French Immersion For All:
Supporting, Encouraging and Inspiring Parents of Students with Learning Difficulties
in the French Immersion Programs in Ontario

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to design an accessible, research-based resource for parents\(^1\) of children with learning difficulties in the French Immersion (FI) program in Ontario. The resource aimed to provide parents with current, empirical information relevant to the topic of students with learning difficulties in the FI program; to identify the most effective, pedagogically sound remediation strategies for parents to use at home to support their children’s learning; and, to provide a compilation of resources to enhance parents’ involvement and confidence in their ability to support their children’s special learning needs in the FI program.

The Overlapping Spheres of Influence model was used as the framework for this project; the model indicates that a child’s development at home and at school overlap and a strong, positive relationship between parents and a school can have a positive impact on student achievement (Epstein, 2001). Information for this resource was collected through a careful selection and analysis of documents, including a variety of handbooks for parents of children in the French Immersion program in Ontario and relevant Ontario Ministry of Education documents. The Backwards Design model was used to inform the structure and design of the resource. Components for the resource were modelled after parent engagement kits developed by the Council of Ontario Directors in Education (C.O.D.E), and include elements such as a parent resource guide, a workshop template and accompanying Blackline master activity sheets, a reproducible fact sheet, and a list of online resources to support parents of students with learning difficulties in the FI program.

This resource intends to fill a gap in the current literature for parents of children in the FI program in Ontario, by addressing concerns related to the learning needs of students with learning difficulties in theFI program.

\(^1\) In this project, the term parents will be used to refer to all parents, guardians, and legal caregivers who have the primary responsibility of looking after a child with exceptionalities in the French Immersion program.
learning difficulties, because at the present time, no such document for parents in Ontario exists. This project may be presented to the local school board and will be available to share widely through networks for FI teachers and parents to support their goal to improve parent involvement and the support of students with learning difficulties in the FI programs across Ontario.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The last two years have been two of the greatest, most fulfilling years of my life. After a decade of working as an elementary school teacher in various classroom settings, I was beginning to feel that I had more questions than answers. As most teachers can attest, our lives are often so busy with the daily tasks of planning, implementing, tutoring, marking, reporting, and supporting student and parent needs that we rarely have the time or energy to do the kind of professional development we would like. For this reason, I am incredibly grateful to have had the privilege of being able to go back to school, as a seasoned teacher, to learn, network with colleagues, and find the many answers to my questions.

This project has been an incredible journey that has taken me in many different directions. Throughout the last two years, Dr. Lynda Colgan has been my greatest supporter. Dr. Colgan’s passion and commitment towards community outreach, and her dedication to helping parents in communities across Ontario, is what inspired me to focus my research on parent engagement in the French Immersion program. I want to thank Dr. Colgan for her gentle guidance, constant support, and most of all, for never ceasing to believe in me.

I would also like to thank Dr. Nancy Hutchinson for being my second reader. Dr. Hutchinson played an integral role throughout my project by providing me with positive, constructive feedback, and offering sound advice and guidance on aspects related to children with learning difficulties.

While this project has been a wonderful personal and professional journey, it has not been without a few unforeseen bumps along the way. I would not have been successful without the constant support and encouragement of my loving family and friends. First, I want to thank my husband Erik who encouraged me to complete my MEd degree, and supported me
throughout the last two years with his patience and understanding. I also want to also thank my two amazing, spirited, loving daughters, Mia and Sophie. You inspire me every day to be a better person and to help other parents in their quest to also be the best, most supportive parents they can be for their children. I love you and hope your love of learning takes you on many exciting adventures and continues throughout your lifetime, too.
# Table of Contents

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................................................................... ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................................................................................................................................ iv

Chapter 1 Introduction ............................................................................................................................................................... 1
  Purpose ......................................................................................................................................................................................... 3
  Key Terms ..................................................................................................................................................................................... 4
  Rationale ..................................................................................................................................................................................... 5
  Method ....................................................................................................................................................................................... 9
  Implications ............................................................................................................................................................................... 9
  Overview of the Project ............................................................................................................................................................. 10

Chapter 2 Literature Review ...................................................................................................................................................... 11
  The History of the French Immersion Program .......................................................................................................................... 12
    Goals of the FI program ............................................................................................................................................................ 13
    Associated Benefits of the FI program ........................................................................................................................................ 13
  The French Immersion program and students with learning difficulties .................................................................................... 15
  Attrition Rates in the FI program ................................................................................................................................................ 19
  Consequences of Transfer Out of the FI Program .......................................................................................................................... 21

Effective Interventions in the French Immersion program ......................................................................................................... 23

Parent Involvement in Ontario’s Schools ....................................................................................................................................... 32
  Brofenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory and Epstein’s Overlapping Spheres of Influence ......................................................... 33
  Needs Analysis: Parents of Students with learning difficulties in Ontario’s French Immersion Program .................................................... 35
  Case Studies of Parents of Children with learning difficulties in the FI program ............................................................................. 37

Chapter 3 Methodology ................................................................................................................................................................. 42
  Purpose of Document Analysis ....................................................................................................................................................... 42
  Rationale of Document Analysis .................................................................................................................................................... 43
  Limitations .................................................................................................................................................................................... 44
  Selection of Documents .............................................................................................................................................................. 45
  Data Analysis ............................................................................................................................................................................... 49
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Findings</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals of the French Immersion Program</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits Associated with participation in the French Immersion program</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Support Strategies</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence of Information</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Education Policy and Curriculum Documents</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Framework for the Current Project</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource Structure and Design</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4 Discussion and Reflections</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5 The Project</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1 Introduction

As an elementary French Immersion teacher with over a decade of experience, I have witnessed a diverse range of learners successfully and confidently learn to read, write and speak in French. To a large extent, I attribute my students’ success to the positive relationships I have between our French Immersion classroom and our parent community. Parent involvement has always been a top priority throughout my career as a teacher. I strongly believe that the positive relationships I have fostered with my parent community have contributed significantly to my students’ enjoyment and success in the French Immersion program.

I have always encouraged parent involvement in my classroom. I believe that a strong, positive partnership between a class and the parents has a positive effect on students’ happiness, motivation, achievement, and success. To welcome and encourage parents to become active participants in our classroom community, my practices have included daily communication with parents in students’ agendas, monthly newsletters, regular parent-teacher conferences, invitations to parents to watch student plays and science discovery days. My open-door policy has welcomed parents into our classroom to assist with students’ learning, to volunteer on class excursions or to ask questions about their child’s development.

Most parents of students in the French Immersion program do not speak French; however, they want to be actively involved in their children’s bilingual education. It comes as no surprise then that the one question posed to me most consistently as a French Immersion teacher has been “How can I support my child if I don’t speak French?” Finding appropriate supports for such parents has been one of the greatest challenges that I have faced as an educator. In particular, parents whose children were experiencing academic difficulty wanted and needed strategies that they could use at home to help support their children’s learning. Despite my
greatest efforts and attempts to encourage them to keep their child in the French Immersion program, I saw many of my students transfer out of FI and into the regular English program in order to receive the support services they required. Parents of academically challenged children felt discouraged by the lack of resources available to them, ill-equipped to support their children’s learning in the French Immersion program at home, and poorly informed during the important decision-making junctures impacting their children’s education.

I am now a parent myself who is considering the French Immersion program for my own two children. At no other time has parent involvement been a more important priority in my life than it is now as I look forward to my own children’s future. Both my husband and I are committed to being actively involved in our daughters’ education and while we believe in the value of having a second language, our first priority is to ensure that our daughters feel supported at school and at home.

My personal interests as a parent, as well as my professional goals as a French Immersion teacher, are what led me to pursue my Master’s degree in Education, with a focus on helping parents support their children’s learning needs in the French Immersion program. I believe that parents can be stronger supporters for their children’s special learning needs in the French Immersion program if they are provided with the essential information, necessary strategies, and appropriate resources they require for their children to succeed.
Purpose

The overall purpose of this project was to create an accessible resource for parents of children with learning difficulties in the French Immersion (FI) program. The project was in response to recommendation 2.2 in Canadian Parents for French (CPF) Executive Summary of the State of French Second Language (FSL) Education in Canada (2012). Recommendation 2.2, under the Key Focus Area of Resources, advised that a user-friendly, relevant, and evidence-based resource be created to be accessible to all FSL stakeholders.

This new resource was developed to complement the visions and goals to improve FSL programs and the support provided to academically-challenged students in French Immersion and other FSL programs. The objectives of the current project were three-fold: to inform parents of children with learning difficulties in the FI program of the most current, research-based information on how the FI program can meet the needs of students with learning difficulties; to provide parents of children with learning difficulties in the FI program with effective, pedagogically sound strategies to support their children’s FSL learning at home; and, to heighten parents’ awareness of resources, services and other supports available related to special education in the French Immersion program.

The parent resource developed for this project will be made available to share widely through networks for FI teachers such as The Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers, TFO Education, and The Centre franco-ontarien de ressources pédagogiques to support their common goal to improve parent involvement in French Second Language programs across Ontario.
Key Terms

French Immersion (FI) program:

In the context of this study, the French Immersion (FI) program refers to the early French Immersion program in which students receive 100% of their instruction in French from kindergarten until the end of Grade 2, after which point the proportion of French instruction gradually decreases while the English instruction gradually increases so that by the end of elementary school the two languages are balanced.

Students with learning difficulties:

In this project, the term students with learning difficulties refers to students in Kindergarten to Grade 6 French Immersion in Ontario who experience academic difficulty and have challenges learning grade level Ontario curriculum expectations in the regular French Immersion class setting. The nature and severity of the learning difficulty may vary. For the purpose of this project, the term students with learning difficulties refers to three subsets of students: students who have been formally identified with a learning disability, students who are at-risk for reading disabilities, and students who have not yet been formally identified but who are experiencing difficulty meeting grade level expectations. As the literature on elementary French Immersion students with other learning exceptionalities, such as hearing impairment, autism, ADHD, Down’s Syndrome, etc. is virtually non-existent, this project aims to address the needs of students who have learning difficulties related to a learning disability, students who have been identified as at-risk for a reading disabilities, and students who are not identified but have presented difficulty learning in the French Immersion classroom setting.

Parent Involvement:

The term Parent Involvement refers to the level of participation of a parent in their child’s education and school, including volunteering in the classroom, communication with the
classroom teacher, support with homework, participation in school activities and initiatives, involvement in decision making, as well as an understanding their child’s individual learning needs.

Attrition:

In order to maintain consistency with previous studies (Obadia & Theriault, 1997) the term attrition is defined as the incidence of students enrolled in the French Immersion program who leave the FI program to transfer into the regular English program.

Rationale

Parents play a vital role in the development and education of their children. Research has shown that student achievement improves when parents play an active role in their children’s education (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012). Students are more likely to have a positive attitude towards school, be more motivated take academic risks, have better behaviour and social skills, and have greater academic success when their parents are actively engaged in supporting their learning at school (Ministry of Education, Parent Engagement, 2010).

Parents of children in the French Immersion program play an equally important role, even if they do not have the ability to speak or read in French. The Ontario Ministry of Education Framework for French as a Second Language (FSL), states that parent involvement is a critical component of the FSL goals, and that parent engagement in FSL programs highlights, for students, the value that is placed on learning additional languages, especially French in Ontario.

In 2012, Canadian Parents for French (CPF), a national organization committed to supporting Ministries of Education, teacher organizations, parents and other groups concerned about French as a Second Language (FSL) education in Canada, released their Executive Annual Report entitled the State of French Second Language Education in Canada: Academically-Challenged
Students and French Second Language Programs. The purpose of this Annual Report was to make clear recommendations to the Ministries of Education to improve the effectiveness of FSL programs for all students. One of the recommendations in the Report was “that a national/regional resource be created. It must be user-friendly, relevant, accessible to all stakeholders, and evidence based.” (CPF, Annual Report, 2012, p. 17). This project aimed to fulfill this recommendation.

In 2013, the Ontario Ministry of Education released a new document, *A Framework for French as a Second Language (FSL), K-12*. The document was developed in response to a call for “a useable framework to be developed at the Ministry of Education level to systematically support academically-challenged students in French Immersion and French-second-language programs. (CPF, Annual Report, 2012). *The Framework for FSL* (2013) lists three goals. For the purpose of this project, only a summary of the third goal will be addressed. The third goal aims to increase student, educator, parent, and community engagement in FSL. The goal statement declares:

Engaged parents are committed to supporting their children in their learning. Community engagement leads to partnership opportunities that provide authentic French experiences for FSL students both within and beyond the classroom. Student achievement is enhanced when all stakeholders are engaged and place a high value on learning; therefore, increasing awareness of the benefits of learning FSL is critical.

(FSL, K-12, 2013, p. 9)

This project aimed to meet these goals by creating a resource for parents that outlines the myriad benefits associated with the French Immersion program, and bilingualism, and to provide
parents with effective coaching strategies to enable them to be more engaged, active participants in their children’s second language education.

This project intended to also address a provincial concern for the lack of information, support services and resources available to parents of children in the FI program who are living in Ontario. In 2004, CPF published a report, *The State of French as a Second Language Education in Canada*, and pointed directly to the province of Ontario for an inadequacy in FSL information available to parents. It stated that “information regarding FSL guidelines, policies and programmes is not always readily available to parents. There is no clear provincial policy governing the provision of this information. The amount shared with school communities varies by school board” (CPF, 2004, p. 21). In terms of parent involvement, the document reports that “parents are not consistently involved in FSL decision-making and school board requests for input from parents vary across the province” (CPF, 2004, p. 21). This statement indicated a clear need for increased parental input in the decision making processes for students in the FI program. This project was developed with these concerns in mind, and aimed to provide parents of children in the FI programs in Ontario with evidence-based information, relevant resources, and support services to help them be more informed, confident decision makers in their children’s education. Various other Canadian provinces, such as Alberta and Manitoba, have achieved this goal of improving parental communication, and have developed resources for parents of children in the FI program, and have included chapters on meeting the needs of exceptional learners. However, Ministry of Education policies, programs and support services differ across the country, therefore, it is critical that a resource is developed to specifically target parents of children in the French Immersion program in the province of Ontario.
The Ontario Ministry of Education recently released a new parent resource titled *Supporting your Child’s Success in French Immersion and Extended French, Kindergarten to Grade 8- A Parent Guide (2014)*. The resource was intended to address the call for improved parent engagement in the FSL programs in Ontario (CPF, 2012) by providing caregivers with practical suggestions for simple, everyday things that they can do at home to enhance their child’s learning in the French Immersion and Extended French programs. The *Parent Guide* does not address the topic of academically-challenged students in the French Immersion program in Ontario and fails to provide the research-based evidence that shows how the French Immersion program can be a suitable program option for students with learning difficulties. As the issue of students with learning difficulties in the FI program was overlooked, there was no mention of effective intervention and remediation strategies, online supports, or resources for parents of children with learning difficulties in the FI program. Such information could foster greater communication and partnerships between parents and schools, as well as help to strengthen parents’ knowledge, understanding, and confidence when making important decisions regarding their child’s education.

This MEd project aims to fill a gap in the current literature by creating a new parent resource titled, *French Immersion For All: A Tool-Kit to Support, Encourage, and Inspire Parents of Students with Learning Exceptionalities in the French Immersion Program in Ontario*, and to provide parents of students with learning difficulties with the essential information, strategies and resources they need to be stronger, more informed supporters of their child’s learning and development in the FI program.
Method

The Overlapping Spheres of Influence model was used as the framework for this project. The model indicates that a child’s development at home and at school overlap and a strong, positive relationship between parents and a school can have a positive impact on student achievement (Epstein, 2001). Data for this resource were collected through a careful selection and analysis of documents, including a variety of handbooks for parents of children in the French Immersion program in Ontario and relevant Ontario Ministry of Education documents. The Backwards Design model was used to inform the structure and design of the new parent resource, *French Immersion For All: A Tool-Kit to Support, Encourage, and Inspire Parents of Students with Learning Exceptionalities in the French Immersion Program in Ontario*. Components for the resource were modelled after parent engagement kits developed by the Council of Ontario Directors in Education (C.O.D.E), and include elements such as a parent resource guide, a workshop template and accompanying Blackline master activity sheets, a reproducible fact sheet, and a list of online resources to support parents of students with learning difficulties in the FI program.

Implications

This project aimed to fill a gap in the existing literature by creating a new resource for parents of children with learning difficulties in the French Immersion programs in Ontario, because at the current time, no such document exists. This new parent resource, *French Immersion for All*, may strengthen parents’ understanding that children with learning difficulties can succeed in the FI program when provided with the appropriate supports and services at home and at school. The new parent resource may also shed light on the importance of parent involvement in FSL programs and inspire parents across Ontario to become more involved in
their child’s FSL education in the classroom, school, and district levels. Furthermore, educators and school administrators could be inspired to encourage more parent involvement in the French Immersion classrooms by creating more opportunities for parents of children with learning difficulties in the FI programs in Ontario. Finally, this project may initiate many important conversations amongst parents, teachers, administrators, and other people interested in strengthening the attitudes and beliefs that students with learning difficulties can succeed in Ontario’s French Immersion programs.

Overview of the Project

In this chapter, I introduced the topic and outlined the purpose of the project. In Chapter 2, I present a review of the literature that examines the suitability of the French Immersion program for students with learning difficulties, the interventions and remediation programs to support students with learning difficulties in the FI program, and topics related to parent involvement in the French Immersion programs. In Chapter 3, I provide the methods of the project, explaining the conceptual framework that informed the research design, data collection, and analysis of data. Chapter 4 is the new parent resource, *French Immersion for All*, that was developed for this MEd project. Chapter 5 presents the possible implications of the project and how it contributes to the area of parent involvement and children with learning difficulties in the FI program. The project concludes with my final thoughts and reflections.
Chapter 2 Literature Review

The following literature review is divided into four sections to provide the reader with a greater understanding of the major issues and questions at the heart of this study. The first section of this chapter is a review of the French Immersion (FI) program’s history, goals, and the putative benefits associated with the FI program in Ontario. The second section of this chapter reviews literature which contributes to the understanding that children with learning difficulties can benefit from the French Immersion program experience. Included in this section is a review of the intervention strategies and remediation programs found to be effective for students with various exceptionalities in the FI program, as well as a review of the consequences when students with learning difficulties transfer out of the FI program and into the English program. The third section reviews studies that have explored the impact of parent involvement on student success. Literature on parent involvement in the French Immersion program is scarce, and studies that examine the impact of parent involvement on the achievement of children with learning difficulties in the French Immersion program are virtually non-existent. Therefore, this section reviews two case studies that enhance the understanding of the barriers and challenges parents of children with learning difficulties in the French Immersion program face to access the necessary services and resources to support their children. Included in this section on parent involvement is a review of Brofenbrenner’s (1979) Ecological Systems theory and the overlapping spheres of influence framework (Epstein, 2001) which are the theoretical frameworks used for this project. Finally, this chapter concludes with a summary of the findings as they relate to parent involvement of children with learning difficulties in the French Immersion program.
The History of the French Immersion Program

Canada’s French Immersion (FI) program began in 1965 as a class of 25 students in the small suburb of St. Lambert, Quebec (Lambert & Tucker, 1972). The program was initiated by a group of English speaking parents who were unhappy with the traditional core French approach to teaching French. The parents sought to find a form of education that would provide their children with improved opportunities to learn to speak, read and write in French so that they could achieve functional bilingualism (Mannavarayan, 2002). The FI program was designed to provide academic instruction in French to children from non-French speaking families. Initially launched as a research project, the FI program was funded by the St. Lambert Research Experiment. Almost 50 years later, the FI program has grown from a population of 25 students to over 342,000 students across all Canadian provinces and territories (Statistics Canada, 2013). The French Immersion program is now globally recognized as one of the greatest models for second language acquisition and has been hailed as “the great Canadian success story” (Hayden, 1988, p. 18).

The French Immersion program is one of several French as a Second Language (FSL) programs offered to students in publicly funded school boards in Ontario. The Ontario Ministry of Education, French as a Second Language (2013) document mandates French is the language of instruction for a minimum of 50 per cent of the total instructional time at every grade level of the French Immersion program, and that by the end of Grade 8, students must have received a minimum of 3,800 hours of instruction in French. Most school boards offer the French Immersion program beginning in Junior Kindergarten or Grade 1. Although the French Immersion curriculum is written for a Grade 1 start, many FI programs starting in Grade 1 provide instruction in French in all subjects (i.e., for 100 per cent of total instructional time).
Once students reach Grade 3, they begin to receive one period of formal instruction in English each day. Instruction in English may then be gradually extended to include other subjects. By the end of Grade 8, students may receive up to 50 per cent of their instruction in English.

