

FOUNDATIONS FOR LEARNING AND SPEAKING ANOTHER LANGUAGE

THE FRENCH IMMERSION PROGRAM

SECOND EDITION

April 2014

MANITOBA EDUCATION AND
ADVANCED LEARNING

BUREAU DE L'ÉDUCATION
FRANÇAISE DIVISION

Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning Cataloguing in Publication Data

Foundations for Learning and Speaking Another Language, The French Immersion Program, Second Edition [electronic resource]

Bibliographical references: p. 13
ISBN: 978-0-7711-5771-4

1. Immersion (Language instruction) — Manitoba.
 2. French (Language) — Study and teaching — Immersion.
 3. French (Language) — Spoken French — Study and teaching — Manitoba.
 4. Oral communication — Study and teaching — Manitoba.
- I. Manitoba. Bureau de l'éducation française Division
372.6541

Copyright © 2014, the Government of Manitoba represented by the Minister of Education and Advanced Learning.

Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning
Bureau de l'éducation française Division
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Every effort has been made to acknowledge original sources and to comply with copyright law. If cases are identified where this has not been done, please notify Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning. Errors or omissions will be corrected in a future edition. Sincere thanks to the authors and publishers who allowed their original material to be adapted or reproduced.

Schools are encouraged to share this document with parents, guardians and communities, as appropriate.

Any websites referenced in this document are subject to change.

Ce document est disponible en français.

FOREWORD

This document is the result of action-based research projects conducted by Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning in response to concerns raised by the educational community regarding how to help students improve their French oral communication skills.

The projects' findings show that at least three components are required to address this need:

- Clarifying the theoretical foundation of the French Immersion Program, and establishing assumptions and guiding principles, with a view to validating students' choice to learn and speak another language. This component is developed in the following document.
- Implementing a language immersion teaching methodology to ensure that students go beyond speaking a transient language known as "Immersionese", and provide materials that support the development of students' ability to speak fluently and accurately when interacting with others in French.
- Enhancing the school setting by adding a sustained "reflective oral" practice through structured discussions which allow students to reflect on topics relating to their personal experience and to express their thinking in French.

Table of Contents

Foreword	i
Introduction	1
1.0 Rationale.....	3
2.0 Goal of the French Immersion Program	7
3.0 Assumptions and Guiding Principles.....	9
References.....	13

INTRODUCTION

An immersion language program varies depending on the political, social and linguistic context in which it is offered (Rebuffot, 1993, cited on the Association canadienne des professeurs d'immersion [ACPI] website). Therefore, to give greater direction to its French Immersion Program, Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning has further clarified its theoretical foundation, and established assumptions and guiding principles.

After 40 years of French Immersion in Manitoba, students enrolled in the program perform as well as their peers in other school programs. However, it is evident that they need more support in their French language learning experience. Many students feel that their language learning and its use are limited to the school environment, and report a lack of confidence when speaking French in public (Manitoba Education, 2010). Many speak a transient language, known as "Immersionese"; in fact, over the years, language content took precedence over language form.

To build confidence, students need to strengthen their language proficiency in French through various contexts thus validating their skills. In addition, it is imperative that schools, parents, and members of the community further value the learning of languages. In society, people tend to participate in activities and events knowing that they have the required skills, and that these activities and events are valued by the people around them. This is what is needed for the evolution of the French Immersion Program in Manitoba.

1.0 RATIONALE

Generally speaking, French Immersion is defined as a form of bilingual education in which French [...] is used to teach various subjects to all the students in the same class [...]. It is the teaching of a range of subjects in French [...] that sets immersion apart from all the other educational approaches to language teaching and learning¹ (Rebuffot, 1993, cited on the ACPI website).

In Manitoba, this immersion concept needs to be further developed to better guide educators to support students more effectively in their language experience. It recognizes that:

1. An immersion language program is **first and foremost a language program** where a school program is delivered through a particular language of instruction. As a result, **all** immersion program teachers have the dual task of:
 - Teaching the subjects assigned to them in the target language;
 - Ensuring ongoing learning and sustained use of the target language.

