

ELIZABETH RUMMEL SCHOOL

L'ÉCOLE ELIZABETH RUMMEL

FRENCH

IMMERSION

PARENT HANDBOOK

A. PHILOSOPHY OF FRENCH LANGUAGE LEARNING PROGRAM

We, in L'école Elizabeth Rummel School, feel that the following beliefs are critical components in our French Language Program. We believe:

1. in a child-centred approach;
2. that children should hear and speak French through a variety of activities;
3. that in French as a Second Language, French is taught as a subject with the aim of gaining a greater appreciation of the language and culture;
4. that communication should take place in a natural and meaningful environment with the teacher as model;
5. that there is a distinction between the French Immersion program and the French as a Second Language program;
6. that learning French should be an enjoyable experience;
7. that the classroom is a French community in which children learn cooperatively;
8. that a positive self-concept is fundamental for success in the program.

B. GOALS

The goals of the French Language Learning Program in L'école Elizabeth Rummel School are to:

1. Develop a positive self-concept by providing the learner with opportunities for success.
2. Develop a sensitivity to a second culture (Francophone) as well as to develop a greater appreciation of the student's own culture.
3. Develop a program which enables students to learn according to their individual learning style (visual, auditory, kinaesthetic).
4. Make students responsible for their own learning.
5. Make learning situations pertinent and meaningful.
6. Heighten students' awareness of the appropriate use of language in effective oral and written communication.

C. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the French Language Learning Program at each grade level will be specific to that grade and in accordance with the goals as stated above.

THE IMMERSION APPROACH

French Immersion was initiated at the Toronto French School in 1962. The intent was to offer English-speaking students an opportunity to become functionally proficient in French while maintaining fluency in English. In 1987, a group of parents in Canmore requested a French Immersion program. The first French Immersion class was offered in September, 1987, to grade one.

French Immersion programs are producing functionally bilingual graduates. The degree of proficiency in French is related to the number of hours of instruction. At Elizabeth Rummel, the program begins at the kindergarten level. The Ontario Ministry of Education has published baseline data on which to gauge reasonable expected outcomes.

After at least 5000 hours of French instruction during the student's school career, the student:

- a. Can take further education with French as the language of instruction at the college or university level - that is, understand lectures, write papers, participate in class discussions.
- b. Can accept employment using French as the working language or live in a French community after a short orientation period.
- c. Can participate easily in conversation.
- d. Understands and appreciates the emotional attitudes and the values held in common by members of a French-speaking community.

By the end of Grade Six, students in the Early Immersion program have received approximately 5000 hours of instruction in French.

In Alberta, there is one Program of Studies which prescribes the objectives and content of courses approved by the Minister of Learning. These goals are intended for all students and apply to the French Immersion programs. At the end of their schooling students enrolled in the immersion program develop the same knowledge skills and attitudes as their peers in the English program. In addition, immersion students will develop fluency in two languages.

Research indicates that students taught through the immersion approach achieve as well in mathematics, science and social studies as students taught solely in English. Although there may be a lag in proficiency in English Language Arts in Grades Three and Four, by Grade Six immersion students demonstrate skills similar and at times superior to those of students in unilingual classes.

¹ Ontario Ministry of Education, Teaching and Learning French as a Second Language. (Toronto 1977)

KINDERGARTEN

The French Immersion Kindergarten program is consistent with the philosophy and goals of the Alberta Learning Kindergarten Program Statement, and is based on well-established principles of second language acquisition.

At the same time as the students are developing social skills and readiness skills, they are acquiring a second language. The teacher's main objective is that this first experience with school and with French be positive. At the Kindergarten level, the emphasis is on listening and comprehension. New vocabulary and structures are presented and practised through songs, games and rhymes. This is the "understanding" stage, the foundation for language acquisition.

The children participate as active listeners, and their verbal participation is limited. Children are allowed to acquire fluency at their own pace, and it is normal for the children to continue to speak English throughout the Kindergarten year.

GRADE 1

Most students in immersion Grade One encounter their first experience with school at the same time as their first exposure to French. For this reason the emphasis at the beginning of Grade One is on the development of oral communication skills, that is; listening and speaking. Over time reading and writing receive increasing attention.

