of the goals of the French Immersion Program is to introduce the learners to francophone cultural life in Manitoba and the French-speaking world. Ask them to explain their vision of what it means to integrate French culture into their teaching.

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 evaluations and assessments they plan to use and for what purposes.

What are their French language skills? Because French immersion teachers serve as models for students, they should have an excellent command of the language in which they will be teaching, French or English, and working knowledge of the other language. (See Chapter 2.) The oral language proficiency of candidates should be assessed. The committee may also want to assess potential candidates’ written language skills. The following question may be used to this end:

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

Not all teachers proficient in French have the teaching methods that will allow them to be effective in the French immersion classroom. Furthermore, not all teachers have the French skills required to be effective French immersion teachers. Both of these elements must be considered when considering new staff.

What is their area of expertise or specialization? In addition to having excellent French language skills and second language teaching methods and an understanding of second language teaching methodology, French immersion teachers must be able to teach the knowledge, skills and attitudes identified for the different subjects. Although it is imperative that the teachers be competent in their specialization, it is important that they be flexible with respect to their teaching load, particularly at the secondary level where they may be asked to teach a wide variety of courses.

The previously mentioned criteria represent fundamental elements to be considered during the interview process. In addition to the above stated questions, an administrator may consider the following.

Explore the candidates' 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 divisional level; and
- assuming leadership for a particular curricular area, e.g., mathematics, science, technology, drama, music.

What are their previous work experiences? As in any employment interview, administrators should probe the candidate's work record and check references. In the case of new teachers to the profession, it is important that faculty advisors be contacted.

Explore the candidate's own goals for maintaining and/or improving 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.

Explore the candidate's short-term and long-term career plans. For many school divisions/districts, recruitment and retention of French immersion teachers is a major concern. To address this issue, the interviewer may wish to provide an overview of the support systems and strategies in place for teachers. (See below Supporting Newly Hired Staff.)

Supporting Newly Hired Staff

Before beginning the task of supervising newly hired teachers, administrators should ensure that necessary supports are in place. To facilitate integration in the community and school milieu, new immersion teachers would benefit from:

- a welcoming and supportive environment. This may include:
 - social events to help them integrate into the school and community
 - assistance with finding appropriate housing
 - information on the community's values and attitudes

- vital information and documentation about the school. This may include:
 - school handbook
 - school routines
 - other school services
- access to the resources that will allow them to meet the learning outcomes of the curricula. This may include:
 - curriculum materials and basic resources
 - 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 classes. This may include:
 - school support team
 - divisional resources (human and financial)
 - materials

It is important to keep in mind that teachers new to the profession have particular needs. They come to a very demanding profession with much vim and vigour and yet, with very little experience. As a result, efforts must be made to ensure they are working in a supportive climate with opportunities to discuss with colleagues on a regular basis. Check with your school division to see if there are any guidelines in place for supporting new teachers. Administrators may refer to divisional policy which provides additional guidelines to support newly hired staff.

There are several Web sites that address the needs of French immersion teachers for research, networking, professional development and resources. Encourage your teachers to find and explore these. To start, try:

- *Association canadienne des professeurs d'immersion/Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers (ACPI/CAIT)* <http://www.acpi-cait.ca>
- Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers <http://www.caslt.org>
- Second Language Education Centre <http://www.unb.ca/slec>
- Ontario Institute for Studies in Education <http://www.oise.utoronto.ca>
- *Le Centre canadien des ressources sur l'enseignement des langues* <http://www.sfu.ca/ccrel>
- Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition <http://carla.umn.edu>
- Center for Applied Linguistics <http://www.cal.org>
- The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages <http://www.actfl.org>
- American Association of Teachers of French <http://www.frenchteachers.org>
- Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages/*Commissariat aux langues officielles* <http://www.ocol-clo.gc.ca>

Supervising and Evaluating Staff

The administrator will supervise the teacher for both formative and summative purposes. 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 and evaluating French immersion teachers at any grade level.

The teacher:

- respects the curriculum guides developed for the French Immersion Program;
- chooses language teaching strategies specific to second language acquisition:
 - structures activities which enable students to see and to 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.
- shares with the learners the value of learning a second language;
- ensures that teaching materials are in French and are appropriate for the learners;
- encourages spontaneous use of the language through teacher-student and student-student interaction;
- establishes an environment where risk-taking to communicate in French is valued;
- uses French (written and spoken) at all times (English should only be used when the learners' emotional well-being or security is at risk or during English Language Arts.);
- encourages learners to speak in French to satisfy not only their academic needs but also their emotional and social needs; and
- invites guest speakers proficient in French into the classroom and organizes excursions in French to underline the authenticity of French as a language of communication outside the walls of the school.

Note: To assist with teacher evaluation, it is recommended that the administrator with limited French language proficiency seek support of a bilingual administrator or divisional personnel.

Meeting Professional Development Needs of Staff

In addition to regular professional development necessary for all teachers regardless of the program in which they teach, French immersion teachers may have several specific needs.