The purpose of the French Immersion Program, as a language program, is to prepare learners to **be proficient in two languages**. This idea must be at the forefront in the minds of educators, students and parents. French Immersion teachers focus on French language learning and oral proficiency skills through all subject areas, just as those teaching in English focus on English language learning and oral proficiency skills.

For subjects taught in French, in addition to learning concepts, students need to use subject specific vocabulary and expressions orally so that they have the opportunity to speak and hear themselves speaking proficiently in French on these subjects. Moreover, teaching practices and the teaching of subject matter content in French must be rethought so that language learning is as much a priority as the learning of the subject matter.

In reading, all students need to engage in read aloud activities, which give them the opportunity to hear others and themselves speaking French proficiently.

¹ Free translation

As for writing, educators need to encourage students to think in French (i.e. to hear themselves think in French) and to realize that this silent verbal phenomenon is often enhanced by a verbal one (i.e. speaking aloud) as a way of clarifying thinking as well as finding the right way to put thoughts into words. Educators and students must be aware that speaking is at the heart of the language learning process, and that the development of oral skills maximizes learning and the effective use of French and English.

Another way to support second language learning and proficiency is to expose students to other languages, to encourage them to learn a third or fourth language, at school or in their community, and to validate other languages students already speak.

2. An immersion language program promotes students' **cognitive growth**. Research has shown that **learning another language not only exercises the brain to perform more effectively, but it provides a mental consciousness and flexibility that builds intellectual character** (Forget, 2011-2012, and Light Shields, 2011).

People who know more than one language have different brains from unilingual people. Knowing more than one language changes the way people use their first language and even the way they think. They do not merely attach another language to their repertoire; they are unique plurilingual² individuals who build up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contribute, and in which languages interrelate and interact (Cook, 2008, cited on the Wikipedia website and Council of Europe, 2001).

Users of two or more languages think more flexibly than monolinguals, are more aware of language in general, and have a more open attitude towards other cultures (Cook, 2008, cited on the Wikipedia website). Theoretically, people learning another language tend to compare it to their first language and other learned languages. This suggests that it would be appropriate to conduct a more explicit comparative study of French and English starting in grade 3 or 4, and especially from grade 5 or 6 onward, to facilitate the learning and mastery of these two languages. For example, in the teaching/learning of a text's narrative structure, the teacher could have students compare French and English texts,

² "Pluri" comes from the Latin word *plures* (*plusieurs* in French) which means more than one.

which share the same basic structure, and bring students' attention to the fact that it is particularly the cultural aspect (values, beliefs and ways of doing things) which colours the story in terms of style, tone, choice of word, expressions, etc. In addition, students and teachers who speak more than two languages could also explore and share the differences and similarities of the various types of texts, expressions and other elements, written in other languages.

Focusing on the cultural dimension of these two languages as well as the cultural dimension of other languages and peoples is therefore intrinsic and basic to the study of languages.

3. An immersion language program promotes students' **personal growth**. John Ralston Saul (2001; 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.** This added value is complex, but life-changing. Students therefore need to become conscious of their choice to speak and to live in two languages. 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 (Girouard and Drzystek, 2012).

It is therefore incumbent on schools and teachers to have students think and talk about their language learning experience; students — especially adolescents — need to be commended and encouraged to go further by taking responsibility for their language learning and for living in both (or all) languages they have learned. Students can be wonderful ambassadors for the experience of learning and using another language. They need to be encouraged to share their fears, their concerns and their successes.

2.0 GOAL OF THE FRENCH IMMERSION PROGRAM

The goal of the French Immersion Program is to **ensure that students become proud, engaged, plurilingual global citizens.**

The immersion setting must value and encourage students' experience by focusing on their pathway to becoming bilingual, or plurilingual citizens. It is imperative to think constantly about the success and the evolution of the French Immersion Program by asking questions, such as:

- Does our Immersion Program allow students, including students with special needs, to achieve a high level of linguistic competency in both French and in English? Are students proud of their linguistic competencies and do they have confidence in their ability to speak French in various public settings?
- Are students aware of their own cultural identity and are they open to other languages and cultures? Do they have the confidence and interest to participate in activities in the francophone community, here and elsewhere?
- Do students value the learning of languages? Do they continue to study French, or languages other than English, after high school?