Currently in Ontario, there are two French Immersion programs for parents to choose from, the Early French Immersion program, which refers to the FI program that begins in Junior Kindergarten, Senior Kindergarten, or Grade 1, depending on the school board, and the Late FI program, which begins in Grade 7. Evidence has shown that while students who enroll in the Late FI program are usually at par with their Early FI program peers in terms of reading, writing and verbal comprehension by the end of Grade 8, they may, however, lag slightly behind their early FI peers in the area of oral language (Mannavarayan, 2002).

**Goals of the FI program**

The goals of the French Immersion program are for students to use French to communicate and interact effectively in a variety of social settings; for students to learn about Canada, its two official languages, and other cultures; to appreciate and acknowledge the interconnectedness and interdependence of the global community; for students to be responsible for their own learning as they work independently and in groups; to use effective language learning strategies; and for students to become lifelong language learners for personal growth and for active participation as world citizens (Ontario FSL, 2013).

**Associated Benefits of the FI program**

A considerable body of research shows that there are many benefits associated with learning a second language, including many cognitive and social benefits. Parents are aware of these benefits, citing bilingualism as the primary reason why they decide to enroll their children
in the FI program (Mannavarayan, 2002). Parents believe that the ability to communicate effectively and comfortably in French will give their children more job opportunities and allow their children to attain a more comfortable socio-economic level later in life. Genesee (2008) states that the French Immersion program is “a form of education that is regarded as being the most effective educational means for attaining functional bilingualism” (Genesee, 2008, pg. 141).

The French Immersion program is reported to increase students’ exposure to cultural diversity and enhance their respect for different cultures. Exposure to a second language is believed to develop students’ awareness of how languages and cultures are connected, and helps students to develop an appreciation, and respect for the diversity in Canada, as well as in other countries around the world (Framework for FSL, 2013). Knowledge of a second language is associated with an enhanced enjoyment of cultural experiences, including music, art, theatre, literature and travel. Knowing a second language may also increase students’ ability to form personal and professional relationships with people around the world by facilitating meaningful communication (Mannavarayan, 2002).

In addition to strengthening students’ ability to communicate in French, knowledge of a second language has been shown to strengthen students’ first-language skills. The ability to speak two or more languages may enhance students’ cognitive development, reasoning and creative-thinking skills (Mannavarayan, 2002). It has also been reported that second-language learners tend to be more divergent thinkers, with improved memory and longer attention spans (Halsall, 1994). In short, parents want their children to be bilingual in order to be able to express themselves in all types of situations, including school and work.
The French Immersion program and students with learning difficulties

In the last three decades, there has been a paucity of research examining the suitability of the French Immersion program for students with learning difficulties. Following the initiation of the French Immersion program 40 years ago, there was a surge in interest and academic research that investigated the suitability of the French Immersion program for students with learning difficulties (Genesee, 1976; Bruck, 1978, Cummins, 1984, Wiss, 1989). Studies examining the suitability of the FI program for students with academic challenges consistently found that students with learning difficulties experienced no greater disadvantage in the French Immersion program than they would in the English language program in terms of their English language development and overall academic achievement (Genesee, 2004). Studies also found that students with learning difficulties would face the same academic challenges if they were enrolled in the English language program (Genesee, 2007). The seminal literature in the field of French Immersion has not, to the best of my knowledge, been expanded upon in recent years; however, these earlier studies are critical for the understanding that students with learning difficulties are able to be successful in the FI program.

In one of the first quantitative studies in this field, Genesee (1976) sought to investigate the suitability of the French Immersion program for students with low intellectual ability in both the elementary and secondary school panels. Genesee (1976) aimed to evaluate the role of intelligence in the acquisition of French as a second language in French Immersion and English language programs in schools across Montreal, Quebec. A total of 341 Anglophone students were selected for the study. Students were in Grades 4, 7 and 11 of either the French Immersion program or the English language program. Table 2 of the report categorizes participant sample sizes by grade, gender, and IQ score (Genesee, 1976, p.273). There was a relatively equal
distribution of students in the English and French comparison groups. Students’ intelligence was assessed using standardized I.Q tests. The students were classified in groups according to their grade level, program, and level of intelligence. Levels of intelligence were grouped as average (IQ between 90 and 110), below-average (IQ less than 85), or above average (IQ above 115) based on their intelligence test scores. Genesee (1976) posited that IQ tests typically correlate positively and significantly with performance test of academic achievement, such as reading, mathematics, and science. Students underwent a battery of tests to assess their language development in terms of their reading, writing and listening skills in both the English and French language. All students were administered a French listening comprehension test, French reading test, le Test de Rendement en Francais, and le Test de Rendement en Mathematiques. The listening comprehension test consisted of 37 multiple-choice questions which measured listening skills and were presented using a tape-recorder. The reading assessment consisted of a test developed for native French-speaking children and measured word skills and comprehension of text. Le Test de Rendement en Francais was a standardized test developed by La Commission des Ecoles Catholiques de Montreal for use with French-speaking students. The Test de Rendement en Mathematiques was similarly developed by La Commission des Ecoles Catholiques de Montreal however measured mathematical skills and abilities. In summary, the various tests aimed to assess formal or academic language usage and that related to informal or interpersonal language usage.

Results of the English language assessments were presented in a table for each grade level, comparing the results of above-average, average, and below-average students in each of the two programs. The data revealed that below-average students in all three grade levels in the French Immersion program did not score significantly lower on their English language
development or academic achievement tests compared to the similar group of students in the English language program. The results of the French language assessments indicated that below-average students in the French Immersion program in all three grade levels scored significantly higher on their French reading, writing and oral language assessments compared to their below-average peers in the English language program who were receiving French language instruction in the conventional core French program. The finding suggest that IQ level is not the exclusive or most important variable in predicating second language learning success. Genesee concludes that “there seems to be no empirical basis for excluding low-ability students from these (FI) programs” (Genesee, 1976, p. 279).

In summary, this seminal quantitative study provided preliminary evidence to suggest that students with low levels of intellectual abilities were at no more of a disadvantage in the FI program than they would be in the regular English language program. The findings provided preliminary evidence to suggest that students with low intellectual ability were able to benefit from the FI program experience in the form of enhanced French language skills. As the purpose of the study was to explore the role of IQ in students’ ability to learn French as a second language, more research would be necessary to investigate the impact of specific learning disabilities on students’ ability to learn a second language. Students with normal IQ may have one or more learning disabilities which would necessitate the need for additional supports for the student in the FSL program. Genesee did not specify if any students in the average or above-average groups had been identified with a learning disability. This may be due to the limited knowledge and understanding on the topic of learning disabilities at the time of the study, particularly how learning disabilities impact students’ ability to learn a second language.
It was this group of students, children with normal intelligence but with a learning disability, that captivated the interest of a researcher at the University of McGill, in Montreal, Quebec. Using a quantitative approach, Bruck (1978) sought to investigate the suitability of the FI program for a group of Grade 3 students identified as learning disabled with a language impairment. In order to examine the suitability of the FI program for students with language impairment, Bruck (1978) identified subgroups of Grade 3 FI immersion and non-immersion students who were ‘impaired’ or ‘normal’ in their first language development. Students were identified based on teachers’ judgments, an oral interview, and a battery of diagnostic tests. Bruck administered literacy and academic achievement tests in English to the students over a six week period. Results of the study indicated that language impaired FI students scored at the same level as similarly language impaired students in the English program and that both groups scored lower than their ‘normal,’ or developmentally average, peers in the same programs. Results of the study also revealed that the language impaired students had developed significantly higher levels of proficiency in French than both subgroups of non-French Immersion students, who were receiving French instruction in the conventional core French program. This finding illustrated that participation in the French Immersion program had benefited the language impaired students with significantly superior French language skills compared to students receiving French language instruction in the conventional core French program. In conclusion, Bruck’s findings supported those of Genesee (1976) who found that participation in the FI program had benefited the more academically challenged students.

A subsequent study by Paradis, Crago, Genesee, and Rice (2003) sought to determine whether students with specific language impairments (SLI) were at significantly higher risk for language difficulties if they were learning a second language in the FI program. SLI was defined
as children who were at least one standard deviation below the mean on measures of language but normal levels of intellectual development. The participants for the study were two groups of seven-year old children, one group of monolingual children and one group of English-French bilingual children, all of whom were identified with a SLI. Results of the study found that the bilingual children with SLI exhibited the same language profiles as the monolingual children with SLI, indicating that being bilingual did not result in a unique pattern of impairment. Additionally, Paradis et. al. (2003) found that the linguistic impairments of the bilingual children with SLI were of the same magnitude as those of the monolingual children with SLI, indicating that being bilingual did not seem to result in greater impairment.

In summary, these studies provide strong evidence to suggest that the French Immersion program can be a suitable, alternative educational program for students with various learning difficulties (Bruck, 1978; Genesee, 1976; Paradis, 2003) and for those who want to learn French as a second language. Despite the evidence, however, French Immersion students frequently leave the Program before attaining French fluency. The following section addresses the issue of attrition in the FI program.

**Attrition Rates in the FI program**

Despite the substantial evidence that suggests the French Immersion program is a ‘suitable’ program for students with learning difficulties, students who are faced with academic challenges drop out of the French Immersion program at an alarming rate. One report estimated that one-third of students transfer out of the French Immersion program and into the regular English program by the end of Grade 3 (Halsall, 1994). A second study reported that only 20% of students enrolled in early French Immersion programs remain in the program until the end of Grade 12 (Bournot-Trites, 2004).
The rise in the French Immersion attrition rate in the past decade has procured a great deal of attention from researchers and provoked concern among French Immersion stakeholders. In a qualitative study which sought to understand the factors that influenced students’ decisions to transfer out of the FI program and into the English language program, Obadia and Theriault (1997) used questionnaires to collect teachers and administrators perspectives on the attrition rate in French Immersion programs in school districts across British Columbia. Questionnaires were distributed to participants in 4 school districts with the French Immersion program in British Columbia: 45 questionnaires to French coordinators, 38 questionnaires to school principals, and 31 questionnaires to French Immersion teachers were distributed, representing 44% of the schools with French Immersion in the four districts. Open-ended questions were developed around four areas of inquiry: participants’ perceptions of the FI attrition rate; participants’ perceptions of the action taken to reduce the FI attrition rate; participants perceptions regarding the reasons for FI attrition; and suggestions how to reduce the FI attrition rate. Results from the study were coded, categorized, and summarized in Table 6, under seven main themes which emerged from participants’ responses. The results of the study were extensive therefore only the results pertaining to the topic of current project have been summarized.

Obadia and Theriault (1997) reported that teachers, administrators, and parents all indicated that academic difficulty was the primary reason why students leave the FI program. The perception was that the attrition rate was highest in Grade 7 and Grade 8, when peer pressure may influence students’ decisions to transfer out of the FI program. When asked for suggestions how to reduce the FI attrition rate, 70% of French coordinators, 45% of principals, 39% of FI teachers responded and recommended improved communication with parents, improved special
education services and supports, better extra-curricular activities as ways to help retain students in the FI program.

The findings from this study shed light on a couple of important issues. In the views of adults, the lack of resources available for students with learning difficulties in the French Immersion program is a major factor in students’ decision to leave the program. As well, parents may not be adequately informed of the research on students with learning difficulties in the FI program, not included in the decision making process when it comes to students transferring out of the FI program, or not sufficiently supported in their efforts at home to support their child’s learning needs in the FI program. The findings from this study may have implications at the school district and provincial levels to improve communication between schools and parents of students with learning difficulties in the FI program.

Consequences of Transfer Out of the FI Program

In a longitudinal study carried out over an eight year period of time, Bruck (1978) examined the role of academic ability following parents’ decisions to switch students out of the early FI program. The purpose of the study was to evaluate whether students who experienced difficulty in the FI program would fare better in the English-only program. Results of the study revealed that students with learning difficulties who were switched out of the FI program and into the English program were no worse off than those students with learning difficulties who remained in the FI program. Bruck reported that students who remained in the FI program “continued to develop facility in their first language; they learn their basic academic skills at the predicted rate; they exhibited no severe behavioural problems; and, of most importance, they acquired competence in French” (Bruck, 1978, p. 88). Additionally, Bruck found that students who switched out of the FI program and into the English program expressed significantly more
negative attitudes toward school (the FI program in particular) and exhibited more behavioural
problems than the students with learning difficulties who remained in the FI program.

In a follow-up study, Bruck (1985) examined the emotional and social impact that
program transfer had on students who had transferred out of the FI program due to academic
difficulty. The participants in the study were Grade 6 students and data about students’ academic
performance was collected using a variety of academic tests provided by the students’ teachers.
Teacher and parent interviews were conducted to collect data on the psychological characteristics
of the students who had transferred out of the FI program. Bruck’s findings indicated that
switching out of the FI program could have negative consequences on students’ self-esteem and
may give them a sense of failure. Similar findings were reported by Cummins (1983), who found
that the students who transferred out of the FI program experienced feelings of frustration and
unhappiness. He reported that for some students who transferred out of the FI program, self-
esteeem was low, either because they had to repeat a grade, or because they felt the English
stream program was of lower status than the FI immersion class (Cummins, 1983). Cummins
also cautioned that “transfer to an English program may damage a child’s self-image and the
stigma of failure may compound the learning problems” (Cummins, 1983, p. 4). In a
complementary study, Wiss (1989) found that students with learning difficulties who transferred
out of the FI program had lower self-esteem, more negative attitudes, behavioural problems, and
feelings of failure for not being able to succeed in the FI program.

In summary, research has demonstrated that transfer out of the French Immersion
program may not always have positive results or be a guarantee of improved academic success
for students experiencing learning difficulties. Switching out of the FI program and into an
English-only program may not result in an improvement in a student’s academic performance.
Furthermore, transferring out of the program may have a negative impact on students’ social and emotional well-being. As evidence has suggested, switching out of the FI program in order to access required support and remediation services may come at a cost: students may receive the supports they require in the English program, however, at the cost of their social and emotional well-being.

Effective Interventions in the French Immersion program

There have been few studies that have examined the effect of interventions for French Immersion students with learning difficulties. Only four intervention studies in the French Immersion program were identified. One study examined students with learning disabilities (Rousseau, 1999); another study examined students with mild reading difficulties (Bournot-Trites, 2004); another study investigated the effectiveness of phonological awareness (PA) training in English on the PA awareness skills of at-risk FI students (MacCoubrey, 2007); while the last study explored intervention strategies for at-risk learners in French Immersion (Wise & Chen, 2010).

Rousseau (1999) used a descriptive case-study approach to examine the effectiveness of a two-year French Immersion Learning Disabilities Program (FILDP), as perceived by students, parents and teachers, in Edmonton, Alberta. The FILDP focused on strategy instruction, developing students’ awareness of their learning style and disabilities, and promoting self-esteem. The participants for the study consisted of 13 learning disabled children enrolled in a split Grade 3 and 4 Learning Disability French Immersion Program. According to the report, students learning disabilities were identified by definition of the Association of Learning Disabilities of Canada, which in the study is described as someone of “above average intellectual ability, discrepancies in performance, with both strengths and weaknesses evident, and minimal,
if any, difficulties with attendance and behaviour” (Rousseau, 1999, p. 18). Throughout a 2 year intervention period in the FILDP, the 13 students received daily academic instruction in French. The Program focused on four main elements to enhance student learning: strategy instruction based on each students’ individual needs with an emphasis on organizational skills, study skills, peer-assisted learning, problem solving, and proof-reading strategies; a Weekly Learning Disabilities Awareness session; English reading interventions, using flashcards, phonics, dictations and reading aloud; and emphasis on communication between school and home, including offering suggestions about how parents could maintain strategy use in the home as well as encouragement to ask any questions they had throughout the 2 year duration of the program.

Data for the study were collected from parents, teachers and students, post-intervention, using interviews, questionnaires and a survey using a 5-point Likert scale. Interviews with parents, teachers and students were audio-recorded, transcribed and coded using network analysis, and results from the surveys and supplementary documents provided by parents were also coded and categorized. The most frequent themes that emerged from the interviews were presented in Table 1 (p. 20), the results of the survey presented in Table 2 of the report (p. 22), and results from the questionnaire were summarized in Table 3 (p. 23).

In summary, the findings from the study provided strong evidence from students, parents, and teachers to suggest the FILDP was an effective means of improving students’ attitudes towards learning, their self-esteem, and awareness about their learning disability. Students reported an “increase in confidence, self-image, and a more positive attitude toward learning” (Rousseau, 1999, p. 20) as well as a greater awareness of their learning disabilities after participating in the 2 year FILDP. Parents reported satisfaction with the program, reporting that their children gained a lot of control over their disability and were able to be more active learners
as a result of the FILDP. Parents credited the small class sizes, provision of learning strategies, and the focus on learning deficits for their child’s enjoyment of the program. Additionally, parents reported a high degree of satisfaction with the program’s communication between school and home. According to the parents “the success of the program was mainly due to the support they received through the school, the compassion of the teachers, and the context in which free communication took place.” (Rousseau, 1999, p. 21). Parents also remarked they had an increased awareness of the nature of their children’s learning disability which enabled them to provide greater support for their children at home.

The multiple methods of data collection, including interviews, questionnaire, survey, and supplementary student reports and documents, enabled triangulation of data. Triangulation strengthens and increases trustworthiness of a study by combining various methods of data collection (Patton, 2002). Data was the perceived effectiveness of the FILDP, as reported by parents, teachers, and students; it is important to note that no quantitative measurement of student achievement, such as reading outcomes, was carried out, therefore, the results of this study represent solely the perceived benefits and effectiveness of the French Immersion Learning Disabilities Program. Future research may expand upon these findings by taking a quantitative approach to measuring student academic performance pre-treatment and post-treatment to assess the effectiveness of the program in terms of academic achievement.

One of the most significant components of this study was the emphasis the FILDP placed on regular communication with the students’ parents at home. Results from the survey indicated that 100% of parents were very satisfied or satisfied with the information they received about their child’s performance in the FILDP and 83.4% of parents were satisfied with the suggestions on how to help their learning disabled child at home while in the FILDP. Because of the strong
focus on communication between school and home, parents felt they had an important role in their child’s learning and progress, and parents felt supported in their efforts at home with their learning disabled child. As demonstrated in this study, effective communication with parents strengthens the partnership between schools and home, and may enhance student success in the French Immersion programs.

Bournot-Trites (2004) used a quantitative approach to evaluate the effectiveness of a reading intervention program in elementary schools in British Columbia. The purpose of the study was to examine if a French Immersion (FI) peer-tutoring reading program could contribute to better results in reading and improve the attitudes towards reading for Grade 2 and 3 students experiencing mild reading difficulties. The study was conducted over a two year period of time in two schools, an experimental school and the control school, in a school district in British Columbia. The participants were 16 Grade 2 French Immersion students with mild reading difficulties and 19 Grade 3 French Immersion students with mild reading difficulties. Students in the experimental schools where the peer-tutoring took place were matched with students in the control schools. The intervention for Grade 3 FI students occurred in September until March, 2003, while the intervention period for Grade 2 students occurred in January until May, 2003.

A total of 35 tutors from Grades 5 to 7 were chosen by their homeroom teachers based on the following criteria. Tutors demonstrated good work habits, punctuality, a sense of organization, patience and understanding with young children, an ability to handle discipline issues, good leadership qualities, the ability to work independently, and a high motivation to participate in the peer-tutoring program (Bournot-Trites, 2004). Parent volunteers trained the student tutors prior to the intervention. Tutors were trained about specific reading strategies including making predications, interactive reading, word identification using context and
decoding strategies, comprehension, and developing vocabulary using flashcards. Following the training of the peer tutors, the peer-tutoring intervention between tutors (Grade 5 to 7) and tutees (Grade 2 and 3) took place over 16 weeks, twice a week for 30 minutes each time. The books used during the interventions were narratives and texts at the Grade 2 and Grade 3 level. Parent volunteers supervised the organization and training sessions.