In Grade One immersion classes French is used as the language of instruction. The teacher speaks to the students in a natural way, using gestures, mime, pictures etc. to aid comprehension. As in Kindergarten, the students are engaged in active listening. It is usually several months to a year before students begin to participate spontaneously in conversation.

At the same time as they are learning the new language, the Grade One students are acquiring knowledge, skills and attitudes in all subject areas.

GRADE 2

Grade Two is the year during which students practise to develop their competency in the French language. Whereas the emphasis in Kindergarten and Grade One is placed on the development of oral communication skills, (listening and speaking), in Grade Two reading and writing receive increasing attention. Just as in the English program, students learn and apply strategies for reading and writing by engaging in a variety of opportunities to read and write.

Learning in a second language is a slow process, requiring a willingness to make mistakes. Children develop reading and writing competency at their own rate.

Students in Grade Two French Immersion do not receive formal English language instruction. As these students become more active in groups such as Brownies, Cubs, etc. they are confronted with the expectation that they should be reading and writing in English. Parents and children may begin to experience doubts about the child's progress in learning to read English.

It is important to keep in mind that you have chosen a particular educational route for your child. Now you must rely on the research and experience that have gone into the development of the French Immersion program. It is important also, that you trust in your child's ability and eagerness to learn.

GRADE 3 - THE TRANSITIONAL YEAR

At the Grade Three level, 5 hours/week of English Language Arts instruction is mandated by Alberta Education. Children with good oral skills in English often do not need much formal instruction in order to begin reading in English. The students enter Grade Three with many strategies for reading, which they apply and refine in English.

This transitional period can be difficult for students and parents who may have unrealistic expectations for performance (e.g. spelling, punctuation). Because the children are just beginning to be instructed in English, and because of the limited hours of instruction per day, it is possible that the students will not demonstrate the same level of competency as their peers in unilingual classes. There are elements of the French language sound system that are different from the English language sounds. It takes time to acquire and refine these abilities.

Teachers understand that the children will develop their English reading and writing at their own rate, depending in part, on previous experiences. Teachers accept and accommodate a variety of levels of achievement in the classroom.

Research has shown that children in the French Immersion program are generally working on a level with students in the English program by the end of Grade Six.

Grade 4

When students reach Grade 4, there is often a significant increase in the amount of homework. Course content in the core subjects increases and the concepts are more abstract. Parents often express a concern over the increase in difficulty in math problems. It is important to maintain good communication with the classroom teacher in order to understand homework expectations and to share any difficulty your child may be experiencing with assignments.

Students continue to receive 10 hours of formal instruction in English Language Arts in a six-day cycle. By the time they reach Grade 4, most immersion students are more likely to do their leisure reading in English rather than in French. Because their recognition vocabulary and understanding of nuances is much greater, it is easier for the students to read in English.

It is important for students to read in French in order to continue to develop their vocabulary and to be able to understand the increasingly complex texts they will encounter as they move up through the grades in French immersion.

Here are a few ways you can encourage reading in French:

- Encourage your child to read even a small portion of his/her reading in French.
- Find books on subjects that are of particular interest to your child. These could include translations of English books, non-fiction, special interest topics such as hobbies, travel, etc.
- Look for materials that allow your child to read a small amount at a time, such as comic books, magazines, and short stories

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

Researchers are not yet agreed as to the criteria that can be used systematically to determine student suitability for learning through the medium of a new language. However, educators with experience in the immersion program and researchers do agree that there are several things to consider when placing students in the immersion program:

1. Mastery of Mother Tongue

Children whose mastery of their mother tongue is poor can potentially experience the greatest difficulty in French Immersion. These children have less knowledge of the first language to transfer to the second language learning situation. They would be better served academically, socially and linguistically in the English program.

2. Self Esteem and Motivation of the Student

Learning a second language is a gradual process. It requires a willingness to experiment and risk making mistakes. A child's motivation to learn and speak a second language plays a definite role in his/her achievement in the program.

3. Mastery of English

Children whose first language is neither English nor French often do very well in immersion. However, children who have weak English skills could have difficulty when formal English Language Arts instruction is introduced in Grade Three.

4. Commitment of the Family to the French Immersion Program

The commitment to place a child in the French Immersion program can be a difficult decision for parents. It is normal for parents to experience fears and doubts. Children are very sensitive to the family's feelings and attitudes, and these are reflected in their own attitude towards learning a second language.