3.0 ASSUMPTIONS AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Students in Manitoba's French Immersion Program need support to develop the accuracy of their oral communication skills and to become more aware of the advantages of knowing more than one language in order to gain confidence in speaking French in public. The assumptions and the guiding principles that follow further guide the teaching, the learning and the use of the French language which are key to the linguistic success of French Immersion students.

3.1 ASSUMPTIONS

3.1.1 Teachers of the French Immersion Program are required to teach school subjects in French. This intensive teaching-learning period creates an **immersion setting** that encourages students **to learn and use** the language. Teachers and students also commit to maintaining a French speaking school environment at all times.

3.1.2 **Upon entering** a French Immersion Program, students are French language **learners**. They are engaged primarily in listening to and repeating words, sentences, nursery rhymes, poems or songs. **Learners** begin to develop fluency and accuracy in communicating in French.

3.1.3 As a rule, French Immersion students:

- a) Move quickly to the French language **learner-user** phase; they are engaged primarily in learning the language and begin to speak it: students take part in simple exchanges using learned expressions and vocabulary;
- b) Become French language **user-learners** after two years of study, or fewer, given that the subjects and school provide a French Immersion setting with content with which students can work. Students speak the language and are aware of their need to continue learning. They are not afraid to restate, to ask for help and to be proactive in their learning.

3.2 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

3.2.1 French Immersion educators are French language **user-learners** who:

- a) Speak French fluently and accurately in all situations both inside and outside the classroom;
- b) Continue to improve their French language skills, making this learning visible so that their students will also become lifelong learners;
- c) Bring alive the francophone cultures for students for whom such cultural exposure is critical.

3.2.2 French Immersion educators:

- a) Provide an immersion setting in which students can develop **both fluency and accuracy** in their interactions in order to maintain their status as French language **user-learners**.

They use a language immersion teaching methodology (Lyster, 2007) which consists of a socio-cognitive approach where issues, questions and concepts are studied through exploration tasks rather than teacher-delivered course content. On one hand, students use the French language to discuss amongst themselves and with teacher to acquire the expected knowledge and skills of the subject matter. On the other hand, both teacher and student interact to negotiate proper language accuracy.

As such, a discourse-rich approach aimed to fulfill students' language potential entails:

- More teacher-student interaction;
- More opportunities for meaningful interaction among peers when working through subject matter;
- Less reliance on non-verbal clues to convey meaning;
- More explicit than implicit correction of language form for the students to attain a higher level of language accuracy.

Manitoba Education's *Ensemble multimédia — Interagir avec aisance et précision à l'oral*, 2013, multimedia kit provides support to develop and assess oral competencies. It features:

- A reference chart accompanied by video clips explaining specific concepts used in the oral competencies assessment documents;
 - Video clips demonstrating oral language expectations for students at various grade levels;
 - Formative interactive assessment material which facilitates day-to-day recording of observations with which to provide feedback to students. These materials are designed for teachers of all subjects taught in French;
 - Summative assessment material which consolidates day-to-day observations, providing evidence of learning for report cards or any other report as needed.
- b) Enhance the school setting by adding a sustained reflective oral³ practice (Chabanne and Bucheton, 2002, and Plessis-Bélair, 2010) through structured discussions (e.g., *Touchstones*[®] *Discussion Project*, Manitoba Education, 2013) which allow students to reflect on topics relating to their personal experience and to express their understanding of a variety of phenomena in French. In addition to fostering the development of high-level thinking skills, this reflective oral practice draws on experience-based oral communication (from everyday situations) and therefore gives students the opportunity to learn French expressions and vocabulary that go beyond school-based oral communication and writing. The group discussions also help build their ease and confidence in speaking French in public (Girouard, 2013).
- c) Value and encourage students' experience as two-language learners and users by:
- Helping them become aware of the advantages of knowing more than one language — linguistic multi-competence (Cook, 2008, cited on the Wikipedia website);