Following the 16 week peer-tutoring intervention in French, Grade 2 and 3 tutees in the control school and the experimental school underwent a French reading test, using a phonics-based instrument used by teachers at the local Learning Assistance Centre (LAC) (Bournot-Trites, 2004). The diagnostic tool consists of Grade level words of increasing difficulty according to the different French phonemes. The number of correct words read and the time taken to read the word list was recorded. The Grade 3 students only were given a second French reading test to measure their French reading comprehension, using the Barik test, which consisted of short paragraphs followed by multiple choice questions. The French test was chosen because “it was normed using French Immersion students and was the only standardized group reading test available” (Bournot-Trites, 2004, p. 7).

Raw data from the reading assessments was analyzed using ANCOVA analysis. Mean reading scores were calculated for both the experimental and control schools and presented in tables 1, 2, and 3 (p. 9). A comparison of the words read correctly (reading accuracy) results indicated that Grade 2 students from the control group scored higher (127.06 words on average) than the Grade 2 students in the experimental schools (123.06 words on average). There were no significant differences between the two groups on this variable. Similarly, on the word speed test Grade 2 students from the control group scored higher (19 words read correctly per minute) than Grade 2 students from the experimental school (18.81 words read correctly per minute).
results of the Grade 3 reading tests showed a significant difference and indicated that Grade 3 students in the experimental school scored significantly higher than Grade 3 students in the control school on all aspects except for reading comprehension. Bournot-Trites (2004) explained that the significantly negative results of the Grade 2 experimental group could be attributed to the difference of population between the experimental school and the control school. It was also suggested that the unexpected results could be attributed to a phonics reading program that was implemented at the control school at the time of the intervention.

Informally, teachers, parents and students shared their perspectives on the success and effectiveness of the peer-tutoring program, post-intervention. Bournot-Trites (2004) reported that parents perceived the peer-tutoring program to have had a beneficial impact on students’ attitudes towards reading and increased students’ motivation to read in French. Parents and students also reported that the peer-tutoring program had a beneficial effect on students’ self-confidence in their ability to read in French.

The findings from this study shed some light on the potential effectiveness of a peer-tutoring French reading intervention. Benefits of a program of this kind in French Immersion schools throughout Ontario may reach beyond reading improvement in students: peer-tutoring programs may also enhance student tutors and tutees’ leadership skills, raise students’ awareness of effective reading strategies, and may also evolve to include parents as tutors, which could improve parent engagement in French Immersion school communities.

Other studies have sought to investigate if reading interventions in students’ second language could have a positive impact on students’ reading ability in French. MacCoubrey (2007) sought to investigate if an intervention program in students’ second language could be effective at improving their phonemic awareness skills, and in turn have a positive impact on
their reading ability in French. Participants for the study were 77 English-speaking Kindergarten French Immersion students from a school district in Ontario who were considered to be at-risk for future reading difficulties. Students were identified as ‘at-risk’ based on their performance on English phonological awareness tests, English letter knowledge, and word reading tests that were administered pre-intervention. Students who scored at or below the 40th percentile on the phonological awareness and letter knowledge test in English and were able to read less than two words from the Word Identification sub-test of the Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests were selected for the study with parental consent. The 12 week, French phonological awareness (PA) intervention was conducted exclusively in French and focused on letter-sound activities, segmentation and blending. FI students who received the PA intervention were compared to a control group of FI students who did not receive the PA intervention. The results of the pre- and post- intervention tests indicated that students who received the PA intervention in French achieved significantly greater improvement in phonological awareness in both French and English, than students who did not receive the PA intervention. This finding is consistent with the results from other studies which have suggested that there are cross-linguistic factors in first and second language reading acquisition, and that learning to read in a second language involves some of the same processes and factors as learning to read in one’s first language (Genesee, 2007).

The results of MacCoubrey’s (2007) phonemic awareness intervention study may have significant implications for the timing and delivery of interventions administered in early FI programs, which typically don’t occur until students have well-established French language skills. These findings also provide a better understanding of the relationship between language
and reading development, further supporting the notion that students with learning difficulties can be successful in the FI program, if the appropriate, early interventions are provided.

In a complementary study, Wise & Chen (2010) built on the findings of MacCoubrey (2007). This quantitative study aimed to analyze the impact of a phonological awareness (PA) intervention on the reading achievement of at-risk Grade 1 readers enrolled in an early French Immersion program. At-risk students were identified on the basis of text reading performance and phonological awareness test scores. The treatment group was comprised of 17 Grade 1 at-risk readers in FI. The treatment group was compared to a control group of 14 at-risk students in the FI program; this group did not receive the PA intervention. The goal of the PA intervention was to develop students’ phonological awareness skills in an explicit and systematic manner. Lessons focused on teaching students that sentences are made up of words. Words are made up of syllables, and syllables are made up of individual sounds called phonemes, using games and activities that were based upon vocabulary and stories being used in the students’ classrooms. Students in the treatment group received 25 minutes of daily small group PA instruction in English for 10 weeks, followed by 25 minutes of daily small group PA instruction in French for 10 weeks, for a total of 20 weeks.

Results of the study revealed two noteworthy findings. First, at-risk readers in the treatment group scored significantly higher than the control group on all three aspects of the phonological awareness tests after receiving the PA intervention. The effect sizes for all significant tests were large, indicating that the treatment was highly effective. Secondly, the PA intervention had a considerable impact on the reading development of the at-risk Grade 1 students. The French reading achievement levels of the treatment group were significantly higher than those of the control group. The results indicated that the PA intervention enabled at-risk
readers to read more challenging tests with greater accuracy and increased comprehension than their at-risk Grade 1 peers who did not receive the intervention.

The findings from this study are compelling because they demonstrate that supplemental instruction of sufficient duration and intensity for at-risk and struggling readers, provided early in their year, may be the key to their success in the FI program. The authors note “it is possible that with appropriate support, these students will become fluent, proficient readers in French and English” (Wise & Chen, 2010, p. 141).

In summary, results of these four intervention studies illustrate an optimistic future for children with learning difficulties in the French Immersion program. The findings emphasize the importance of early phonological awareness interventions and reading support for students experiencing learning challenges in the French Immersion program. As indicated in the studies by MacCoubrey (2007) and Wise and Chen (2010), early intervention is crucial to reduce the risk of future reading problems for struggling students. Also, these studies provide further evidence to show that reading skills transfer across languages and that interventions provided in English can have a positive impact on students’ French language skills. Although the degree of the difficulties and challenges faced by students varied across the studies, they all highlight the importance of early literacy support and appropriate interventions in any language for students experiencing language difficulties in the French Immersion program. Future research could provide a better understanding of the extent to which each of these interventions helps to improve the academic performance of students, and to determine the most appropriate time for intervention to occur. Further implications of this research could involve the aspect of parent involvement and how parents can provide additional support and help reinforce the student
support strategies and PA skills at home. The next section gives an overview of the parent engagement policies, goals and visions as they pertain to Ontario’s schools.

Parent Involvement in Ontario’s Schools

The Ontario Ministry of Education asserts that parents play a vital role in the education and academic achievement of children in Ontario’s public schools (Parent Engagement Policy, 2010). In Ontario, parent involvement is defined as:

A board term and includes such things as good parenting, helping with homework, serving on school councils and board committees, communicating and meeting with teachers and volunteering in the classroom or on school trips. All forms of parental involvement are beneficial. In every form, parental involvement in education shows children that their parents care about what they are doing and learning, and that they value a good education.


Schools are encouraged to involve parents in aspects of student learning, stating “when parents are engaged and involved, everyone-- students, parents, and family, teachers, schools, and communities-- benefits, and our schools become increasingly rich and positive places to teach, learn, and grow” (Parent Engagement Policy, 2010, p. 5). Parents are viewed as partners in education who contribute much to the work of schools and influence their children’s academic achievement.

Parent involvement is just as important in Ontario French as a second language programs. Parents are viewed as partners in FSL education, and can help shape the attitudes and values that students have towards learning French. Parent interest and encouragement can also help to
motivate students to engage fully in the FSL education. The Framework for FSL in Ontario Schools (2013) states that “high levels of engagement in FSL by adult role models in the school, home, and community highlight for students the value that is placed on learning additional languages, especially French, in Ontario” (Framework for FSL, 2013, p. 24) and increased parent engagement is a critical component of the FSL goals. Regular communication between parents and schools fosters strong partnerships and enhance student learning. This partnership can be understood through the lens of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory and Joyce Epstein’s Over Lapping Spheres of Influence model (2001).

**Brofenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory and Epstein’s Overlapping Spheres of Influence**

The ecological systems theory was developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) and is based on the idea that there are five environmental systems in which an individual interacts (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, chronosystem), and the connections among these systems affect a child’s development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). At the center of Brofenbrenner’s ecological model is the child who is surrounded by the *microsystem* which includes the family and school. The *mesosystem* represents the interactions between microsystems that have indirect effects on a child’s development, such as the relationship between a school and the parents. The *exosystem* are the institutions or community organizations that impact the microsystems and mesosystems. The *macrosystem* describes the socio-cultural beliefs, values and practices that affect all systems. Parent and community involvement in the schools is reflected in the *exosystem* which describes the community influences on the child, and the value and beliefs about parent involvement are reflected in the *macrosystem*. The *chronosystem* encompasses the change in characteristics of a person over
time as well as the changes in the environment in which that person lives, including changes in family structure, employment, and place of residence.

Through an ecological perspective, Joyce Epstein (2001) developed the overlapping spheres of influence theory and Six Types of Parent Involvement framework. The theory posits that children’s development and academic achievement are jointly influenced by the home and school settings, and the degree to which educators and family members maintain positive relationships with one another helps determine children’s academic success. Epstein argues that schools which implement practices that promote strong partnerships with parents should be better able to help children succeed because they create consistency between the children’s home and school environments (Epstein, 2001). The Six Types of Parent Involvement framework was developed to help strengthen school, parent and community partnership programs across the United States and Canada. Each type of involvement raises key challenges that must be solved to reach all families and provides sample practices to help produce positive results.

An ecological perspective is used in studies that seek to examine the influences of varying environments in which children exist, as well as the interactions between these settings, on their behaviour and development. Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological theory and Epstein’s theory of overlapping spheres of influence were used in a quantitative study of a nationally representative sample of kindergarten students from 864 schools across the United States (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012). The study sought to examine through an ecological perspective the extent to which school outreach to parents and family involvement were associated with reading and math achievement gain in kindergarten students. Data came from large-scale surveys from the Early Childhood Longitudinal study (ECLS-K) Kindergarten class of 1998-1999 and included a nationally representative sample of 16,430 students. A two-level hierarchical linear
model (HLM) was used for data analysis and tests were statistically controlled for student, family and school background variables. Results from the study found that school outreach is effective at getting more families involved at school and that these activities are related to students’ reading and math achievement gains during kindergarten. Data analysis found that the effect sizes of the school outreach and family involvement variables were modest yet significant (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012).

Through the lens of the ecological systems theory, we can understand how parent engagement plays a vital role in the academic, social and emotional development of children. In the context of the French Immersion program, however, parents often feel they are not able to be involved and often feel left out of the decision making processes of their child’s education (CPF, 2012). One report stated that “little support is available in school and at home; parents are often left to find remediation and support on their own and they feel guilty and may question their decision to keep their child in French Immersion” (Harding, 2012, as cited in CPF, 2012, p.10). Very few studies have explored the role of parent involvement in the context of the French Immersion program, and fewer still have sought to determine the nature of parent involvement in Ontario’s French Immersion programs. The following section summarizes one study that was carried out by Canadian Parents for French in Ontario that sought to explore the nature of parent involvement in the FI programs across Ontario, and to understand the resources, needs and wants of the parents of children in the FI program, as told from their perspective.

Needs Analysis: Parents of Students with learning difficulties in Ontario’s French Immersion Program

In a mixed-methods study undertaken at the request of Canadian Parents for French, Ontario, Hart, Lapkin, Mison & Arnott (2010) sought to understand the types of resources
parents of students in the French Immersion program perceive they need to help them assist their children with homework. The catalyst for the study was the frequently reported concern from parents of their inability to help their children with homework because they do not know the language of instruction. The participants for the study were 606 parents with children in Grade 1-8 French Immersion and 153 elementary French Immersion teachers. Data were collected using a survey instrument for parents, which was then adapted to suit the needs of the FI teachers who participated in the study. Data were collected in May to June, 2010. As the results of the survey are lengthy and detailed, only the findings relevant to the current project will be summarized.

Results of the parent survey indicated that a large percentage of parents (66%) felt only ‘somewhat’ competent in helping their children with homework in French (Hart, Lapkin, Mison, & Arnott, 2010). When asked how much additional support they required to help their children deal successfully with homework in French Immersion, 28% of parents indicated they required a ‘great deal’ and ‘quite a lot’ more support, while 35% of parents indicated they need ‘some’ more support. When asked to indicate the form of help that they felt they needed to effectively support their children with home, 60% of respondents indicated ‘How to’ guides for parents without French language skills would be very helpful. Other answers included better internet resources for French Immersion students (64%), better communication with child’s teacher (52%), internet forums for French Immersion parents to share experiences and strategies (33%).

Parents had the opportunity to make open-ended comments on the survey. Comments were coded, graphed and analyzed. Results from the open-ended questionnaire indicated that 32% of parents would like more and better parent resources (e.g. pronunciation websites, online tutoring, grammar checker, French games, etc.), and 18% of parents indicated they would like more support from their child’s school.
Results of the teacher survey revealed discrepancies between teachers’ and parents’ perceptions of parents’ ability to help students with their homework (45% of teachers perceived that parents required ‘some’ help with FI homework whereas 25% of parents perceived they required a lot of support). In terms of parental understanding of FI homework, one-third of teachers responded they felt parents understood ‘all’ or ‘almost all’ of their children’s homework, whereas one-third of parents indicated they do not feel competent in their ability to understand their children’s FI homework. These discrepancies point to the need for improved communication between FI teachers and FI parents. In terms of a ‘how-to-guide’ for parents, both parents (60%) and teachers (65%) agreed that this would be an effective parent support tool.

In summary, findings from this study strongly support the need for more information-based support resources for parents. Parent resources may help parents be more actively engaged in their children’s bilingual education, be more knowledgeable about curriculum content-specific activities, and increase their connection to the school and classroom communities. Although this study sought the opinions of parents, it did not address needs specific to the community of parents with children with learning difficulties in the FI program. The next section reviews two case studies that aimed to tell the story of two parents whose children experienced learning difficulties in the FI program. Told from the parents’ perspectives, these case studies identify the possible barriers and challenges that parents of children with learning difficulties may face when their child is enrolled in Ontario’s French Immersion program.

Case Studies of Parents of Children with learning difficulties in the FI program

Mady and Arnett (2009) used a case study approach to examine one parent’s perspective about the challenges and barriers a mother faced during her efforts to access special education services for her son in the French Immersion program in a school district in southern Ontario.
The mother in the case study, an experienced second language teacher and teacher educator herself, expresses that it was her frustration with the juxtaposition between policies governing the rights of children with learning difficulties in education programs in Ontario and the lack of inclusion practices in the French Immersion program which led her to share her story.

Data for the study were collected through an analysis of the mother’s personal journal, in which she chronicled her communication with her son’s school and teaching team, and recorded her attempts to access special education services for him, over a two year period of time. Data were coded, categorized and analyzed. Three themes emerged from the data and were identified as barriers which hindered the mother’s ability to access the special education services her son required in the French Immersion program: procedures and policies regarding the identification of learning disabilities, the status of French Immersion and how its perception as being a program for the academic elite excludes students with special learning needs, and research on supporting students with special needs within French Immersion. Despite her wealth of knowledge due to her experience as a French Immersion teacher, the mother in this study ultimately made the decision to withdraw her son who had been identified with a severe learning disability (dyslexia) from the French Immersion program in order to allow him access to the special services and education programs he required.

In a second case study, Cobbs (2014) investigated one mother’s struggle to access the necessary support services for her two daughters who were identified with Attention Deficit Hyper Activity Disorder (ADHD) and a gifted exceptionality in the French Immersion program in a large city in Ontario. In this study, Cobbs (2014) used a phenomenological approach to interview and analyze data to describe one mother’s experience of her efforts to be part of the special education processes of her children with learning difficulties in the French Immersion
program. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Through a rich, detailed narrative, Cobbs (2014) recounts the mother’s challenge to have Individualized Education Plans (IEP) developed and implemented for her daughters and the mother’s perception of feeling “removed from the decision-making processes” (p. 13), specifically those which involved her daughters’ transfer out of the French Immersion program and into a program which would provide access to the required support services. The mother also reported that the parent-school relationship deteriorated and eventually became combative as she advocated for her daughters’ right to support services in the FI program. Cobbs (2014) stated that the mother felt excluded both in her interactions with French Immersion staff as well as mainstream and special education staff, leading her to “perceive an unpleasant, exclusionary tone” (p. 14). One of the major limitations of this study is that the findings reflect just one mother’s perspective of the degree of support for parents of children with learning difficulties, or other exceptionalities in the French Immersion program. Cobbs (2014) highlights the need for further research in the area of special education support services in French Immersion and calls for the need for future research to examine the perspectives of parents and students in relation to special education support accessibility in the French Immersion program.

These two case studies contribute to a growing body of evidence to suggest that parents of children with learning difficulties in the FI program do not feel adequately supported, informed or included in the decision making aspects of their child’s education. Additionally, these case studies illustrate how parents may feel they are prevented from accessing the resources they require to effectively support their children’s learning needs in the FI program. Though two case studies alone are not sufficient evidence to make generalizations, they do suggest that the problems encountered by the parents in these two studies may not be isolated
incidents, rather they may represent the feelings of a larger population of parents. Since parents may feel self-conscious about their lack of understanding and knowledge about their child’s learning exceptionalities, many parents may not feel comfortable sharing their story.

What is certain from these case studies, is that more conversations are necessary about how we can improve the inclusion of students with learning difficulties in Ontario’s FI program, how we need to improve communication with parents, and provide parents with more research-based information, services, and resources to help them support their children in the FI program.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the research that has explored three aspects at the heart of this study: students with learning difficulties in the French Immersion program; effective intervention strategies for students with reading difficulties and various other exceptionalities in the FI program; and parent involvement as it relates to Ontario’s FI program. Although the body of literature on the nature of parent involvement in the French Immersion program is limited, the research highlights parents’ desire to be more actively engaged in their child’s second language education and better informed in the decision making processes. Studies suggest that parents feel under-supported in their efforts to have their child identified, and as illustrated in the before-mentioned case studies, parents may feel they lack access to the necessary special education supports and services for their child in the FI program.

By analyzing existing parent handbooks from school districts across Ontario, it was evident that there was a lack of information available to parents on the inclusion of children with learning difficulties in the French Immersion program. This absence of information may further perpetuate the myth that the French Immersion program is not intended, nor ‘suitable’, for children with diverse learning needs. By creating an accessible, research-based resource for
parents of children with learning difficulties in the FI program, I hope to add to the limited body of literature in Ontario that is currently available and to provide parents of children with learning difficulties in the FI program in Ontario with the information they need to better support their children’s learning needs.
Chapter 3 Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology used to collect and analyze data utilized in this Masters in Education project. To best serve the purpose of the project, which was to create an accessible, evidence-based resource for parents of children with learning difficulties in the French Immersion (FI) program, data for the project were collected through a careful and thorough selection of documents from various school boards across Ontario, as well as resources developed by the various divisions within the Ministry of Education for the province of Ontario, including the Curriculum and Inclusive Education Branches. Curriculum, policy and procedure, and other ancillary documents contain a rich source of information about organizations and programs that can be used to inform the development of new documents (Hodder, 2000). This chapter aims to: explain the purpose of document analysis as a method of data collection in qualitative research; identify the advantages and limitations associated with document analysis as they pertain to this project; explain how documents were located and selected for this project; and describe the ways in which data was coded, categorized and analyzed. This chapter concludes with a table and summary of the major findings. The major findings were assimilated and used to inform the development of a new resource for parents of children with learning difficulties in the French Immersion program that, currently, does not exist in Ontario.

Purpose of Document Analysis

Document analysis is described as a method in which data are examined and interpreted for the purpose of gaining understanding and developing empirical knowledge relevant to a research topic (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Documents used in research analysis can take a variety of forms, both print and electronic, and may include but are not limited to: advertisements agendas, manuals, books and brochures; diaries and journals; event programs; letters and
memoranda; maps and charts; newspapers; press releases; radio and television program scripts; survey data; and, various public records. The documents selected for this project have been narrowed to Ontario Ministry of Education policy and curriculum documents, and ancillary print and electronic materials such as parent handbooks developed by school districts across Ontario.