“When the teacher talks, the students do not talk... I wish to draw attention to the idea that whether the teacher talks or not is not a matter of preference or taste, but rather a matter of pedagogy — at least, in second-language immersion. There are many objectives to be accomplished by talking — students need to learn to understand; students need a model; students need to be told what to do either socially or academically; students need to be told information they did not have before. But the teacher should bear in mind that these objectives are achieved at the expense of providing an opportunity for students to talk and consequently the teacher should be asking him/herself whether he/she or the students should be doing the talking.”
(David S. Ireland)

Sally Rehorick, a 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.” (Rehorick, 1996, pp. 1-3)

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 Manitoba, Québec, New Brunswick, or in another French-speaking country in order to maintain a high level of French language proficiency.

Note: French immersion educators need to be informed about the availability and scope of the bursaries for professional development and how to obtain these funds (see Chapter 3).

French immersion teachers must stay informed of research in the area of second language acquisition and of the pedagogical resources that are available.

It is important that administrators:

- encourage teachers to attend French immersion conferences and professional development sessions;
- provide opportunities for networking with other French immersion colleagues (see Chapter 4); and
- establish a professional development library 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 will want to consider for your professional development library collection:

The Canadian Modern Language Review
University of Toronto Press – Journals Division
5201 Dufferin St., Toronto, ON M3H 5T8
eml@utpress.utoronto.ca
<http://www.utpjournals.com/cmlr/cmlr.html>

Le journal de l'immersion Journal
Association canadienne des professeurs
d'immersion/Canadian Association of
Immersion Teachers (ACPI/CAIT)
301-176 Gloucester Street,
Ottawa, ON K2P 0A6
bureau@acpi-cait.ca
<http://www.acpi-cait.ca>

L'Inform-Action
Éducatrices et éducateurs francophones
du Manitoba (EFM)
191 Harcourt Street,
Winnipeg, MB R3J 3H2
efm@mbteach.org
<http://www.efm-mts.org>

Education Canada
The Canadian Education Association/
L'association canadienne d'éducation

317 Adelaide St. W., suite 300
Toronto, ON M5V 1P9
publications@cea-ace.ca
<http://www.cea-ace.ca>

Réflexions
A theme-based journal published by the
Canadian Association of Second Language
Teachers (CASLT) CASLT National Office
201-57 Auriga Drive, Ottawa, ON K2E 8B2
admin@caslt.org

*Teachers of English as a Second Language
in Canada (TESL)*
TESL Canada
P.O. Box 44105, Burnaby, BC V5B 4Y2
admin@tesl.ca

*The American Council on Immersion
Education Newsletter*
University of Minnesota
619 Heller Hall,
271 19th Avenue S.
Minneapolis, MN 55455 USA

Organizing for Instruction



When organizing for instruction, consider the following:

- The more exposure students have to French through instruction and activities, the better their language skills tend to be.
- When planning for the purchase of instructional supports, ensure that appropriate funds are designated for the purchase of French textbooks and resource materials, French software, and other instructional resources.
- Any support program such as early literacy and enrichment programs must also be offered in French.
- At the secondary level, ensure that French is offered in each semester (that is, at all times throughout the year). Remember that French immersion students are required to complete a minimum number of credits that are taught in French at each level from Grade 9 to Grade 12. 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.
- Ensure flexibility of organization so teachers may group and regroup students to meet the specific needs of the students and take advantage of teacher expertise.
- Accommodate student exchanges. For example, if students are going to be involved in the Manitoba-Québec exchange, schedule the timetable to accommodate it.
- Take advantage of alternative methods of course delivery, such as online and distance learning which may be available for students at the secondary level.
- Partnerships with postsecondary institutions may enhance learning opportunities. For example, consider offering a university level French course in Grade 12.
- With respect to the English Language Arts curriculum and the French Language Arts curriculum, many of the learning outcomes are similar. Teachers are encouraged to make effective use of their language arts time by avoiding unnecessary repetition. For example, if the teacher chooses to teach how to write a resume in French, it is not necessary to repeat that learning outcome in English. At the secondary level, where there may be two different teachers teaching the two language arts programs, it is important that they collaborate to ensure an interesting and diverse course for their students.

Establishing and Maintaining a Library



A library designed to support the French Immersion Program is important for any French immersion school. When planning for the library, administrators may consider the following areas:

- Is there a budget for developing and maintaining a French collection?
- When a person walks into the library, is the French language evident on walls, table displays and on signage?

- Can the students do a computer search in French? Can they sign out a book in French? Are they expected 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 curricula? Are these materials age appropriate? Is fiction as well as non-fiction available in French?
- Do students have access to the library when required?
- 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 school subscribe to French book clubs?
- Are book exchanges and the donation of used French books from the community encouraged to vary the collection?
- Are book lists prepared for French immersion parents and included in the school newsletter?



Responsibilities of Staff and Parent Councils

School Staff

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

Parent Council

The parent council acts in the interests of all partners in the school community to enhance student learning. This includes the French immersion students and parents. The parent council of a dual track school, to be truly effective and representative, will include among its members representatives from both programs offered in the school.

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Suggested Readings

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