STUDENTS WITH EXCEPTIONAL NEEDS

Immersion students at L'école Elizabeth Rummel have access to the same counselling and assessment of special needs as the students in the English program. Some remediation is offered to students in the French Language.

Since the inception of the immersion program in 1989, Learning Support services have been used by parents, students and teachers.

These services include:

- Learning Resource teacher
- Psychologist
- Occupational Therapist
- Speech and Language Pathologist
- Youth Worker
- Divorce/Separation Support Group
- Social Skills Group
- Individual and Family Counselling
- Motor skills development
- Enrichment programming in and out of class

The classroom teacher who has concerns with regard to a particular student consults with the Learning Support teacher to make program accommodations in a consistent manner, and over a period of several months. In assessing special needs, teachers and parents work together to consider all facets of the child's development. Many children with exceptional needs benefit by remaining within the immersion program once specific needs have been established and accommodated.

HOW CAN PARENTS HELP?

This is the question most often asked by parents of children who are in the immersion program. Many parents feel that because they do not speak French, they will be unable to help their child with his/her language learning. However, there are many things that you have probably been doing naturally to encourage reading and writing. Here are some suggestions:

1. Keep Your Child Healthy

Because of the emphasis on oral communication in French Immersion, students must be at school to learn. It is impossible to make up at home for the language acquisition that takes place *daily* in the classroom. Students in the French Immersion program are required to be active listeners. Seeing, hearing, and feeling well are essential to active learning.

2. Talk With Your Child
Take time to engage your child in conversation. Listen to your child's ideas, opinions and perceptions of his/her progress. Ask questions that require more than a one word answer.
3. Read To Your Child
Children of all ages love to be read to. Reading to your child in English will develop vocabulary and comprehension skills that can be transferred to reading in French. Enjoyment should be the main focus of this time spent together.
4. Read With Your Child
This should be a special time when you and your child work as partners in the reading process. Three to four times a week can make a big improvement in a child's reading.
5. Encourage Silent Reading
Encourage your child to read for pleasure and relaxation.
6. Respond to Your Child's Writing
Show a genuine interest in the content of what your child is writing. Accept attempts at spelling and punctuation. Encourage meaningful writing (letters, diaries, lists, poetry).
7. Be Positive
Your child's attitudes will reflect your own. Be positive in all matters relating to your child's school experience.

PARENT VOLUNTEERS

Parents should not hesitate to offer their assistance in the classroom because of lack of knowledge in French. There are many ways in which parents can participate in activities to enhance their child's education:

- preparing teaching materials
- preparing picture files
- participating in field trips
- reading English stories to children
- helping with the English Language Arts component of the program
- assisting school librarians
- helping with fundraising activities

HOMework

Parents of children in the immersion program may feel that because they, themselves, are not fluent in French, they will not be able to give the same kind of assistance and support to their child as they would in the English program.

Homework is not usually assigned in Grades One and Two. Students may be given words to practise for spelling, or they may be encouraged to practise their number facts at home. In these cases the teacher communicates expectations and routines clearly to the parents.

In Grade Three, homework is sent home on a more regular basis:

- a. To encourage students to develop regular routines for study. These study habits will become increasingly important to success.
- b. To complete work which was explained and practised in class.
- c. To practise skills, concepts (e.g. spelling, math facts, handwriting) that have been explained and reviewed in class.

The parent's responsibilities in "helping" with homework are the same in the French Immersion program as in the English program.

- a. Provide your child with a space to study/do homework. (a table, or desk, a good light, no distractions)
- b. Establish a time for homework. The T.V. and radio are turned off, no phone calls are accepted.
- c. Help practise skills (spelling, math facts) by dictating or holding flash cards.
- d. French Immersion teachers recommend that the family purchase a **good** quality French-English dictionary. Help your child look up words, correct spellings, etc.

Any work that has been assigned as homework should be something that your child can work on independently.

If you are concerned that your child is having difficulty or is not able to complete an assignment, contact the teacher. By sharing observations and information you and the teacher can work together in adjusting or adapting assignments to suit the needs of the child.

Although reading may not be assigned for homework, students are encouraged to read as much as possible along or with their parents. Your child can always benefit from time set aside for reading.