Historically, document analysis has been used in combination with other qualitative research methodologies, such as interview, focus groups, and questionnaires, in order to triangulate data (McMillan et al., 2010). More recently, document analysis has been used as a stand-alone method of data collection and has been gaining recognition for its usefulness and its immense value in generating new documents by providing background information on a particular research topic, helping to generate new questions to be asked, and providing supplementary data (Bowen, 2009).

For the purpose of this project, document analysis was used to identify the main themes that emerged from the current available handbooks for parents of children in the French Immersion program, to observe and evaluate the visual presentation and organization of each of the documents, and to identify the strengths and limitations of each document.

Rationale of Document Analysis

Document analysis was the chosen method of data collection for this project because of many of the advantages it offers in relation to other qualitative research methods. As Bowen (2009) attests, documents are an efficient and cost-effective means of gathering data. I was able to locate all of the documents for my project using the internet, including government and school district websites, as well as at Queen’s Faculty of Education Library and Resource Centre. Documents selected for the study were easily located because they were all available and intended for public access/use, and were also free of charge. Another advantage of using
document analysis for data collection is that documents provided me with a broad coverage of information on my topic of study. Documents also provided me with references to empirical studies and details that I may not have discovered using other methods of data collection. Documents are considered to be ‘unobtrusive’ and ‘non-reactive’ (Bowen, 2009, pg. 31). In other words, document analysis counters concerns related to reflexivity and the possibility of my influence on the findings in the research, therefore, increasing the trustworthiness of the data collected for my final project. Documents can also be used to discover the absence of a particular matter pertinent to the topic of study. For example, the absence of information in a document may suggest the need for further investigation or the need for a gap in the literature to be filled (Bowen, 2009).

Finally, document analysis offered me one other significant advantage: in order to create a practical resource for parents of children with learning difficulties in the FI program, it was necessary for me, as the researcher, to be informed about the most current provincial policies and expectations to ensure that my resource included the most pedagogically sound and effective remediation strategies for students with learning difficulties in the FI program. Also, thorough knowledge and understanding of curriculum documents and policies ensured that my resource was in alignment with the vision and goals of the Ontario Ministry of Education for French as a Second Language curriculum, and complemented provincial Special Education policies and Parent Engagement initiatives.

Limitations

It is important to note that there are also a number of limitations associated with using documents as a sole means of data collection. Bowen (2009) warns researchers against an over-reliance on documents as they may lead to insufficient detail to answer a research question. Due
to the nature of this study, this limitation is arguable since there are currently very few available. Bowen also warns against biased selectivity, meaning that a researcher may purposefully select documents to align with the purpose of the study, and deliberately leave out other documents which may not be aligned, or support the purpose or ‘agenda’ of the study. In the case of the current project, the availability of relevant and up to date documents and parent handbooks related to the topic of children with learning difficulties in the FI program in Ontario is scarce at best, and therefore all Ontario documents that met the criteria were selected and included to gain sufficient data to be used to inform the new parent resource.

Selection of Documents

The selection of documents for this MEd project was principally guided with the overall purpose of the project in mind, which was to develop an accessible, research-based resource for parents of children with learning difficulties in the French Immersion program, in Ontario. Therefore, it was critical that the documents used to inform the new parent resource specifically reflected the provincial curriculum expectations and visions and goals for French as a Second Language (FSL) programs in Ontario schools. The data collected for the new parent resource were aligned with the province’s French curriculum expectations, best teaching approaches for an inclusive classroom, such as the Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and the most current program initiatives in Ontario in order to ensure parents received the most current, reliable information that was specific to the province’s goals for FSL. These are outlined in the five selected Ontario’s Ministry of Education curriculum documents and supplementary resources.

Nine documents were selected for data analysis for the current project: five documents produced by the Ontario Ministry of Education and four handbooks for parents of children in the French Immersion (FI) program that were developed by various school districts across Ontario.
Documents and ancillary resources were selected based on the following criteria: availability (public documents); relevancy (they contained information on children in the FI program in Ontario and/or children with learning difficulties in the FI program in Ontario); and, currency (they contained up-to-date information that was in accordance with best practices in Ontario’s publicly funded schools). The Ontario Ministry of Education documents selected for the project were: the *Ontario Ministry of Education, Parent Engagement Policy (2010); Ontario Curriculum for as a Second as a Second Language (2013), Framework for French as a Second Language (2014), Learning for All, A Guide to Effective Assessment and Instruction for All Students, Kindergarten to Grade 12 (2011), and Supporting your Child’s Success in French Immersion and Extended French, Kindergarten to Grade 8: A Parent Guide (2014)*. School District handbooks for parents of children in the French Immersion program were from: the Rainbow District School Board (RDSB), Peel District School Board (PDSB), Simcoe County School Board (SCDSB), and Durham District School Board (DDSB).

Other school districts in Ontario either did not have a publicly accessible parent handbook at the time of this project, or did not have a parent handbook that met the criteria for the current project. Ontario school districts that were not represented in this project offered outdated resources (>10 years) that were not concurrent with Ontario’s most recent Ministry of Education curriculum expectations, visions and goals for FSL; or because in lieu of providing a parent handbook for children in the FI program the school district provided related web links on their school district website to external websites, such as Canadian Parents for French and links to websites and resources developed by other Ontario school boards, such as the Homework tool box for parents, produced by the Rainbow District School Board.
The resource deficiency in many of Ontario’s school districts reinforces the need for more consistent, reliable information for Ontario parents of children in FSL programs. Specifically, parents of students with learning difficulties in French Immersion programs across the province need to be assured that the information they are provided aligns with Ontario’s visions and goals to “strengthen FSL programming, promote the benefits of FSL, heighten appreciation of and support for FSL educators, and increase public confidence in FSL education…and to improve FSL programming throughout the province” (Framework for FSL, K-12, 2013, p. 7).

During the initial search for documents which met the outlined criteria, French Immersion parent handbooks and supplementary resources from other provincial Ministries of Education in Canada were located. The province of Manitoba provides an online handbook, *French Immersion in Manitoba: A handbook for School Leaders (2007)*, for administrators. It offers important information on provincial programs that aim to enhance parent involvement in Manitoba’s FI programs, as well as programs that aim to provide appropriate educational programming for children with academic challenges. The province of Manitoba mandates that all Manitoba children have a right to an appropriate education in the programs offered by the school divisions and districts in which they are enrolled and school districts have an obligation to provide the appropriate educational programming to students in all grades from Kindergarten to Grade 12 to ensure their academic, social and emotional needs are met (French Immersion in Manitoba: A Handbook for School Leaders, 2007). The *Manitoba Handbook* was developed and designed specifically for a professional, administrative audience and of the handbook’s twelve chapters, only one (Chapter 9) addresses the issue of students with learning difficulties in the French Immersion program. Although some of the information contained in the document could
be relevant and of interest to parents of children with learning difficulties in Manitoba’s French Immersion program, the information may not be readily available or easily accessible for parents. Specifically, the table *Questions to Consider Asking During Teacher Conferences* (French Immersion in Manitoba: A Handbook for School Leaders, 2007, Ch. 9, p. 9), may be relevant to all parents, therefore, was included in the new parent resource for this project.

The province of Alberta offers a very comprehensive and complex list of online resources for educational professionals, consultants, specialists, and parents on the topic of the French Immersion program and students with learning difficulties. The list of online resources includes information specific to Alberta’s Ministry of Education policies, programs, and Special Education Act. The material on the website is only available in electronic form, and not in print, which could limit access to include only those with internet access, the necessary PDF software, and adequate computer literacy skills. The ancillary resources on the website include web links, support services and programs that are recommended by the government of Alberta and are available in municipalities within the province.

The above-mentioned French Immersion handbooks were not included in the selection of documents for data analysis due to the fact the content within each document was written specifically to target and meet each province’s unique FSL needs. As well, the Manitoba and Alberta handbooks were developed to align with the province’s curriculum expectations, program initiatives, and provincial Ministry of Education policies, visions, and goals for FSL. Although the research evidence pertaining to children with learning difficulties in the French Immersion program is universal, the processes, policies and student support services are specific to each Canadian province. Therefore, only Ontario Ministry of Education documents were
selected and used in this project, to ensure the content was in alignment with the province of Ontario’s FSL curriculum and policies.

Data Analysis

At the heart of this study is the belief that parent involvement has a significant impact on student success. Therefore, the conceptual framework that this study is based upon is Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory and Epstein’s theory of overlapping spheres of influence. According to Bronfenbrenner (1998), children’s behaviour and development are influenced by their interactions within different contexts, as well as the connections among settings, including the information and communication within each setting. In other words, a child’s development is influenced by the parents’ relationship with the child’s school and vice versa. Epstein (1995) developed the overlapping spheres of influence model (Figure 1) to illustrate how a child’s development at home and at school overlap, therefore the relationship between the two environments can have an effect on a child’s development and academic achievement. Epstein posits that the degree to which educators and parents maintain positive relationships with one another helps determine the child’s academic success. In the context of the present study, a resource for parents of children with learning difficulties in the French Immersion program would enhance parents’ knowledge and understanding of topics related to special education in the French Immersion program, improve parents’ ability to make well informed decisions about their children’s second language education, and ultimately enhance the partnerships between parents and schools by engaging parents in students’ learning at home. Epstein’s overlapping spheres of influence support this hypothesis, stating that practices that promote strong school, family, and community partnerships should be able to help children succeed academically.
because these outreach activities create greater consistency between children’s home and school environments (Epstein, 2001).

Figure 1. Epstein’s Overlapping Spheres of Influence Model

As with all qualitative analysis, the main goal when analyzing documents is to examine and interpret the data to elicit meaning, gain a deeper understanding of the topic being studied and to develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For this project, the objective was to gather information that would enhance and contribute to the creation of an original resource for parents of children with learning difficulties in the French Immersion program.

The first step in analyzing the data for this project was an initial skimming of the documents. Corbin and Strauss (2008) assert that this first step, the ‘first pass,’ is an important one because it is during this phase that meaningful and relevant data are identified and impertinent information is separated out. During this process, the reviewer is expected to demonstrate objectivity and sensitivity in both the selection and analysis of data from the documents (Bowen, 2009). For this project, I reviewed all documents that met the established criteria and contained information relevant to the topic of children with learning difficulties in
the French Immersion program. It was also necessary for me, during this initial stage of
document analysis, to determine that the documents that I selected were authentic, credible,
accurate, and fit the conceptual framework of my project.

The next step of data analysis involved a closer examination of the documents followed
by sorting and organizing the information into categories directly related to the purpose of the
research (Bowen, 2009). This step is known as content analysis. Headings and subtitles guided
the development of categories which I used to organize the data. Data were coded, organized into
themes and categories, and recorded on a table. Table 1.1 provides an overview of the categories
and the presence or absence of each theme within each document.
Table 1.1: Handbooks for Parents of Students in French Immersion programs in Ontario

|                  | Definition of Terms related to FSL and/or glossary | FI Registration Information | Characteristics of typical “successful” FI student | Program Goals | Benefits of FI | Provides references to curriculum and/or research-based information | Student Support strategies | Pronunciation Tips | Homework Tips | French Grammar Tips | Suggested Book Resources and Dictionaries | Suggested online FI parent support resources (e.g. CPF) | French games, music, activities, apps | French cultural experiences (i.e. museums) | Strategies for parents of students with learning difficulties in the FIP | References to special education services | Reference to research-based information on special education in FI education | FI Parent Engagement Workshop Template, Posters, and Activities |
|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Rainbow DSB      |                                                     |                             |                                                   |               |                |                                                                     |                          |                   |               |                     |                                             |                                             |                                             |                                           |                                                 |                                               |                                              |
| Peel DSB        | *                                                   | *                           |                                                   |               |                |                                                                     |                          |                   |               |                     |                                             |                                             |                                             |                                           |                                                 |                                               |                                              |
| Simcoe County DSB |                                                     |                             |                                                   |               |                |                                                                     |                          |                   |               |                     |                                             |                                             |                                             |                                           |                                                 |                                               |                                              |
| Durham DSB      |                                                     |                             |                                                   |               |                |                                                                     |                          |                   |               |                     |                                             |                                             |                                             |                                           |                                                 |                                               |                                              |
| MOE Parent Guide | *                                                   | *                           |                                                   |               |                |                                                                     |                          |                   |               |                     |                                             |                                             |                                             |                                           |                                                 |                                               |                                              |
Summary of Findings

The findings from the document analysis revealed that handbooks for parents of children in the French Immersion programs vary significantly in terms of content across Ontario. There is very little consistency in the detail of student support strategies and information provided in each. The following section summarizes the major themes that emerged from the data analysis.

Goals of the French Immersion Program

Language proficiency is the main goal of the French Immersion program, according to the Simcoe County District School Board’s handbook for parents of children in the French Immersion program. It states that by the end of Grade 12, students should be able to read books, newspapers and magazines with ease; understand radio and television programs; understand and converse with native French speakers; appreciate French literature and culture; write with ease and accuracy; and pursue studies in French at the university level if they choose to do so.

The Durham District School Board’s French Immersion Handbook for Parents states that the purpose of the French Immersion program is to provide children with the opportunity of achieving a meaningful level of functional bilingualism, enabling them to function in both English and French. The document states that the goal of the French Immersion program is not to expect all students to attain the fluency of native speakers but rather to enable students to achieve a high level of functional bilingualism.

The Ontario Ministry of Education’s Supporting your Child’s Success in French Immersion and Extended French, Kindergarten to Grade 8 Parent Guide states that the goal of FI and Extended French programs is “to develop proficiency, not just in French but in English as well” (p. 5). The goal statement asserts that children who develop abilities in the French language will improve their abilities in the English language. Goals of the French Immersion
Benefits Associated with participation in the French Immersion program

Four of the five handbooks for parents of students in the French Immersion program list the benefits associated with participation in the French Immersion program. The Simcoe County District School board provides a research-based account of the benefits of learning a second language. Under the subtitle Benefits of learning a second language, it states that second language learning provides significant cognitive and academic benefits, and it enhances first-language and overall literacy skills. It cites the Commissioner of Official Languages report (2004-2005) which states that individuals “who master more than one language increase their self-confidence and self-esteem and are more at ease with others” (Adam, 2005, p. 107). As well, the benefit that second language acquisition has on global communication is mentioned.

The Rainbow District School Board uses a question and answer format to convey information to parents of children in the French Immersion program. Under the subheading Why choose French Immersion? a brief description of the benefits of a second language are listed, including enhanced reasoning, problem-solving and creative thinking skills, strengthened first-language skills, and a reminder of the fact that it is one of Canada’s two official languages and a language used around the world.

The Durham District School Board provides a detailed description of the benefits and advantages of learning a second language, based on information from the Ontario Curriculum-Grade 9 and 10, French As a Second Language- Core, Extended and Immersion French, documents. As well as noting the academic advantages, the handbook describes the social and cultural advantages associated with second language acquisition, including the ability to
communicate and participate effectively in the workplace and global community and increasing students’ ability to understand themselves and other people.

The Ontario Ministry of Education’s parent guide *Supporting Your Child’s Success in French Immersion and Extended French* did not address the purported benefits specifically associated with second language learning. Rather, the document provided a brief description of the benefits associated with strong literacy skills in any language. “The earlier children are exposed to language and literacy through activities like reading and writing, the more likely they are to do well at school. This is the case no matter what the language they are exposed to in their early years.” (p. 4). The document does not address the putative benefits associated with bilingualism such as increased education and employment opportunities, improved cognitive development, enhanced cultural awareness, and greater travel opportunities (Mannavarayan, 2002).

**Student Support Strategies**

The five parent handbooks described strategies for parents to support their children’s French as a second language education. The Rainbow District School Board *Parents as Partners in French Immersion Handbook* listed reading in English, establishing good homework and study habits, and communicating with the child’s teacher as effective student support strategies. There was minimal elaboration on these suggestions, and no reference to other resources was provided. However, further investigation revealed that the Rainbow District School Board does have a website for parents of students in the French Immersion program called *A Homework ToolBox*, however, no reference to the website was made in the parent handbook.

The Peel District School Board document suggests the following strategies for parents to help their children be successful in French Immersion: learn as much as you can about the FI
program; show your child that you are committed to the program; encourage your child and show an interest in what your child is learning; find ways to expose your child to French outside of school time; borrow French books from the public library, listen to French music, and watch French television programs. No examples or reference to recommended resources (television shows, books, music, or websites) was provided.

The Simcoe District School Board resource provides parents with some general suggestions to help support their child’s French learning at home, such as maintaining a positive attitude about the French language and offering words of encouragement to the child if they seem reluctant to express themselves verbally. The handbook also has a text box that highlights some “helpful tips” for parents when they are working with their child at home. The suggested tips include: reading to your child in English, encouraging your child to sound out words in French, and finding relevant and authentic French opportunities outside of school. The strategies and tips provided are general in nature and do not speak specifically to students who are having reading or other learning difficulties in the French Immersion program. The handbook also provides parents with a list of online apps and helpful language resources.

The Durham District School Board provides the most comprehensive overview of student support strategies for parents. Suggestions including maintaining a positive interest in your child’s daily activities, being positive about the FI program, communicating regularly with the teacher, listening to your child read in French and English, reading daily to your child, providing access to French books, games, videos, television and radio, and volunteering to help at the school. Specific homework strategies for parents are also provided. The strategies are scheduling a regular time each day for homework, providing a quiet place, with good lighting and free from distractions, listening to your child talk about what the homework expectations are, and ensuring
you are there to support, and not do, your child’s homework for him or her. A list of ‘tips for reading’ are provided, and include suggestions such as modeling correct reading behavior and showing your child your appreciation of books. A list of suggested language resources, including dictionaries, music and exchange programs, concludes the section.

The Ontario Ministry of Education’s *Supporting Your Child’s Success in French Immersion and Extended French: Parent Guide* systematically categorizes strategies for helping students in French Immersion by objective. These objectives are: helping your child become a great communicator; helping your child become an imaginative and analytic thinker; helping your child become a thoughtful consumer of information; helping your child learn how to learn; and, helping your child become a lifelong language learner. The strategies mentioned in the parent guide focus on general literacy development that is not specific to French as a Second Language (FSL) learning. The document powerfully emphasizes cross-linguistic transfer of skills and abilities, and stresses throughout the handbook the significant impact that non-French speaking parents can have on the literacy development of children in second language programs like French Immersion.

Noticeably absent from the Ontario Ministry of Education *Parent Guide* was information pertaining to students with learning difficulties in the French Immersion program. More specifically, there was an absence of empirical evidence and ‘facts’ addressing the issue of the suitability of the FI program for exceptional learners. Such information could help to strengthen parents’ understanding that FI is a suitable program for exceptional learners and children with learning difficulties are able to benefit from the FI experience in the form of bilingualism. The *Parent Guide* also omitted information on ways in which parents of students with learning difficulties can support their children’s learning outside of the classroom such as exposing them
to a variety of social and cultural events and activities in French. The *Framework for FSL, K-12* (2013) document states:

Parents can also support their children’s FSL learning by exposing them to French through television, movies, and cultural events. Children can be highly motivated to study FSL when they see that French is the language used by many people in their daily lives. Moreover, such experiences help nurture an enduring appreciation of French culture in Ontario, throughout Canada, and around the world.

(Framework for FSL, 2013, p. 23)

Additionally, the Ontario Ministry of Education *Parent Guide* omits important information with respect to the instructional approaches used in the French Immersion setting, such as the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Differentiated Instruction (DI) which are the same instructional approaches that are employed to meet the diverse learning needs of students in Ontario’s English language programs. A *Framework for FSL, K-12* (2013) highlights two instructional approaches, the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Differentiated Instruction (DI), neither of which were mentioned in the *Parent Guide*. The UDL model focuses on using teaching strategies or pedagogical materials designed to meet the special needs and to enhance the learning of all students, regardless of age, skills, or situation. The UDL approach aims to nurture students’ individual strengths by fostering an inclusive learning environment that is flexible and accessible to everyone by providing students with accommodations such as technology and media tools, different assessment strategies, and materials so that every student can reach his or her maximum potential (*Learning for All*, 2013). Differentiated Instruction is described as a “teaching practice that acknowledges the varied learning needs of all students— including struggling learners, students who are excelling, and all students in between”
(Framework for FSL, 2013, p. 36). When implemented effectively, both of these approaches can effectively meet the learning needs of all students, including students with learning difficulties in the French Immersion setting. Knowledge of these instructional approaches may be beneficial to parents and help them make well-informed decisions about their children’s educational program choices.