³ Reflecting and discovering new concepts, learning to name and discuss them, and appreciating one's personal viewpoint and that of others, are just some of the activities that promote the development of high-level thinking skills in a context of discussions guided by the teacher, who helps students put their understanding into words. Such oral exchanges are known as "reflective oral" language opportunities. (Plessis-Bélair)

- Commending and encouraging them — especially adolescents — to take the next step and to assume responsibility for learning and proficiency in two languages;
- Exposing them to other languages and by encouraging them to learn a third or a fourth language, because adding another language and opening up to another culture become easier and more interesting after learning a second language;
- Exposing them to role models who have walked the walk and can talk the talk. In addition to bringing such individuals into the schools, there are other useful resources available (for example, see Canadian Parents for French – MB, 2012; Ferguson, 2011);
- Having their family, peers and community become aware of the advantages of a linguistic multi-competence and the fact that they can support and validate language learning by participating in cultural activities and by organizing community events (Girouard and Drzystek, 2012).

REFERENCES

- Association canadienne des professeurs d'immersion (ACPI). *Qu'est-ce que l'immersion*. <http://www.acpi.ca/a-propos/qu-est-ce-que-l-immersion>, (17 jun. 2013).
- Canadian Parents for French – MB. "French: An Opportunity of a Lifetime." *French for life*. 2012. Available online at <http://www.frenchforlife.ca/careers.cfm>.
- Chabanne, Jean-Charles, and Dominique Bucheton. *Parler et écrire pour penser, apprendre et se construire, L'écrit et l'oral réflexifs*. Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2002.
- Council of Europe. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. United Kingdom, Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Ferguson, Cdr Rob. "Learning a second language provides lessons in innovative learning." *Lookout Newspaper*. 15 August 2011: p. 5. Available online at <http://www.lookoutnewspaper.com/issues/56/2011-08-15-33.pdf>.
- Forget, Dominique, "Le bilinguisme, c'est for me... dable!" *Québec Science* December 2011 – January 2012: 18-23.
- Girouard, Florence. "Touchstones® Discussions — Reflect to Express, Express to Reflect." *Manitoba Education*. October 2013, p. 4. Available online at <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/newsletter/previous/10-2013.pdf>.
- Girouard, Florence, and Sandra Drzystek. "The Added Value of Learning Another Language." *Manitoba Education*. May 2012, p. 6. Available online at http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/newsletter/previous/05_2012.pdf.
- Light Shields, David. "Character as the Aim of Education." *Phi Delta Kappan* May 2011: 48-53.
- LYSTER, Roy. *Learning and Teaching Languages through Content: A Counterbalanced Approach*, Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 2007, 161 p.
- Manitoba Education. *La communication orale au quotidien en immersion française*. Bureau de l'éducation française Division. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education, 2010. Available online at <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/m12/eval/coq/index.html>.
- Manitoba Education. "Ensemble multimédia – Interagir avec aisance et précision à l'oral." *Évaluation : Documents d'appui et outils dévaluation*, 2013. Available online at <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/m12/eval/multimedia/index.html>.
- Manitoba Education. "Projet de discussion Touchstones®." *Évaluation : Documents d'appui et outils d'évaluation*, 2013. <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/m12/frpub/me/touchstones/index.html>. (11 Oct. 2013).
- Plessis-Bélaïr, Ginette. "La compréhension, l'apprentissage et le développement de la langue parlée en contexte d'oral réflexif à la maternelle", in Doyon, Denise, and Carole Fisher. 2010, *Langage et pensée à la maternelle*, Collection Éducation-Recherche, Québec, Presses de l'Université du Québec.
- Saul, John Ralston. "French Immersion Students: Proud, Engaged, Global Citizens." French Immersion Students in Manitoba Conference. Manitoba Education. Victoria Inn Hotel, Winnipeg, MB, 18 March 2011. Keynote Address.
- Saul, John Ralston. "Speech on the Occasion of the Official Opening of *Le Français pour l'avenir* National Conference." Winnipeg, MB, 5 April 2001. <http://archive.gg.ca/media/doc.asp?lang=e&DocID=1363> (22 Jun. 2013).
- Wikipedia. "Multi-competence." <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multi-competence>. (19 jun. 2013).