

Helping your child become bilingual

Source: Canadian Parents for French

Why Learn French?

- Learning a second language enhances first language skills
- Second-language learners have larger vocabularies
- Knowing another language gives you enhanced appreciation of your own cultural identity
- Second language learners are self-confident and independent
- Language learning results in increased creativity and variety of expression
- Languages are important for travel and business
- Having a second or third language means more job opportunities

The Science and Math Myths

Students in French Immersion follow the Manitoba Science and Math curriculum, which is the same for both English instruction and French Immersion. The majority of the concepts are based on words that are similar and students are able to transfer knowledge and skills from one language to the other. Whether simple discoveries by Early Years students, or complex investigations of concepts in Senior Years, students are using new words and increasing their knowledge of Science and Math.

Provincial test scores show that French Immersion students perform as well or better in Science and Math than their peers in the English program. On national tests thirteen and sixteen year-olds, French second-language students performed as well or better than their peers in the English program.

What about English?

Students in Manitoba learn to read in English first, in grade one, then in French, in grade two. National tests of reading and writing skills show that students in second-language programs score equally well or better in comprehension and expression than those in English-only programs. In Immersion, English language skills are taught intensively in blocks comprising approximately 25% of the school day. Speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing are essential learning outcomes. The Language Arts Curriculum for Immersion takes advantage of the fact that in studying two languages children receive double exposure to language skills. Skills are readily transferred between languages. In Early Years, students may experience a slight lag in mechanics like capitalization and spelling. This is a normal part of the process of second language acquisition. By the Middle Years, studies show they have enhanced first-language skills.

How Can Parents Help?

Read, read and then read some more, is the advice of teachers everywhere. Share the joy of reading with your children. Enjoy picture-books with the youngest and then move on to stories and novels with older children. Make reading a family affair!

Libraries can supply books for all fields of interest. Remember, they have book and cassette sets in French, as well as interactive CD-ROMs for you and your children to enjoy together.

How Does Immersion Work?

Early Immersion begins in Kindergarten or Grade 1. Kindergarten is 100% French. The teacher speaks French most of the time, except in case of emergency or if a student is in distress. Students usually speak English. The purpose of this year is to accustom the children to hearing French. While they may speak some French in Kindergarten, it is normal for the students to speak to each other or to respond to the teacher in English.

In Grades 1 to 6, the students study in French 75% of their day, with 25% or approximately one our devoted to English Language Arts. Students learn to read in English in Grade 1, then in Grade 2. [In St. Boniface Immersion schools, English begins in Grade 2].

In Grades 5 to 8, students study subjects like Math, Science, Social Studies, Music and Phys.Ed in French, for 50-75% of their school day.

In Senior 1 to Senior 4, students must take 50% of their courses in French, to graduate with a Manitoba Immersion diploma.

French Immersion is...?

- An effective way for children to become fluent in French while achieving the same objectives as the regular program
- Designed for children whose first language is NOT French and whose parents do NOT speak French
- Open to all children registering for Kindergarten to Grade 1
- A gentle and natural way of acquiring a language
- A choice for all children
- An approach which enhances the child's first language skills
- A contributor to tolerance and an appreciation for cultural diversity
- A door to future travel, study and career choices
- A choice that has benefited thousands of students since the 1960's
- A choice that gives your child a life-long openness to other languages

French Immersion is a recognized educational program. Curriculum and support materials are provided by the Department of Education and Training. Expectations and assessments are the same as those in the English Language program. Specific information about the program in your school can be obtained by calling the school or the school division office.