Absence of Information

An absence of information in a document or ancillary resource may, as previously mentioned, provide the researcher with insight into important elements that may be critical to the understanding of a particular topic. In the case of this MEd project, findings from the document analysis revealed an absence of information related to the topic of children with learning difficulties in the French Immersion (FI) program in all five handbooks for parents of students in the FI program, including effective instructional approaches (i.e. UDL and DI), at-home strategies, and online support resources for parents of children with learning difficulties in the FI program. According to Bowen (2009) the absence, sparseness, or incompleteness of documents suggests certain matters have been given little attention or that certain voices have not been heard. This absence of information suggests the need for additional information to fill a gap in the literature or to shed light on a particular issue. In the case of the current project, the absence of information on special education in the French Immersion program indicates a gap in the literature, and this project and corresponding parent resource aims to fill that gap.

Ministry of Education Policy and Curriculum Documents

Four Ministry of Education curriculum and policy documents for the province of Ontario were selected for document analysis based on their relevancy to this project: the Ontario Curriculum for French as a Second Language (2013), A Framework for French as a Second
Language in Ontario Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12 (2013), Learning for All: A Guide to Effective Assessment and Instruction for All Students, (2013), Parents in Partnership: A Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools (2010), and Supporting Your Child’s Success in French Immersion and Extended French, Elementary Schools: A Parent Guide (2014). Each document was read, coded and the data categorized and analyzed. The purpose of the analysis was to locate data that would help ‘fill the gap’ of information missing from the current parent handbooks. In other words, the most current Ontario Ministry of Education documents relevant to this project were carefully selected and data from these documents were used to inform the development of the new handbook for parents of children in the French Immersion program. The Ontario Ministry of Education documents provided an essential component to the project, offering information not available in other handbooks for parents of children in the FI program. These documents also ensured that information provided in this resource was in alignment with the French as a Second Language (FSL) learning expectations, FSL goals and FSL policies in Ontario.

Conceptual Framework for the Current Project

The development of this resource for parents of children with learning difficulties in the FI program was guided by the Backward Design model. This framework, developed by Wiggins and McTighe (2000), was based on the idea that planning should begin with the end in mind. The approach starts with the desired results, such as goals or desired outcomes, and then these goals become the criteria by which materials are selected, content is outlined, teaching methods are developed, and assessments are prepared (Wiggins & McTighe 2000). In this project, the goal was to create a relevant, accessible, evidence-based resource for parents that focused on students with learning difficulties in the FI program. Therefore, throughout my document analysis I
sought data that were compatible with this goal. The researchers also recommend beginning with a set of questions prior to the investigation. The objectives outlined in my purpose represented the questions that guided my data collection and analysis: (a) What is the most current, research-based information on inclusionary practices in the FI program? (b) What are the most effective strategies to support children with exceptional needs’ learning at home? (c) What are the resources, services and other supports available to children with exceptional needs in the French Immersion program? These focus questions ensured that the evidence I gathered for my resource was relevant, meaningful and supported the purpose of my project.

**Figure 2:** Stages in Backward Design Process (Adapted from Wiggins & McTighe, 2001, p. 9)

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**Resource Structure and Design**

The resource for this project was developed to be accessible to a wide-spread parent audience across Ontario. It was therefore necessary that the information in the resource be easy to access, reader-friendly, and simple to use. Unlike other Ministry of Education documents which are targeted for school board and educator audiences, this resource aimed to speak directly to parents who have a concern for the bilingual education and academic well-being of their children. It was therefore necessary for the resource to be visually appealing, and have a friendly, inviting presentation.

Consideration of these factors was what led me to design the resource for this project using parent resources models developed by the Council of Ontario Directors of Education.
(CODE) and The Ministry of Education Parent Engagement Office. Specifically, the design and organization of the present resource for parents of students with learning difficulties in the French Immersion program was designed after the soon-to-be-released *Parent Engagement Tool-Kit for Mathematics*, which is unique in its structure and organizational design. The resource for parents of children with learning difficulties in the FI program contains elements that can be found in the Parent Engagement Tool-Kit for Mathematics, including a parent resource book containing information specific to students with learning difficulties in the FI program, workshop plans with Blackline masters for activities, a brochure and fact sheet for parents, and a list of online resources to support parents.
Chapter 4 Discussion and Reflections

Overview

The purpose of this project was to create an accessible resource for parents of children with learning difficulties in the French Immersion (FI) program in Ontario. The project was in response to a recommendation in the Canadian Parents for French (CPF) Executive Summary of the State of French Second Language Education in Canada (2012) for academically challenged students and French second language programs. The recommendation advised that a user-friendly, relevant, and evidence-based resource be created to be accessible to all FSL stakeholders. The objectives of the project were to inform parents of children with learning difficulties in Ontario’s FI program of the most current, research-based information explaining how the FI program can meet the needs of students with learning difficulties; to provide parents of children with learning difficulties in the FI program with effective, pedagogically sound strategies to support their children’s FSL learning at home; and, to heighten parents’ awareness of special education and French resources, services and other supports available in Ontario for parents and children with learning difficulties.

Results of the document analysis revealed that current handbooks for parents of students in Ontario’s French Immersion programs vary significantly across the province in terms of detail and the type of information provided. Furthermore, the document analysis demonstrated there is a lack of information available to parents specifically on the topic of exceptional learners in the FI Program in Ontario. Of the five handbooks for parents of children in the FI program located for this project, only one handbook from the Durham District School Board, provided information on the issue of exceptional learners in the FI program.

Parents of children in the French Immersion program want to be knowledgeable and information in order to better support their children’s learning needs at home and at school.
Results from the needs analysis study (Hart, et. al., 2010), funded by Canadian Parents for French, revealed that parents of children in the FI program wanted more information on ways to support their children’s learning in the French Immersion program at home. The study indicated that parents wanted a ‘how-to-guide” or resource for parents who do not speak French to help them better engage with their child in curriculum related activities and homework activities at home. This project was inspired by this call for help as well as by my own desire to provide support to parents of children with learning difficulties in Ontario’s French Immersion programs.

Reflections:

At the commencement of this project, in the Fall of 2013, there were limited resources available to parents of students with learning difficulties in the FI program in Ontario. The resources that were available were not current and did not reflect the visions and goals outlined in the most recent Ontario Ministry of Education documents. This project intended to fill an evident need as indicated in prior studies and a gap in the current resources available to Ontario parents.

Unknown to me at the time, as I was working towards my goal to develop a new resource for parents of children in the FI program, the Ontario Ministry of Education was also in the process of developing a new guide for parents of children in the FI program. This new parent guide was the latest in a series of resources developed for parents in Ontario. The recent addition to this series, Supporting Your Child’s Success in French Immersion and Extended French, Kindergarten to Grade 8- A Parent Guide (2014) was released online in the Winter of 2014, as I was in the final stages of my parent resource.

Initially disappointed that my new parent resource would no longer be considered unique nor relevant, upon reading Supporting Your Child’s Success in French Immersion and Extended French, Kindergarten to Grade 8- Parent Guide, I was surprised to see that it, like the many
other handbooks for parents of FI students from school districts in Ontario, did not include information specific to the topic of students with learning difficulties in the French Immersion program. Despite the evidence to show that children with diverse learning needs can be academically successful in the FI program, the new Ontario Parent Guide does not address this important research. Also absent from the new Ontario Parent Guide is information to help parents better understand the process for identifying students with learning disabilities, how the FI program uses instructional approaches such as the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Differentiated Instruction (DI) to meet the diverse student learning needs in the FI classroom, and links to important resources and documents in Ontario to increase their knowledge on the province’s policy’s and mandates to include and provide the necessary supports to all learners in Ontario’s French as a second language programs.

In conclusion, I hope that my new parent resource, *French Immersion For All: A Tool-Kit to Support, Encourage and Inspire Parents of Students with Learning Difficulties in the French Immersion program in Ontario* will initiate more important conversations about the importance of including students with learning difficulties in our province’s French Immersion programs, and how we as a community can all work together to encourage and support more diversity in our second language classrooms. Finally, my hope is that this parent Tool-Kit will help parents across the province become better informed, confident advocates for their children’s second language education.
References


http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/fsl.html


http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/learning.html


http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/amenagement/frameworkFLS.pdf


Chapter 5 The Project
French Immersion For All

A Tool-Kit to inspire, engage, and support parents of students with learning difficulties in the French Immersion programs in Ontario

2015
Preface

“Parent engagement matters. Study after study has shown us that student achievement improves when parents play an active role in their children’s education, and that good schools become even better schools when parents are involved.”


This Tool-Kit was created specifically for parents of children with learning difficulties in the French Immersion (FI) program in Ontario. The goal of this resource is to provide parents of students experiencing academic difficulties in the FI program with the most essential, research-based information to be the best, most knowledgeable, and confident supporters for their children’s second language education.

This Tool-Kit is unique when compared to other parent resources because it provides you, the parent of a child with learning difficulties in the French Immersion program, with facts and strategies not found in other French Immersion parent resources in Ontario.

How you use this Tool-Kit is up to you. You may choose to read it from front to back. Perhaps, you may use it as a reference guide to answer specific questions that arise along your journey supporting your child in the FI program. Or, maybe you only have time to read the Fact Sheets, which highlight the key information from each chapter. You may also want to share your Tool-Kit with a friend who is looking for the information she needs to help her child who is struggling in the French Immersion program. Whichever way you choose to use it, this Parent Tool-Kit will undoubtedly help strengthen your knowledge and understanding that you play an important role in your child’s education, and that your child can learn and benefit from the French Immersion program with your help and support.

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 the author. Errors or omissions will be corrected in a future edition.

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1 The word parent(s) is used in this document to refer to parent(s) and guardian(s). It may also be taken to include caregivers or close family members who are responsible for raising the child.

2 The term learning difficulties refers to Kindergarten to Grade 6 students in Ontario who have been identified with a learning disability, students at-risk of a reading disability, and students who have not been identified with a learning disability but who are below-average in language and math skills and development.
# Table of Contents

Preface  

Introduction  

What is in this Tool-Kit?  

Chapter 1: The French Immersion Program - A Canadian Success Story  
- French Immersion program history  
- French Immersion program goals  
- Benefits of having French as a Second Language  
- Characteristics of children in the FI program  
- Definition of key terms  
- Chapter 1 fact sheet and resources  

Chapter 2: French Immersion and Special Education Policies and Research  
- The Ontario Curriculum, French as a Second Language policy  
- A Framework for French as a Second Language Programs in Ontario Schools  
- Learning For All  
- Parents in Partnership  
- Chapter 2 fact sheet and resources  

Chapter 3: Is the French Immersion Program Able to Meet My Child’s Needs? Yes!  
- What are the warning signs?  
- I Have Concerns. Now What?  
- Questions To Ask During a Parent Teacher Conference  
- Is the assessment in French or English or does it matter?  
- The French Immersion Program CAN Meet your Child’s Needs  
- Accommodations and Modifications to Meet your Child’s Needs  
- Interventions to Support Student Learning in the French Immersion Program  
- Should I Transfer My Child into the English Program?  
- Chapter 3 fact sheet and resources  

Chapter 4: How can I Help my Child if I don’t Speak French?  
- Joyce Epstein’s Overlapping Spheres of Influence Model  
- The French Connection- Parent Engagement in the FI program  
- I Want to Help But I Don’t Speak French!  
- Parent Tips for Supporting FSL Learning  
- Homework Help
Pronunciation Tips  
Chapter 4 fact sheet and resources  

Parent Resource List  

Conclusion  

Too Many Acronyms! Commonly Used Acronyms in this Tool-Kit  

Glossary of Terms  

Parent Workshop  

Appendix A: Invitation Letter to Parent Workshop for FI Students with learning difficulties  
Appendix B: Invitation Poster for Parent Workshop for FI Students with learning difficulties  
Appendix C: Fact or Fiction Icebreaker Quiz  
Appendix D: Fact or Fiction Icebreaker Quiz Answer Sheet  
Appendix E: Word Match Activity  
Appendix F: Bingo Game Sheet
Introduction

Over the last 50 years, the French Immersion program has grown significantly in both population and diversity. In fact, in Ontario alone, enrollment in the FI program has increased over 12% since 2006.\(^3\) Originally believed to be a program suitable exclusively for children of average to above-average intellectual ability, researchers now suggest that students of all abilities can benefit from the French Immersion experience, when provided with the appropriate and necessary interventions and remediation.\(^4\)

YOU are your child’s greatest role model and supporter. Like most parents, you have enrolled your child in the French Immersion program because you believe in the benefits associated with learning a second language, particularly in a bilingual country like Canada. You want your child to have the best, brightest future possible, including increased job and travel opportunities.

Like many other parents of children in the French Immersion program, there may be times you worry because you are unable to help your child with his homework, feel unable to answer your child’s questions, unsure how to meet your child’s needs because you don’t speak or understand French yourself, or worry if your child’s difficulties and frustrations are typical in second language programs or stem from something more. There may be times when you question your decision to keep your child in the French Immersion program because you are unsure if the French Immersion program is able to meet your child’s needs. You may sometimes feel unsure how you can support your child’s French language skills when you are unable to speak French yourself. You want and need answers to all of your questions.

You are not alone! Most parents of children in the French Immersion program do not speak French. However, even if you do not speak French, you are still able to help your child learn the French language, progress academically, and succeed while staying in the French Immersion program.

This Parent Tool-Kit has been created to show you how you can support your child and his unique learning needs in the French Immersion program. This resource provides you with the essential information you need to know to make well-informed decisions about your children’s bilingual education. It provides you with the knowledge and strategies you need in order to be a stronger, more confident advocate for the supports your child needs and deserves to be successful in the Ontario French Immersion program.

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The Missing Piece

Research has told us repeatedly that there are many factors which contribute to a child’s second language development and achievement.

The supports required to help children with learning difficulties succeed in the French Immersion program are like pieces of a puzzle- the more elements, or pieces, there are, the more successful and supported the child will be in the FI program. When individuals work together towards a common goal, like pieces of a puzzle coming together, the more likely it is for that goal to be achieved.

Often, however, there are pieces missing from the puzzle. Sometimes students do not receive required elements to support their learning needs. These elements may be adequate, individualized instruction, or the appropriate assistive technology, or the environmental accommodations they need in order to be successful. When elements are missing, students may struggle and may not be able to reach their maximum potential.

When one piece is missing, it affects the whole puzzle.

Often, parent involvement is a missing piece in the French Immersion program. Parents feel intimidated if they do not speak the language of instruction, they may feel left out of important decision making processes, and may not feel informed of the best strategies and interventions that can help their child be successful in the FI program.

The goal of this Tool-Kit is to equip parents with the information, strategies and resources they need to be stronger supporters of their child’s education in the French Immersion program.
In this Tool-Kit you will find:

- Important information for parents with respect to the Ontario Ministry of Education’s goals and visions to improve the accessibility of the French Immersion Program for all learners;

- A summary of policies and procedures outlined in Ministry of Education documents pertaining to the inclusion of exceptional learners in the French Immersion program;

- Fact sheets with research-based information to help parents make the best, most well-informed decisions about their child’s education;

- A workshop template for parents, administrators or anyone else wanting to help educate and empower parents of children with learning difficulties in the French Immersion program;

- Additional resources such as books, websites, services available in your community to support your efforts to help your child succeed in French Immersion;

- An explanation of some of the acronyms you may hear and come across in this handbook, in your child’s school, or elsewhere;

- And, the answers to your unanswered questions and greatest concerns with respect how you can help support your child’s learning needs in the French Immersion program, in Ontario.
CHAPTER 1

The French Immersion Program

“French Immersion: the great Canadian success story.”
(Hayden, 1988, p. 18)

History

Canada’s French Immersion program began in 1965 as a small class of 25 students in the suburb of St. Lambert, Quebec. The program was initiated by a group of English speaking parents who were unhappy with the traditional Core French approach to teaching French. The parents sought to find a form of education that would provide their children with improved opportunities to learn to speak, read and write in French so that they could achieve functional bilingualism. Initially launched as a research project, the French Immersion program was funded by the St. Lambert Research Experiment. Almost 50 years later, the French Immersion program has grown from a population of 25 students to over 342,000 students across all Canadian provinces and territories. The French Immersion program is now recognized world-wide as one of the best models for second language acquisition. It’s no wonder the Program has been hailed as “the great Canadian success story.”

Program Goals

The goals of the French as a Second Language programs are outlined in the Ontario Curriculum, French as a Second Language Grades 1-8 document. The goals for students in the French Immersion program, as well as in the other Second Language programs are to:

- Use French to communicate and interact effectively in a variety of social settings;
- Learn about Canada, its two official languages, and other cultures;
- Appreciate and acknowledge the interconnectedness and interdependence of the global community;
- Be responsible for their own learning as they work independently and in groups;
- Use effective language learning strategies;
- Become lifelong language learners for personal growth and for active participation as world citizens.

Benefits

_The French Immersion program is “a form of education that is regarded as being the most effective educational means for attaining functional bilingualism.”_ (Genesee, 2008, pg. 141)

_Bilingualism_

Bilingualism, or having the ability to communicate in a second language, has many benefits, particularly in a country like Canada which has two official languages.

It is reported that the main reason parents enroll their children in the FI program is so that they attain _functional bilingualism_. In other words, parents want their children to be able to comfortably and proficiently understand, read, write and speak in French. The benefits associated with being bilingual are countless.

_Increased Career Opportunities_

Fluency in a second language will give students greater access to information which may in turn lead to more educational and career opportunities. Bilingualism increases future job prospects and provides students with an edge in a competitive job market in Canada and in other countries around the world.

_Increased Cultural Exposure and Respect_

Exposure to a second language develops students’ awareness of how languages and cultures are connected, and helps students to develop an appreciation, and respect for the diversity in Canada, as well as in other countries around the world. Knowledge of a second language is also associated with enhanced enjoyment of cultural experiences, including music, art, theatre, literature and travel. Knowing a second language may also increase students’ ability to form personal, and professional, relationships with people around the world by being able to communicate with others.

_Increased Cognitive Development_

In addition to strengthening students’ ability to communicate in French, knowledge of a second language has also been shown to strengthen students’ first-language skills. The ability to speak two or more languages has been shown to enhance students’ cognitive development, reasoning and creative-thinking skills. It has also been reported that second-language learners tend to be more divergent thinkers, with improved memory and attention spans.
Characteristics of Children in the French Immersion Program

Children in the French Immersion program are as diverse as any other group of children in any program in Ontario. They vary as much in personality, intellectual ability, physically ability, and behaviour as you would see in any other classroom.

Children who enroll in the French Immersion program do not speak French at home. Typically, children who are in the French Immersion program come from non-French speaking families, and usually speak English or another language at home. Therefore, French is the child’s second (or sometimes third or fourth) language.

Children in the French Immersion program usually do not have parents, or caregivers, who speak, read or write French fluently, and it is not expected that they do.

Depending on the timing of the start of the French Immersion program in your school district, children usually begin French Immersion when they are of Junior Kindergarten age (or in some cases in Grade 1). This is usually children who are 4 or 5 years of age.

Children with diverse learning needs, including students with learning disabilities, can enroll in the French Immersion program. Studies have shown that students with learning difficulties in the French Immersion program will do as well academically as they could be expected to do in an English program, provided they receive the same supports as they would if enrolled in the English program.
Key Terms in Chapter 1

Today there are many different French programs offered throughout Ontario. The differences in the programs can sometimes be confusing. The following list defines the various French programs offered to students in school boards across Ontario. For more information on the French programs offered in Ontario, refer to the Ontario Ministry of Education French As a Second Language Curriculum document.

www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/fsl18-2013curr.pdf

Core French
French is taught as a subject for one period each day, or a few times a week, for a total of 200 minutes per week. In the Limestone District School Board, students begin French instruction in either Grade 1 or Grade 4, depending on the school. All students must receive a minimum of 600 hours of French instruction by the end of Grade 8. (p. 15)

Extended French
In the Extended French program, French must be the language of instruction for a minimum of 25% of the total instructional time at every grade level of the program and provide a minimum of 1260 hours of instruction in French by the end of Grade 8. (p. 15)

French Immersion
In the French Immersion program, French must be the language of instruction for a *minimum* of 50 per cent of the total instructional time at every grade level of the program. By the end of Grade 8, students must have received a *minimum* of 3800 hours of instruction in French. Most school boards offer the French Immersion program beginning in Junior Kindergarten or Grade 1. All FI programs must include the study of French as a second language and the study of at least two other subjects taught in French. These two subjects must be selected from the following: the arts, social studies (Grades 1 to 6) or history and geography (Grades 7 and 8), mathematics, science and technology, and health and physical education. Although the French Immersion curriculum is written for a Grade 1 start, many immersion programs starting in Grade 1 provide instruction in French in all subjects (i.e., for 100 per cent of total instructional time). Once students reach Grade 3, they begin to receive one period of formal instruction in English each day. Instruction in English may then be gradually extended to include other subjects. By the end of Grade 8, students may receive up to 50 per cent of their instruction in English. (p. 16)
Early Immersion refers to a French Immersion program that begins in Junior Kindergarten, Senior Kindergarten, or Grade 1, depending on the school board. Most school boards across Ontario offer the Early immersion program beginning in Junior Kindergarten. Students may continue to go on to Secondary School in the French Immersion program.

Late Immersion refers to a French Immersion program that begins in Grade 6 or 7, depending on the school board. By this time, most students will have had several years of French in the Core French Program. Students may continue to go on to Secondary School in the French Immersion program.
CHAPTER 1: FACT SHEET

“French Immersion: the great Canadian success story.”

(Hayden, 1988, p.18)

Did you know that....

- Children with a wide range of learning abilities can benefit from the French Immersion experience by means of learning a second language?
- Most students who are in the French Immersion program come from non-French speaking families and have parents who do not speak French?
- Having a second language like French can help improve future job opportunities?
- Approximately 7.3 million people living in Canada speak French as their first language?
- Approximately 10 million Canadians report that they are able to conduct a conversation in French?
- Approximately 596,000 people living in Ontario speak French at home?
- A knowledge of Canada’s two official languages helps children to better understand the history, development and politics of their own country?
- French is spoken by about 220 million people around the world?
- French is an official working language of the European Economic Community, the United Nations, the International Red Cross, the International Olympic Committee, NATO, and many other organizations?
- Learning French will make it easier for your child to learn a third or fourth language?

Online Resources:
The ministry provides information about FSL programs in Ontario on its website, at www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/amenagement/FLS.html.

School boards provide details about their local FSL programs on their websites. A complete list of all school boards in Ontario is available online at www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/sbinfo/boardList.html.

Elementary curriculum documents are available online at www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/fsl.html.

Secondary curriculum documents are available online at www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/fsl.html.

The following link provides information on French-language and bilingual postsecondary institutions: www.ontario.ca/education-and-training/french-language-institutions

Possible Factors Influencing Student Performance in French Immersion:
http://www.carla.umn.edu/immersion/acie/vol7/May2004_Student_Performance_Factors.html
Chapter 2

The French Immersion Program and Students with learning difficulties: The Goals and Visions for FSL in Ontario

“Educators, students, parents, and communities can work together to support student achievement in FSL and strengthen FSL programming.”

(A Framework for FSL, K-12, 2013, p. 8)

Three factors are at the heart of this resource: the importance of parent involvement for student success; French as a Second Language program beliefs and goals; and Special Education services for students with learning difficulties in publicly funded programs in Ontario.

This chapter aims to give you, the parent, a summary of the most essential information pertaining to the Ontario Ministry of Education’s beliefs and visions related to parent engagement and meeting the needs of exceptional learners in the French Immersion program. This information has been taken directly from four Ontario Ministry of Education documents. For a more comprehensive overview of Ontario Ministry of Education’s policies, visions and goals please refer to the online version of the Ministry documents.

The Ontario Curriculum, French as a Second Language: Core, Grades 4-8, Extended, Immersion, Grades 1-8 (2013):

According to the Ontario Ministry of Education Curriculum, French as a Second Language: Core, Grades 4-8; Extended; Immersion, Grades 1-8 (2013), all elementary French as a Second Language (FSL) programs are designed to meet the needs of all learners, and schools strive to provide all students with the opportunity to learn in the way that is best suited to their individual strengths and needs. The FSL Curriculum (2013) states:

Ontario elementary schools strive to support high-quality learning while giving every student the opportunity to learn in the way that is best suited to his or her individual strengths and needs. The Ontario curriculum is designed to help every student reach his or her full potential through a program of learning that is coherent, relevant, and age appropriate. The curriculum recognizes that the needs of learners are diverse and helps all learners develop the knowledge, skills, and perspectives they need to become informed, productive, caring, responsible, and active citizens in their own communities and in the world. (p. 3).

7 http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/fsl.html
A Framework for French as a Second Language (FSL) in Ontario School, K-12 (2013)⁸:

The Ontario Ministry of Education’s A Framework for French as a Second Language in Ontario Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12 (2013) (herein referred to as the Framework for FSL, K-12) was developed to help Ontario school boards and schools increase supports and opportunities for all students in FSL programs in order to reach their maximum potential. The Framework for FSL, K-12 supports three core objectives for FSL education in Ontario:

- High levels of student achievement
- Reduced gaps in student achievement
- Increased public confidence in publicly funded education

Parents play an integral role in achieving these goals. The Ontario Ministry of Education acknowledges that parents need to be informed, included and involved in order for these goals to be reached:

The ministry has identified three goals that support the vision for FSL in Ontario as well as the federal objective to promote linguistic duality. By focusing on these goals, educators, students, parents, and communities can work together to support student achievement in FSL and strengthen FSL programming.

(A Framework for FSL, K-12, 2013, p. 8)

The Framework for FSL, K-12 emphasizes the need for increased support and opportunities for students with learning difficulties and promotes the belief that all students are able to learn French when enrolled in FSL programs, including students who are identified with exceptionalities.

The Framework calls for schools and school boards across Ontario to “promote the inclusiveness of FSL programs, recognizing that all students can learn French as a second language given the appropriate support” (A Framework for FSL, K-12, 2013, p. 16). Specifically, the Framework encourages schools and school districts to:

- Provide required accommodations and modifications as outlined in a student’s Individual Education Plan (IEP);
- Ensure access to assistive technology as outlined in students’ IEP, when required;
- Apply inclusive instructional approaches, such as Universal Design for Learning and Differentiated Instruction, when planning for FSL programs in order to accommodate the needs of a diversity of learners in the FSL classroom.

⁸ www.edugains.ca/resourcesFSL/PDF/Framework/frameworkFLS.pdf
Learning for All: A Guide to Effective Assessment and Instruction for All Students, Kindergarten to Grade 12 (2013)\(^9\)

Learning for All: A Guide to Effective Assessment and Instruction for All Students, Kindergarten to Grade 12 is an Ontario Ministry of Education document that outlines the beliefs, policies and procedures pertaining to children with learning difficulties in public schools across Ontario. Although it is available online to the general public, the document was created for a professional audience and is intended for administrators, teachers and other stakeholders in the public education system. The information provided pertains to all students, regardless of their chosen program, including children with learning difficulties in the French Immersion program.

The Learning for All (2013) document states:

- All students can succeed.
- Each student has his or her own unique patterns of learning.
- Successful instructional practices are founded on evidence-based research, tempered by experience.
- Universal design and differentiated instruction are effective and interconnected means of meeting the learning or productivity needs of any group of students.
- Classroom teachers are the key educators for a student’s literacy and numeracy development.
- Classroom teachers need the support of the larger community to create a learning environment that supports students with special education needs.
- Fairness is not sameness.

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Parental involvement is a broad term and includes such things as good parenting, helping with homework, serving on school councils and board committees, communicating and meeting with teachers and volunteering in the classroom or on school trips. All forms of parental involvement are beneficial. In every form, parental involvement in education shows children that their parents care about what they are doing and learning, and how they value a good education.


The document addresses barriers which may prohibit some parents from becoming involved in their children’s education. These barriers include some of the challenges faced by parents of children in the French Immersion program because they are not able or comfortable speaking the language of instruction. The Parent Engagement policy recognizes that language may be a barrier for many parents and encourages schools to implement strategies that enhance parent engagement so that everyone is able to participate in their child’s education.

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10 www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/policy.html
Chapter 2: Fact Sheet

“Educators, students, parents, and communities can work together to support student achievement in FSL and strengthen FSL programming.”

(A Framework for FSL, K-12, 2013, p. 8)

Did you know that...

- There is no evidence to support the argument that students at-risk for reading difficulty are likely to be at differentially greater risk in the French Immersion program?
- Research suggests that the same kinds of interventions that are appropriate and effective for students learning to read in their first language (i.e. English) would be effective for students learning to read in French-as-a-second language?
- All children can benefit from the French Immersion experience when they are provided with the same appropriate and necessary supports and services that they would receive in the English program?
- Students who are strong readers in English, are usually strong readers in French? Students who are poor readers in English, are usually poor readers in French (Genesee, 2007).

Online Ministry of Education Resources:

The Ontario Curriculum: French as a Second Language (2013):
http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/fsl.html

Learning for All: A Guide to Effective Assessment and Instruction for All Students (2011):
http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/learning.html

The Parent Engagement Policy (2010):
http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/policy.html

A Framework for French as a Second Language in Ontario (2013):
http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/amenagement/frameworkFLS.pdf

Ontario Ministry of Education IEP Resource Guide and Samples of IEP’s:
http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/guide/resource/
Chapter 3
Is the French Immersion Program Able to Meet My Child’s Learning Needs? YES!

“Students with special needs can learn second languages. As with other subjects, they need accommodation, but there is nothing inherent in the learning of a second language that precludes special needs students.”
(Archibald, 2006, as cited in A Framework for FSL, K-12, 2013, p. 36)

Today’s French Immersion classrooms are as academically diverse as those offering other programs. Over the last 50 years, researchers who specialize in the area of special education in the French Immersion program, such as Fred Genesee11, have reported that students with learning difficulties and special learning needs are able to succeed in the French Immersion program if they are provided with the appropriate resources and supports.

The Ontario Ministry of Education’s Framework for FSL, K-12 guide recommends that all parents with concerns regarding their child’s academic progress in the French Immersion program contact their child’s FSL teacher as soon as possible so that together you can discuss what can be done to help your child’s learning. The Ministry of Education asserts that:

Most children encounter challenges from time to time, but if your child is worried, frustrated or expresses a concern about learning French, it could be the sign of an underlying problem that should be resolved as soon as possible. Children progress at different rates and learn in different ways, so teachers plan instruction and assessment taking into consideration the students’ interests, learning styles, and previously acquired knowledge and skills.

/Framework for FSL, K-12, 2013, p. 27/

This chapter will help you develop a better understanding of the signs to look for if you suspect your child is having difficulties learning at school as well as some important questions to ask when meeting with your child’s teacher. Included in this chapter is a guideline of the steps you may choose to take if you have concerns about your child’s learning development and progress in the French Immersion program. Finally, you will learn about the supports you can expect to see put into place in the French Immersion classroom to help support your child’s special learning needs at school.

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The Warning Signs

Few children breeze through school without ever having experienced some feelings of uncertainty, confusion or frustration. Every student experiences the occasional difficulty understanding a new concept or trouble applying a new skill at some point in their education. However, if your child is experiencing frustration, severe anxiety about school, a significant change in behaviour, or has become increasingly disengaged from the learning activities at school, it may be time to have a talk with your child’s teacher.

The following list outlines some factors that may be contributing to your child’s ability to learn and progress normally in school. Consult with your child’s teacher if:

- Your child often has difficulty expressing himself or herself clearly in their first language, or difficulty articulating some sounds in their first language;
- Your child regularly has difficulty focusing and paying attention, even for short periods of time;
- Your child has difficulty repeating words or phrases in French;
- Your child has is unable to recognize letter names and associated sounds;
- Your child has difficulty with phonemic awareness, or identifying and separating the different sounds in words.

Also, it is important to talk with your child’s French Immersion teacher if:

- Your child expresses continued feelings of unhappiness about school;
- Your child has demonstrated ongoing behavioural or social problems;
- Your child shows a sudden change in behaviour, such as anger towards family members, disengagement from normally enjoyable activities;
- Your child loses a sense of self-confidence;
- Your child has expressed a definite lack of interest in learning French.

None of these factors indicate that your child should not remain in the French Immersion program. Rather, these signs suggest that a conference with your child’s teacher may be required in order to deal with these issues, just as you would if your child were in the English program.
I have concerns. *Now what?*

If you suspect your child may be experiencing more than the typical frustrations associated with regular school activities, learning experiences, or frustrations due to learning a second language, talk to your child’s teacher. The following is meant to be a *guideline* for the steps that may be taken to help you and your child’s teacher better understand your child’s individual learning needs.

1. Arrange a meeting with your child’s teacher. Regular, positive communication with your child’s teacher and/or teaching team is one of the most important things you can do as a parent. If you have concerns about your child, chances are your child’s teacher does, too. Request a time to meet by writing a note in your child’s agenda or communication book, or make a phone call to request a time to meet that is convenient for all persons involved.

2. Explain your reasons for requesting a meeting. Give your child’s teachers or teaching team a chance to prepare for your meeting by giving them a brief explanation for the meeting.

3. Be prepared. Arrive to the meeting on time, and with your questions and concerns written down (*see box below for suggested questions to ask*). Bring a pen or pencil with you so you can take notes throughout the meeting. A lot of information may be exchanged during this time and clear, dated notes will help you to remember what was discussed and when.

4. The meeting. You or your child’s teacher may have a short agenda in mind for the meeting. An agenda helps keep everyone on track and usually results in the most effective use of time. Also, make sure both you and the teacher have the same objectives for the meeting, whether it is to share your concerns or establish a plan of action.

5. During the meeting. The meeting is a chance for you and the teacher and teaching team to discuss concerns and observations. Ask the teacher to share any observations or concerns he or she has witnessed in the classroom. Keep an open mind. Sometimes students act quite differently in class than they do at home.

6. Plan of Action. A plan of action may or may not be established at this time. A plan of action may be a plan for your child at school, or home, or both. A plan of action should include a time frame in which the plan is to be carried out, as well as some objectives. Sometimes, the plan of action includes appointments with the child’s doctor to have eyesight, hearing and other health factors checked. The more information you and the teacher have about your child, the easier it will be to create the best, most effective supports for him or her.
7. Talk to your child. Tell your child that you and the teacher are proud of his or her accomplishments. Remind your child that everyone has special and different strengths and weaknesses (maybe point out some of your areas of difficulty, such as you aren’t great at baking, or you have trouble skating) and remind your child that you are there to support him or her.

8. Carry out the Plan of Action as best you can. Attend your child’s doctor’s appointments and keep notes or records of your visits so you can share them with your child’s teacher at your next meeting.

9. Arrange a follow-up meeting. Request a follow-up meeting with your child’s teacher and/or teaching team after several weeks of the initial meeting to discuss any progress that was made, and to compare notes and information. At this time, your child’s teacher may suggest asking other members of the school support team, such as the Student Support Teacher (SST), the Student Support Counsellor (SSC), or the Vice Principal to help develop a plan for your child. Remember, no one individual holds all the information that may be needed to help your child, nor is there a “simple solution”. Your child’s success at school is a team effort!

10. After several attempts to implement the action have failed to be successful, it may be time to have your child formally assessed to help identify your child’s needs and to determine exactly how to address your child’s needs. These assessments will require your written consent and will follow the protocol outlined by the school board.

11. In the meantime, do your best to be patient, understanding and most importantly be positive. Your positive attitude and support will be the greatest way you can help your child. For more ideas how you can support your child during this time, go to “What Can I Do?”
Assessments- French or English or does it matter?

In Ontario, most diagnostic assessments are performed in English. Research has shown that specific learning disabilities, including reading disabilities and language impairment, are not language specific. In other words, a learning disability will exist regardless of the language of instruction or assessment. There is a cross-linguistic correlation between reading abilities; in other words, students who are good readers in English are likely to be good readers in French, and poor readers in English are likely to be poor readers in French.12

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The FI Program CAN Meet Your Child’s Needs

“FSL educators strive to meet the diverse needs of all students through the use of differentiated instruction and by providing accommodations and/or modifying expectations if necessary. Participation in FSL programs should reflect the diversity of the student population, including students with special education needs and English language learners.”

(The Ontario Curriculum, French as a Second Language, 2013, p.10)

As in any other classroom, students in the French Immersion classroom come with a variety of strengths and needs. French Immersion teachers must plan engaging lessons that recognize the diversity of the learning abilities and needs of the students, and give all students learning tasks that reflect their particular learning styles and abilities so that all students can reach their maximum learning potential.

The following teaching approaches are recognized as inclusive instructional practices by the Ontario Ministry of Education. In other words, they are teaching practices that are known to enhance the learning experience of a diverse classroom of learners, including students with learning difficulties in the FSL classroom.

**Universal Design for Learning (UDL):**

The Universal Design for Learning is a term that refers to the design of instructional materials and activities that permits the learning goals to be reached by individuals with a wide range of differences in their abilities to see, hear, speak, move, etc. by means of flexible curricular materials and activities designed to include alternatives for students with diversity in their abilities and backgrounds. UDL nurtures students’ individual strengths by fostering an inclusive learning environment that is flexible and accessible to everyone. Students are provided with appropriate accommodations, such as technology and media tools, different assessment strategies and materials so that each student can reach his or her maximum potential.

**Differentiated instruction (DI):**

Differentiated Instruction is a term that refers to instruction that is student-centred in order to address students’ specific strengths and areas of difficulty. It takes into account students’ interests, learning profiles, and level of functioning. The guiding principles of DI include respectful tasks, flexible grouping, and ongoing assessment and adjustment (Huchinson & Martin, 2012). Teachers become familiar with students’ learning styles and preferences, interests, readiness, and current level of ability, as well as the factors that motivate their learning. This knowledge enables educators to be flexible in tailoring the content of instruction and their teaching approaches to the needs and interests of students.
Both the UDL and DI models can be implemented in the French Immersion setting to meet the individual needs of a group of students who all want to learn a second language.

**Accommodations:**

Your child may require specific accommodations to meet his or her individual needs. Accommodations will allow your exceptional child to access the French Immersion curriculum without any changes to the grade-level expectations. In other words, your child will continue to work at his or her grade level. There are three different types of accommodations that may be considered for your child:

*Instructional accommodations:* changes in teaching strategies, including styles of presentation, methods of organization, or use of technology and multimedia (i.e. graphic organizers, photocopied notes, assistive computer software).

*Environment accommodations:* changes that the student may require in the classroom and/or school environment, such as preferential seating or special lighting.

*Assessment accommodations:* changes in assessment procedures that enable the student to demonstrate his or her learning, such as allowing addition time to complete tests or assignments or permitting oral responses to test questions.

**Modifications:**

You and your child’s teaching team may decide that *modifications* are required for your child to be successful in the French Immersion program. Modifications may include one or more of the following:

- An increase or decrease in the number and/or complexity of expectations;
- The use of expectations at a different grade level;
- Specific, realistic, observable, and measurable goals, and specific knowledge and/or skills that the student can demonstrate independently.

Modifications must indicate the knowledge and/or skills that the student is expected to show independently and that will be assessed in each reporting period on the Elementary Provincial Report Card.

For more information on accommodations and modifications that can be made to support your child’s academic achievement in the French Immersion program, see the *Individual Education Plan (IEP): A Resource Guide*, available online at [http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/guide/resource/index.html](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/guide/resource/index.html)
Interventions: What Works?

Researchers no longer ask the question, *IS the FI program able to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties?*, but rather *HOW is the FI program able to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties?*

French Immersion is a suitable educational alternative for students who desire to learn French as a second language, provided he or she is given the appropriate supports, interventions and educational resources he or she requires. This chapter aims to provide you with a summary of five different interventions that, when used effectively, have helped students with learning difficulties thrive in an FSL setting.

Technology:

Denise Harding is a mother to a French Immersion son with a learning disability, and works as a Partner and Academic Coach for an organization that provides academic support for students aged twelve and older. As both a mother and practitioner in the field of exceptional learners she advises the use of technology for students with learning difficulties in the French Immersion program. She often recommends educational apps on tablets, and using smart phones to get kids engaged in their learning of a second language. For students who have difficulty copying an assignment, she recommends taking a picture with a smart phone. She says “Kids love using technologies and thrive when given engaging, hands-on assignments” (Harding, as cited in CPF, 2012, p. 10).

Peer-Tutoring:

A peer-tutoring program may be an effective intervention strategy for some students with mild reading difficulties. In a study done on Grade 2 students in a school district in British Columbia, students who received thirty minutes of daily peer-tutoring with older, trained, Grade 6 students over a ten week period of time, showed a significant improvement in their reading strategies and skills. The intervention focused on teaching the Grade 2 students specific reading strategies such as making predictions, identifying high frequency French words, sounding out words, and developing their comprehension and story retells skills. The intervention was in French. Following the intervention, the Grade 2 students showed improvements in their decoding skills, fluency and comprehension. The author of the study, Dr. Bournot-Trites 13 remarked that the intervention had secondary benefits on the Grade 2 students. Following the intervention, students reported improved attitudes towards reading, greater feelings of self-confidence, and felt more motivated to read.

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Learning and Literacy Programming:

The Calgary Board of Education has a Learning and Literacy (L&L) program for students in Grades 4-6 in both the English and French Immersion tracks. The L&L program provides support for students identified with a learning disability. The goal of the program is to help children with learning difficulties gain skills, knowledge, and competencies to reach their full potential. The program has five key components which contribute to student success.

1. Collaboration: A team of teachers with individual areas of expertise work together with the program’s students and the students’ Individual Program Plan (similar to Ontario’s version of the IEP). Each student has a specifically designed IPP with goals, strategies, accommodations and transition plans to meet their needs.

2. Assessment: Student assessment is frequent, ongoing and involves the students themselves. Assessment includes the use of assistive technology, such as scanners, printers, Smart Boards, and digital cameras, and students focus on developing their strengths.

3. Self-Advocacy: Students are taught to learn about their learning styles and strengths, and with teacher support, create personal academic goals and strategies to attain them.

4. Transition planning: Transition planning maintains continuity for the students so that they are supported in their classrooms as well as in the L&L program. Teachers meet to articulate planning and implementing of transition plans for the students.

5. Parent Involvement: Parents have access to information needed to understand, make decisions, and find resources. Parents are considered to be active participants in and make meaningful contributions to their child’s education. Teachers communicate regularly with parents about students’ academic performance and behaviour.

Currently in Ontario, there is no program equivalent to the French L&L program available for students with learning disabilities in the French Immersion program.

Phonological Awareness Interventions:

It has been suggested that phonological awareness interventions may help improve the reading ability of French Immersion students with reading impairments. Phonological awareness (PA) is the ability to manipulate the sounds, or phonemes, in words. For example, if a student is asked how many sounds they hear in the word cat, a student should be able to identify three separate sounds from the letters c, a, and t. Strong phonological awareness has been shown to be a strong predictor of future reading ability. One study (MacCoubrey, 2004) looked at how phonological awareness interventions in French and in English could be used as predictors of future reading difficulties of 77 Grade 1 French Immersion students. Students were tested using a variety of rhyming games and syllable activities in English, and in French. It was found that students with poor PA abilities were at greater risk for reading difficulties later on. The results of this study are

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important because they indicate that at-risk students can be identified before they even learn to read, using PA interventions in either English or French. Therefore, it is suggested that early interventions are implemented to help at-risk students before reading failure occurs. The results of the study also suggest that phonological awareness is transferable across languages so that PA interventions can be done in English and still benefit students reading development in French. The findings from this study advocate early sound skill and reading interventions rather than taking a ‘wait and see’ approach, which can result in widening the achievement gap for at-risk students.

What’s Necessary for Some is Good for All: Strategies for an Inclusive Classroom:

Dr. Callie Mady is a Professor at the Schulich School of Education at Nipissing University, in Nipissing, Ontario and an advocate for creating more inclusive French Immersion classrooms across Ontario. In an article she wrote for Canadian Parents for French (2012), Dr. Mady stated that French Immersion classroom teachers need to adapt classroom strategies to help students with learning disabilities. Parents can also use these same strategies with their child at home, or as recommended by the child’s IEP.

Some of the instructional strategies Dr. Mady recommends are:

1. Using manipulatives- hands-on materials may help visual learners
2. Pre-teaching vocabulary- isolate and teach new vocabulary before reading it in a story or using it in context
3. Rephrasing and restating of instructions- some students may require multiple repetitions of instructions; this may be done verbally and/or in writing.
4. Using simpler language- simplify complex instructions with easier, more familiar vocabulary
5. Teach explicit strategies- some students can articulate the reading strategies they use to be good readers, while other students need more explicit instruction of strategies, such as chunking of words in to syllables, using picture cues, making predictions, and making inferences.
6. Highlighting or enlarging text for students who have difficulty reading
7. Modifying the length of an assignment or offering different ways of presenting their knowledge- instead of an essay, they can do an oral presentation or poster project with visuals. Ultimately, the goal is for the student to demonstrate what they know and have learned, not how they communicate their learnings.
Should I transfer my child into the English Program?

“Any decision to change the placement of a child must be in the interest of the child—not of the program, the parents, or the teachers.”

(Demers, 1994, p.4)

At some point, parents of children with learning difficulties in the French Immersion program may face two difficult questions: Should I transfer my child out of the French Immersion program? And, Will my child be more successful in the English program than in the French Immersion program?

Learning disabilities Are Not Language Specific:

Research evidence suggests that children with learning difficulties, including mild learning disabilities, can be successful in the French Immersion program. In fact, studies report that transferring out of the French Immersion program can have greater detrimental effects on a child than keeping him or her in the French Immersion program. Experts in the field of French Immersion research, Fred Genesee and Maggie Bruck, have reported that children with learning difficulties in the French Immersion program who were transferred out of the program and into the English program continued to have the same learning difficulties in the English program as they did in the French Immersion program. This finding suggests that learning disabilities are cross-linguistic, or in other words, learning disabilities are not language specific and will exist regardless of the language of instruction.

Negative consequences associated with Transfer out of the FI Program:

Transferring a student out of the French Immersion program and into the English program may not always have positive results. Some research suggests that transferring an exceptional child out of the FI program may have emotional and social consequences. Students with learning difficulties who have transferred out of the FI program have reported negative attitudes towards school, low self-esteem, feelings of frustration. Additionally, it has been reported that transferring students with learning difficulties out of the FI program and into a new learning and social environment has resulted in increased behavioural problems. In another study, it was said that “transfer to an English program may damage a child’s self-image and the stigma of failure may compound the learning problems.” In other words, transfer out of the FI gave some students a sense of failure.

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Chapter 3: Fact Sheet

Is the FI Program Able to Meet my Child’s Needs?

Yes!

“Students with special needs can learn second languages. As with other subjects, they need accommodation, but there is nothing inherent in the learning of a second language that precludes special needs students.”

(Archibald, 2006, p. 2)

Did you know that…

- Second-language learning does not negatively affect a student’s first language development?
- Certain speech difficulties are actually helped when a child is given a fresh start in a new language and is involved in a program which depends so much on aural and oral work?
- Universal design for learning (UDL) is an approach to teaching that focuses on using strategies or pedagogical materials designed to meet the special needs and to enhance the learning of all students, regardless of age, skills, or situation. UDL strives to nurture students’ individual strengths by fostering an inclusive learning environment that is flexible and accessible to everyone by providing students with accommodations such as technology and media tools, different assessment strategies and materials so that every student can reach his or her maximum potential?
- Differentiated instruction (DI) is a method of teaching that strives to adapt instruction to meet the various interests, learning styles and readiness to learn of all students in the class?
- Learning Disabilities and reading disabilities are cross-linguistic, meaning that struggling readers will experience similar problems if enrolled or transferred to an English-only program?
- Language skills are transferable and language support provided in English, particularly in reading and writing, will help to improve French language skills?
- Early identification of at-risk French Immersion students is critical in order for early interventions to take place, preventing achievement gaps from widening?
- Assessments for the identification of student exceptionalities can be performed using standard English language assessments?
- There is notable improvement in the performance of students with learning difficulties when provided with appropriate interventions?
- Children with learning disabilities who have transferred from the French Immersion program into the regular English program have reported negative attitudes about school, low self-esteem, feelings of frustration and a sense of failure due to transferring out of the program?
Students with learning difficulties are able to be successful and learn French when the appropriate remediation, interventions and support are provided to them?
Chapter 4
How Can I help my child if I don’t speak French?

“Increased parental and community engagement is a critical component of the FSL goals. High levels of engagement in FSL by adult role models in the school, home, and community highlight for students the value that is placed on learning additional languages, especially French, in Ontario.”

(A Framework for FSL, K-12, 2013, p. 22)

Parent Engagement:

The Ontario Ministry of Education, Parent Engagement document states that parent involvement leads to student success. In other words, regardless of whether or not the parent is able to speak the language of instruction, parents can have a positive influence on their child’s education by being a positive role model for their children, maintaining high but reasonable expectations for their children’s academic achievement and being involved in their learning and development.

Joyce Epstein is an expert in the field of parent involvement in schools and communities. Her research has shown that a strong and positive relationship between a student’s home and school environment helps determine children’s academic success. She believes that schools that have programs that implement practices that promote strong school, family, and community partnerships should be better able to help children succeed academically because these outreach activities create a greater consistency between students’ home and school environments. To illustrate this idea, she has developed a model called the Overlapping Spheres of Influence, where the student is at the centre of the model (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1

(Source: Joyce L. Epstein, Ph.D., et. al., Partnership Center for the Social Organization of Schools, 2001)

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Being involved doesn’t just mean helping with your child’s homework. Joyce Epstein lists six different ways that schools can include and involve parents in their children’s education. A well-designed school program that includes each of these six types of involvement can positively impact students, teachers and parents. The following is a list of Joyce Epstein’s six types of parent involvement, as well as suggestions how you, the parent, might consider this type of involvement in your child’s French Immersion (FI) classroom to help improve your child’s success in school. Ask your child’s French Immersion teacher, Special Education teacher or school administration for specific ways in which YOU can be a more active partner in your child’s education.

1. **Parenting**: A parent involvement practice which involves assisting parents with child-rearing skills, understanding child development (including second language learning), and setting home conditions that support children as students.
   
   **FI connection**: Ask your child’s teacher for tips that will help you support your child’s learning of the French language at home. Your child’s teacher, school principal or other school community members may provide you with reading and writing strategies to use at home with your child and introduce you to fun cultural events in French in your school and local community.

2. **Communicating**: A practice that involves communicating with families about school program and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications. Examples may include regular phone calls home, newsletters, parent-teacher conferences, and Open Houses.
   
   **FI connection**: You have an important role in your child’s second language education. Regular communication with your child’s teacher shows your child that you care about his education and want to be involved. Make a point of communicating regularly with your child’s teacher and try to attend school events when possible.

3. **Volunteering**: A practice which aims to improve recruitment, training, work and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school and in the classrooms to support student learning.
   
   **FI connection**: As a parent, you lead a very busy life and have a packed weekly schedule, and it is often difficult to find time to volunteer at your child’s school. Ask your child’s teachers if there are volunteer opportunities that are flexible and allow you to do some of the volunteering from home, or during weekend and evening events.

4. **Learning at Home**: Joyce Epstein explains that schools need to involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-related activities and decisions.
   
   **FI connection**: If you do not speak French, don’t worry! Most parents of students in the French Immersion program do not speak French and can still be actively involved in students’ learning at home. Ask your child’s teacher for games and activities you can
play at home on the weekends and on holidays. You can also check out your local library for French books, French CD’s and French movies to watch together as a family. Showing your child that you are interested in learning French with him will keep him inspired and show your child you think French is important, too!

5. **Decision Making**: An important aspect of parent involvement is including families as participants in school decisions, governance and advocacy. Epstein suggests Parent Involvement Committees (PIC), School Councils, action teams and other parent organizations.

*FI connection:* Research shows that parents often feel left out of the decision making of their child’s education in the French Immersion program. Canadian Parents for French (CPF) recommends contacting your local CPF chapter to inquire how you can be more involved in the governance in your child’s school and with the FI programs. Many schools now offer Parents for French (PFF) committees at their schools, for parents who want to be more involved in the governance and policies related to the French Immersion programs. Ask your child’s teacher if a PFF committee exists at your school, and if not, consider starting one. Contact your local CPF Chapter for more information and help to do this. ([www.cpf.ontario.ca](http://www.cpf.ontario.ca))

6. **Collaborating with Community**: Epstein suggests that schools coordinate community resources and services for students, families and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community.

*FI Connection:* Parents of children in the French Immersion program who are living in English speaking regions are often unaware of the resources and services available to them in French. Ask your child’s French Immersion teacher what services are available in your community to support your child’s learning and enjoyment of French. Also, consider the list of resources, including online parent support websites, in this Tool-Kit.
I Want to Help But I Don’t Speak French!

By now, you know that parent involvement is an essential component to your child’s success in the French Immersion program. High levels of parent involvement in FSL programs in the school, home, and community show students that their parents and other adult role models value learning additional languages, particularly French as a second language, in Ontario.

As previously discussed, most parents of children in the French Immersion program do not speak French. However, studies have shown that even if you do not speak French, you can still have a positive influence on your child’s enjoyment and success in the French Immersion program. The Framework for FSL, K-12 (2013) states:

Some parents may think that they have little to contribute to their children’s FSL education because they do not speak or read French. This perception is groundless. Parents do not need to possess French-language skills themselves in order to support children in learning FSL. It is important for parents to understand that skills developed in learning one language are transferable to the learning of others.

(Framework for FSL, 2013, p. 22-23)

If you do not speak French yet want to be involved in your child’s FSL education, the Ontario Ministry of Education Parent Engagement Policy (2013) suggests two formal structures within the Ontario education system that support parent engagement and provide parents with a voice at the school and district levels:

1. School Councils
   School Councils focus on increasing parent involvement within the school community as a key factor in supporting student learning and achievement. School councils act as a direct link between parents and the school principal.

2. Parent Involvement Committees (PIC)
   Parent Involvement Committees enhance parent involvement at the regional level in support of student achievement and operate as a direct link between parents and the director of education and trustees.
Tips for Supporting Your Child’s FSL Learning

The following is a list of tips and recommendations to enhance your ability and confidence to support your child’s enjoyment and French learning at home:

1. Have a positive attitude about French culture and the French language! Your positive attitude will reflect back on your child’s own attitude towards learning French as a second language. Also, having a positive attitude will help keep your child motivated to learn French as a second language, translating into greater success in the classroom.

2. Show an interest in your child’s every day activities and learning at school! Ask your child to tell you about her day, what her favourite activities were, and what new things she learned at school. Showing your child that you care enough to ask questions and are interested in her education will keep her positive and motivated to do the best she can.

3. Provide a language-rich environment for your child. Have meaningful conversations with your child, surround your child with books, newspapers and magazines on a variety of topics, and show your child your love of the written word.

4. Read to your child read as often as possible. If you don’t feel comfortable reading books in French, read in English! Although your child is learning to read in French, the conventions of reading are the same in English and in French. For example, reading aloud to your child will teach your child to pause at punctuation, to read with expression, and to use the pictures as cues to aid understanding and comprehension of the text.

5. Ask your child to retell a familiar story to you. Retelling the main events of a story, recalling the main characters and discussing the beginning, middle and end of a story will teach your child important reading skills that will transfer across languages.

6. Listen to your child read. Ask your child to share a favourite book with you, in English or in French. Show your child you are proud of his efforts and accomplishments, even if errors are made. This will help to enrich your child’s self-confidence in his ability to read, no matter what language it is in.

7. Encourage your child to speak French at home. Ask your child to teach you a few words or phrases that are familiar to him. Most likely, your child will love having the opportunity to teach you something new! And always praise your child’s efforts for trying.

8. Expose your child to French outside of the classroom! Children can be highly motivated to learn French as a second language when they see how French is used by people in their
everyday lives. Take your child to a French movie, watch French television, see a French musical or play, or take the family on a road trip to a French festival! These types of experiences help your child develop an appreciation of French culture in Ontario and throughout the rest of the world.

9. Learn alongside your child! Another way of showing your child that you value French is by learning along with your child. There are many online programs available for adults who want to learn FSL, as well as parent groups that support FSL education. Ask your school, local community college, or local library for FSL resources to help you learn French, too. Such experiences may increase your confidence speaking and reading in French, and enhance your ability to support your child’s FSL learning.

10. Play language-based games with your child at home! Games often require attentive listening, recalling of information, inferring, and making predictions. These skills can be transferred to any language, plus your child will benefit from the time spent interacting with you.

11. Talk to your child about his or her future and start to set goals! Even at an early age, it is important for children to know and understand that French will open doors for him or her in the future, such as student exchanges to another province or country, travel opportunities to an exciting, new destination. Talk to your child about how learning French can open doors to more education opportunities and later on, career opportunities. Even if your child is too young to be thinking about his or her career, it is never too early to talk about the benefits of learning a second language.
**Homework**

Although French is the language of instruction in the French Immersion classroom, parents are not expected to know French, and communication between the school and home is in English.

You may wish to talk to your child’s teachers about ways you can support your child’s homework success. However, whether the homework is in French or in English, there are many ways you can help your child establish good homework habits and routines. Good homework habits will teach your child effective time management strategies, organization skills, not to mention, it’s a great time for your child to talk to you about what he or she is learning at school.

Here are some important tips as recommended in the Framework for FSL, K-12 (2013) to help you help your child with his French homework:

1. **Location:** Establish a location where homework can be done each day. Ensure that it is a familiar space, with adequate lighting and comfortable seating so your child is comfortable when he is working. Ideally, the location is free from distractions such as the television, video games, computer (unless the computer is necessary for the homework assignment), and phone.

2. **Time:** Establish a regular time when homework is done each night, preferably a time when you are home to offer help. Setting a time, and timeframe, will help keep you and your child on schedule so that homework assignments are completed.

3. **Supplies:** Have a homework drawer or basket with all the supplies your child needs to do his homework. Being organized and having the required materials will prevent time from being lost looking for needed materials. Supplies include pencils, erasers, lined paper, and a French/English dictionary.

4. **Show an interest:** Even if you do not speak French, show an interest in what your child is working on and learning in school. Ask your child to talk to you about the homework assignments each day. Also encourage your child to share his feelings of frustration or concern with you.

5. **Encourage and Praise:** Learning a second language is hard work, and takes patience, particularly for children with learning difficulties. Encourage your child to always try her best, especially when she encounters obstacles and challenges along the way. Praise your child for her efforts, even when she makes a mistake. Praise should be specific to the task at hand, and genuine. Remind your child that everyone makes mistakes and the important thing is that we learn from them.
Pronunciation Tips:

Here are some differences between French and English pronunciation that might be most obvious to you as you follow along with your child’s reading:

- Stress falls on the last syllable (ami sounds like am-ee);
- While there are significant differences between the sounds of the vowels in the two languages, the consonants are essentially the same;
- Accents change the sounds of vowels: e sounds much like the short English e (heck) while é has the long a sound (hay);
- au has the long o sound (so);
- ch is pronounce d like the English sh (chef);
- eau has the long o sound (so);
- er and ez at the end of a word have the long a sound (hay);
- h is always silent in French;
- i is pronounced like the long English e (bee);
- ou in French always sounds like group (not out);
- oi and oy sound like the wa in water;
- qu sounds like k (not like kw as in quick);
- s at the end of a word to indicate the plural is silent;
- th is pronounced t;
- When a word begins with a vowel (or a silent h), it is usually joined with the last consonant of the preceding word—which may make it sound as though your child is reading one word instead of two.

You can find pronunciation tips online to hear the correct pronunciation of French words.

The Rainbow School District website provides such a link for parents:

Chapter 4: Fact Sheet

“Increased parental and community engagement is a critical component of the FSL goals. High levels of engagement in FSL by adult role models in the school, home, and community highlight for students the value that is placed on learning additional languages, especially French, in Ontario.”

(A Framework for FSL, K-12, 2013, p. 22)

Did you know that…

- Parent involvement is a key component of FSL programs?
- Parents who are engaged in their children’s FSL education are their children’s best role models for FSL learning, by showing their children they value learning a second language?
- You, the parent, can provide your child’s teacher and education team with important information that is critical in order to develop and provide an individualized education plan (I.E.P.) for your child?
- You can reinforce the language skills your child is learning in his FSL classroom by reading regularly to your child in English and by providing a language-rich environment at home?
- You can support your child’s emotional well-being in the FI program by offering your child words of encouragement and praise for his efforts to learn a second language?
- You can help your child establish positive, life-long work habits by enforcing routines and effective homework habits each night at home?
- You are your child’s greatest advocate and are an important participant in the decision making in your child’s education?
- You can assist with changing policies and practices to include more adequate supports for children with learning difficulties in the FI and other FSL programs?
- You can help dispel the many myths associated with exceptional learners in the FI programs by hosting a workshop for other parents and FI community members?
- Research shows that there is notable improvement in the performance of students with learning difficulties in the French Immersion program when appropriate assistance is provided?
- Research shows that early phonological awareness interventions in English can be a predictor of future reading difficulties in French?
- You can heighten your child’s interest and motivation to learn French outside of the classroom by participating in French cultural activities and events?
- Canadian Parents for French (CPF) is a non-profit charitable organization with over 150 Chapters across Canada, including many in Ontario. The Chapters provide parents and
students with support and carry out activities that support French as a second language (FSL) learning both inside and outside of the classroom?

**Ontario Ministry of Education Online Resources**


[www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/involvement/](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/involvement/)

A Framework for French as a Second Language in Ontario Schools: Kindergarten to Grade 12, (2013)  
[www.edugains.ca/resourcesFSL/PDF/Framework/frameworkFLS.pdf](http://www.edugains.ca/resourcesFSL/PDF/Framework/frameworkFLS.pdf)

**Online Support and Parent Resources**

**Abc123**: This website provides tips and tools for parents of elementary students K–6.  

**French as a Second Language Homework Toolbox**: This comprehensive site includes videos, audio files and printable tip sheets to support parents of students in French Immersion or Extended French.  

**Canadian Parents for French (Ontario)**: Canadian Parents for French Ontario has produced a series of tip sheets for parents on how to support their children in FSL programs.  

**Canadian Parents for French**: Canadian Parents for French is a national network of volunteers dedicated to the promotion and creation of French as a second language learning opportunities for young Canadians.  
[http://cpf.ca](http://cpf.ca)

**BBC: Primary Languages—French**: This site provides numerous activities to help your child learn French.  
[http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primarylanguages/french/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primarylanguages/french/)
Conclusion:

No one knows your child and your child’s learning needs, interests and desires more than you. This guide is intended to provide you with the most current, research-based information and strategies you need to make the best, most well-informed decision for your child’s education, in collaboration with your child’s teacher and teaching team.

Although research indicates that students with learning difficulties are able to benefit from the French Immersion program, and transfer to the English program may not always successful, if your child is not interested or motivated to learn French as a second language, the French Immersion may not the best program for him or her.

The most important thing to keep in mind is ensuring that your child enjoys school so that he or she may become a life-long learner. There are many different opportunities and ways of learning a second language, including the late French Immersion program, student exchanges, and online language programs.

The best way that you can help your child in French Immersion, or other education program, is by having a positive attitude about learning yourself. You are your child’s greatest role model and you will have a greater influence on his or her education than anyone else.
Too Many Acronyms! A Quick Reference Guide

CPF- Canadian Parents for French
DI- Differentiated Instruction
FI- French Immersion
FSL- French as a Second Language
IEP- Individualized Education Plan
IPRC- Identification, Placement, and Review Committee
LD- Learning Disabilities
PIC- Parent Involvement Committee
SST- Student Support Teacher
UDL- Universal Design for Learning
Glossary of Terms:

**Accommodations:** Accommodations refers to how an educator instructs a diverse group of students in a classroom. Accommodations includes individualized teaching and assessment strategies, human supports, and/or individualized equipment provided for students who are identified with exceptional needs in the FSL classroom. There are 3 types of accommodations:

- **Instructional accommodations:** Changes in teaching strategies, including styles of presentation, methods of organization, or use of technology, and multimedia (i.e. graphic organizers, photocopied notes, assistive software).
- **Environmental accommodations:** Changes in the classroom and/or school environment as required by the student (i.e. preferential seating, special lightning).
- **Assessment accommodations:** Changes in the assessment procedures that enable the student to demonstrate his or her learning (i.e. allowing additional time to complete tests or work, provision of a scribe, or permitting oral responses to test questions).

**Differentiated Instruction:** Differentiated instruction (DI) is a method of teaching that strives to adapt instruction to meet the various interests, learning styles and readiness to learn of all students in the class.

**Exceptional Student:** An exceptional student is a student who has an identification in one or more of the following categories: behavioural, communicational, intellectual, physical or multiple exceptionalities. The learning needs of students with learning difficulties can be met in a variety of different ways, including program accommodations and modifications.

**French Immersion program:** The French Immersion program is designed to provide students with a minimum of 3,800 hours of instruction in French by the end of Grade 8. The goals of the program are for students to be able to communicate and interact effectively in a variety of social settings; learn about Canada, its two official languages, and other cultures; appreciate and acknowledge the interconnectedness and interdependence of the global community; and to become lifelong language learners for personal growth and for active participation as world citizens.

**Individualized Education Plan (I.E.P.):** A written plan describing the special education program and/or services required by a particular student, including a record of the particular accommodations needed to help the student achieve his or her learning expectations. An IEP must be developed for a student who has been identified as exceptional by an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC), and may also be developed for a student who has special education needs but has not been identified as exceptional. An IEP is a working document that may be modified from or alternative to the expectations given in the curriculum policy document for the appropriate grade and subject or course.
**Modifications:** Modifications are changes to what an educator teaches students in a diverse classroom. Modifications are made to the age-appropriate grade-level expectations for a subject or course in order to meet a student’s learning needs. These changes may involve developing expectations that reflect students’ current knowledge and skills, strengths and weaknesses.

**Universal Design for Learning:** The term universal design for learning (UDL) refers to the idea that a learning environment should be open and accessible to all students, regardless of age, skills, or situation. In the classroom, instruction needs to be flexible and supportive, and can be adjusted to meet the individual needs of all students. UDL enables all students to access the curriculum as fully as possible.
Parent Workshop: Supporting Children with learning difficulties in the French Immersion Program

This workshop has been created to complement the Tool-Kit for Parents of Students with learning difficulties in the French Immersion program. The workshop requires no prior knowledge of the French language or specialized content. The workshop can be implemented by anyone who has an interest in educating parents of children with learning difficulties in the French Immersion program (i.e. FI parents, FI teachers, school administration, or all of the above!) Although all parents are welcome to attend, the purpose of the workshop is to provide information and strategies specific to parents of children with learning difficulties in the French Immersion program.

This workshop has been designed to provide any concerned French Immersion community member with the tools and materials to plan and host parent education sessions. The workshop is intended to be easy to implement, flexible, and includes a template for sharing practical strategies for parents to use at home. All materials for the workshop are included: Blackline masters for all activities, invitation letters and posters (found in the appendix).

5:15-5:30 p.m. Welcome:

Welcome parents, guardians and caregivers at the door as they arrive.
Invite guests to help themselves to prepared coffee and snacks.

5:30-5:45 p.m. Introduction:

Welcome parents and caregivers and thank them for taking the time to come.
Thank all members of the workshop team for their help. Remind parents of the mantra “What is necessary for some, is good for all”. It applies to the information that will be provided in this workshop. The information and learning strategies that work for children with learning difficulties can be beneficial to all!

Purpose: The purpose of this workshop is to:

- Provide parents with the most current, research-based information on students with learning difficulties and learning difficulties in the FI program (FI Fact or FI Fiction?!) 
- Discuss the advantages of having French as a second language
- Clarify key terms and FI program designs which aim to foster an inclusive learning environment
- Give parents strategies to support their children with learning difficulties at home even if they don’t speak French
- Provide parents with resources for more support
5:45- 6:00 p.m. **Ice Breaker: FI Fact or Fiction?!**

Reassure parents that there are many uncertainties and misconceptions on the topic of children with learning difficulties in the French Immersion program. The following activity is NOT meant to test your knowledge (your answers are strictly for your information!), but its purpose is to be an eye-opener to some of the most important research-based information on the topic of students with learning difficulties and the FI program.

Distribute “FI Fact or FI Fiction??” Ice Breaker Quiz, found in Appendix C.

Allow parents sufficient time to read and answer the questions.

Once parents have finished, walk through the questions, one by one, asking parents to offer an answer aloud, or if no one responds, provide the answer. Leave time to have a discussion about the quiz.

Leading questions: Which fact surprised you the most? Which fact would you like all parents of children with learning difficulties in FI to know? What other facts or information would you like to know?

6:00- 6:45 p.m. **Activity 1: Wordle- Advantages of having French as a Second Language**

The purpose of this activity is to show parents the advantages of having French as a second language. This activity may help to motivate parents to keep their child in the FI program and advocate for their child's right to necessary accommodations, supports and services.

This activity can be executed in 2 ways:

a) Requires a laptop, the internet and a projector;

b) Using chart paper and markers.

a) Using a laptop, the internet and a projector do a Google search for “WORDLES” or type into the search box: [http://www.wordle.net/create](http://www.wordle.net/create)

Ask parents to share their thoughts, beliefs and ideas regarding the advantages of French as a Second language. Some parents may share some ideas that may not be correct or may be controversial- be encouraging, not judgemental and ask other parents for their insights.

(Source: https://sites.google.com/site/tricountyassistivetechnology/language-arts/wordle_2.jpg)
b) If a laptop, internet and projector are not available, you may opt to perform this activity in a similar fashion using chart paper and markers. Record parents’ contributions on the chart paper, either in list form, a flow chart or a word web.

Suggested responses may include, but are not limited to:

More job opportunities; increased job security; more comfortable socio-economic level (i.e. possible higher income earnings); ability to communicate with French speaking citizens; greater appreciation for different cultures and traditions; facilitates the learning of a third language; higher levels of creativity, higher levels of divergent thinking, increased intellectual potential, higher achievement in first-language competency, a heightened sense of respect for and value of cultural diversity, etc.

6:45- 7:00 p.m. Activity 2: French Immersion Program is designed to meet ALL learning needs

The purpose of this activity is to introduce parents to key terms and important concepts found in the Ontario Ministry of Education documents. It is meant to provide parents with a general overview of the instructional techniques which effectively meet the needs of children with learning difficulties in the FI program.

Photocopy the handout found in Appendix E. Ask parents to work with a partner or in small groups at their table. Read the text that has come directly from the Ministry document, and match each term to its definition.

Take time to discuss the answers of the Word-Match activity as a group. Encourage parents to ask any questions or share concerns about the terms.
7:00-7:15 p.m. Activity 3: BINGO Game- Supporting Children’s French Literacy skills at Home

Games are a great way to develop children’s French language skills. BINGO games, for example, are a fun and easy way for children to practice their reading skills, and can easily be adapted to suit various ages and levels of ability. Remind parents that creating BINGO cards with a child can be a fun and interactive way for them and their child to practice writing skills, too.

All parents need is a piece of paper, some colouring pencils, BINGO markers (i.e. milk tags or dried beans make great markers!) and a little imagination! Tell parents that they can use the weekly spelling words, high frequency words appropriate for their child’s learning ability, or ask the child’s teacher for thematic vocabulary that the students are focusing on in class.

Using the BINGO template (Appendix E) and the list of “high frequency words” provided, have participants create their own BINGO sheet by writing the words in various places. They may also choose to draw a picture as a visual representation of the word’s meaning.

Tell parents when they play at home, they can write all of the vocabulary words on smaller cards of paper and toss them together in a brown bag or opaque container. The parent and child can take turns drawing the vocabulary words out one at a time. Using their markers to cover words that have been called, the first person to get a row of words vertically, horizontally or diagonally wins!

Parents can modify this game for their child in many ways: use French and English words, use numbers in their numerical form and match them to their word form (i.e. 2 = deux), use pictures and match them to their correct word (i.e. a picture of a cow = vache), or ask the child for her ideas how she would like to modify the game. The options are endless.

(Distribute copies of the BINGO template and instruct participants to fill in their cards with the suggested vocabulary).

7:15 p.m. Closing

Distribute a copy of Parent Brochure to parents (found in Appendix).

Ask parents if they have any further questions about the information provided in the workshop.

Tell parents you will be available after the workshop if they wish to discuss any additional questions they may have.

Thank parents for coming.
APPENDIX A: Sample Invitation Letter

(Date)

Dear French Immersion Parents/Guardians:

Please join us on ___(date)____ at ___ (time)___ for an interactive workshop for parents and guardians of children in the French Immersion program. The purpose of the workshop is to provide you with important information, effective strategies and valuable resources to help you support your child’s academic progress and development in the French Immersion program.

All parents and guardians of children in the French Immersion program are invited to attend. However, the main focus of the workshop will be providing parents of students with learning difficulties, and students who are experiencing learning difficulties, in the French Immersion program with specific information, strategies and resources to help them support their children’s special learning needs in the Program.

In this workshop you will learn about:

- The many advantages associated with learning a second language;
- The most current, research-based findings on children with learning difficulties in the FI program;
- Inclusive teaching practices and how the French Immersion program is designed to meet the needs of all learners;
- The accommodations and modifications that can be made to help your child with exceptionalities benefit from the French Immersion program experience;
- The many different resources and services available to you to help you support your child’s learning needs in the FI program;
- And much, much more!

Coffee and light snacks will be provided in a warm environment where everyone is welcome!

We look forward to seeing you!

Sincerely,

(Name of Workshop Coordinator)
MEETING THE NEEDS OF ALL STUDENTS IN THE FRENCH IMMERSION PROGRAM:

A Workshop for Parents and Guardians

Please join us on

*Thursday, March 1, 2015 at 5:30 p.m. - 7:30p.m.*

*in École Sir. John A. Macdonald Public School’s library (2nd floor)*

for an engaging and interactive workshop for parents of students with learning difficulties in the French Immersion Program

In this workshop you will learn about:

- The many advantages associated with learning a second language;
- The most current, research-based findings on children with learning difficulties in the FI program;
- Inclusive teaching practices and how the French Immersion program is designed to meet the needs of all learners;
- The accommodations and modifications that can be made to help your child with exceptionalities benefit from the French Immersion program experience;
- The many different resources and services available to you to help you support your child’s learning needs in the FI program;
- And much, much more!

*Refreshments and light snacks will be provided.*

Please contact Mme. Coordinator for more information (mme. coordinator@gmail.com)
APPENDIX C: FI Fact or FI Fiction? Quiz

Empowering Parents of Students with learning difficulties in the French Immersion Program

True or False:

1. FSL programs are **not** designed for students with learning difficulties who have special learning needs.
   True___ False___

2. The French Immersion program is designed for students who come from French-speaking homes.
   True___ False___

3. There are very few benefits associated with learning French as a second language.
   True___ False___

4. Most students who enroll in the early FI programs remain in the program until the end of Grade 12.
   True___ False___

5. It is estimated that one-third of students transfer out of the FI program and into the regular English program, by the end of Grade 3, because they want to be with their friends.
   True___ False___

6. Parents who do not speak French are not able to help their children in the French Immersion program.
   True___ False___

7. Children with learning difficulties would not have any learning difficulties if they were learning in their first language (i.e. in an English classroom).
   True___ False___

8. All children with learning difficulties who transfer out of the French Immersion program and into the English program have a positive experience and an improved academic outcome.
   True___ False___
APPENDIX D: FI Fact or FI Fiction Answer Key

1. FSL programs are not designed for students with learning difficulties who have special learning needs. True___ False___
   FSL programs are designed for ALL students, including students with special learning needs.

2. The French Immersion program is designed for students who come from French-speaking homes.
   True___ False___
   The French Immersion program is designed for students who come from non-French speaking homes and for students whose parents do not speak French. Students with French speaking parents frequently enroll in the Elementary French School boards.

3. There are very few benefits associated with learning French as a second language.
   True___ False___
   There are many benefits associated with learning French as a second language. They include: increased intellectual potential, higher achievement in first-language competency, a heightened sense of respect for and value of cultural diversity, improved career opportunities and greater earnings potential.

4. Most students who enroll in the early FI programs remain in the program until the end of Grade 12.
   True___ False___
   Only 20% of students enrolled in the early FI programs remain in the program until the end of Grade 12 (Bournot-Trites, 2004)

5. It is estimated that one-third of students transfer out of the FI program and into the regular English program, by the end of Grade 3, because they want to be with their friends.
   True___ False___
   It is estimated that one-third of students transfer out of the FI program, into the regular English program, by the end of Grade 3 because of academic difficulty. (Halsall, 1994)

6. Parents who do not speak French are not able to help their children in the French Immersion program.
   True___ False___
   Parents who do not speak French are able to help their children in the French Immersion program in many ways, including: having a positive attitude about school and learning the French language (i.e. not saying “I was terrible in French, too, when I was your age”); communicating with the teaching support team on a regular basis about child’s progress; implementing learning strategies recommended by the teaching support team at home; providing homework support and routines at home, and encouraging exposure to
the French language by borrowing books from the library, listening to French books on tape, listening to French music, going for family trips to French speaking communities, etc.

7. Children with learning difficulties would not have any learning difficulties if they were learning in their first language (i.e. in an English classroom).
   True____ False_X__
   Some studies suggest that learning disabilities transfer across languages, and students experiencing difficulty in the FI program, would also experience academic difficulty in the English program (Bruck, 1978; Genesee, 1976, Wiss, 1989)

8. All children with learning difficulties who transfer out of the French Immersion program and into the English program have a positive experience and an improved academic outcome.
   True____ False_X__
   Some studies have indicated that transferring a student with learning difficulties out of the FI program, into the English program, may have negative emotional consequences, such a feelings of failure. (Bruck, 1985)
Appendix E: Activity 2 Key Terms Word Match

Match the definition to its correct term:

1. French Immersion  An approach to teaching that uses teaching strategies or pedagogical materials designed to meet the special needs and to enhance the learning of all students, regardless of age, skills, or situation. ___

2. Students with learning difficulties  Special teaching and assessment strategies, human supports, and/or individualized equipment required to enable a student to learn and to demonstrate learning. Student continues to work at grade-level. ___

3. Parent Engagement  A method of teaching that strives to adapt instruction to meet the various interests, learning styles and readiness to learn of all students in the class. ___

4. Inclusive Learning  Students who have been identified with a learning disability, are at-risk for a reading disability, or who have difficulty meeting grade-level expectations but have not yet been identified with a learning disability.

5. UDL  Changes made to the grade-level expectations for a subject or course in order to meet a student’s learning needs. These may include the use of expectations at a different grade level and/or an increase or decrease in the number and/or complexity of expectations relative to the curriculum expectations for the regular grade level. ___

6. Differentiated Instruction  A term that given to those who play an important role within a school’s community, and whose partnership with a school has a significant impact on children’s attitudes and motivation to learn a second language. ___

7. Accommodations  A written plan describing the special education program and/or services required by a particular student, including a record of the particular accommodations needed to help the student achieve his
or her learning expectations. This plan must be developed for a student who has been identified as exceptional, and may also be developed for a student who has special education needs but has not been identified as exceptional.

8. Modifications

An alternative education program in the public education system that provides French instruction to students whose first language is not French.

9. I.E.P.

A teaching practice that values diversity and fosters a learning environment where all students feel respected, confident and safe so that he or she can learn and develop to his or her maximum potential.
Word Match ANSWER KEY:

1. French Immersion  An approach to teaching that uses teaching strategies or pedagogical materials designed to meet the special needs and to enhance the learning of all students, regardless of age, skills, or situation. _5_

2. Students with learning difficulties  Special teaching and assessment strategies, human supports, and/or individualized equipment required to enable a student to learn and to demonstrate learning. Student continues to work at grade-level. _7_

3. Parent Engagement  A method of teaching that strives to adapt instruction to meet the various interests, learning styles and readiness to learn of all students in the class. _6_

4. Inclusive Learning  Students who have been identified with a learning disability, are at-risk for a reading disability, or who have difficulty meeting grade-level expectations but have not yet been identified with a learning disability. _2_

5. UDL  Changes made to the grade-level expectations for a subject or course in order to meet a student’s learning needs. These may include the use of expectations at a different grade level and/or an increase or decrease in the number and/or complexity of expectations relative to the curriculum expectations for the regular grade level. _8_

6. Differentiated Instruction  A term that given to those who play an important role within a school’s community, and whose partnership with a school has a significant impact on children’s attitudes and motivation to learn a second language. _3_

7. Accommodations  A written plan describing the special education program and/or services required by a particular student, including a record of the particular accommodations needed to help the student achieve his or her learning expectations. This plan must be developed for a student who has been identified as exceptional, and may also be
developed for a student who has special education needs but has not been identified as exceptional. _9_

8. Modifications An alternative education program in the public education system that provides French instruction to students whose first language is not French._1_

9. I.E.P. A teaching practice that values diversity and fosters a learning environment where all students feel respected, confident and safe so that he or she can learn and develop to his or her maximum potential._4_
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**GRATUIT!**

**Mots (Words): Les Couleurs (colours) et les fruits (fruit)**