

Ensuring Reading Success for Students in French Immersion & English- stream Programs

Dear Parents, Guardians, and Teachers,

Thank you so much for participating in our research project which investigates the language and literacy development of students in French immersion programs.

We started the project when our participants were in senior kindergarten (SK) and Grade 1. Last year, the participants were in Grade 1 and Grade 2. We wish to thank you for your continued support and we invite you to collaborate with us this year as we move into the third year of our project.

As promised, we have prepared a written summary of the results from the first two years of the project.

Contact Us – Multilingualism & Literacy Lab

Principal Investigator: Dr. Becky Xi Chen

Email: xchenbumgardner@gmail.com

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE)

University of Toronto

252 Bloor St. West, Room 9-221

Toronto, ON M5S 1V6

<http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/chenlab>

Read often...in any language!

Print awareness is the understanding that print carries meaning. Print organized in a particular way. In English, print is read from left to right and top to bottom. Print awareness is also knowing about the conventions of the written language, such as the purpose of capital letters and punctuations.

*Having a **strong print awareness** early on will support children to become good readers.*

Findings from the study

Grade 1 and 2 students in French immersion and English-stream programs identified 3 strategies for reading a new word: analogic (comparison to a known word), orthographic (reference to spelling), and phonologic (reference to sounds). Children in both programs develop print awareness in a similar manner.

This may be because there are common features of print, regardless of the language that is being learned at school.

Tips to support print awareness

Encourage students to think about print during reading activities, in *any* language

- **Introduce the structure of the book:** “This is the front/back of the book. The title/author of the book is _____. We read from left to right.”
- Ask the student to **identify features of words and sentences:** “Show me the first/last word of a sentence. How many letters are in this word? How many words are in this sentence? Show me a capital/lowercase letter.”

For students learning 2 languages, encourage the student to think about the similarities and differences between the languages during reading time

- **Letters** used in the 2 languages: Is it the same letters (as in the case with English-French) or different?
- **Find words** in the book that remind the student of a word in another language. This can be a word that is similar in spelling, meaning, and/or sound.
- **Direction of print:** Is the print read from left to right or from right to left in both languages?

Bottom line

Print is everywhere, not just in books. These activities can be easily modified to accommodate various types of print, such as menus, labels, and signs.

It is important to have a strong foundation in print awareness to become good readers. To support print awareness, **provide children with many opportunities to engage with print, in *any* language.**

Multilingual Children in French Immersion

French immersion programs are becoming increasingly diverse. Multilingual children whose first language is neither English nor French, **comprised 32% of the student body** in French immersion programs in the TDSB.

An important objective of our study is to monitor multilingual children’s progress in French immersion programs and facilitate their success.

Our findings suggest **multilingual children develop their English and French literacy skills with time.**

Furthermore, although native English-speaking children scored higher on some measures (such as English vocabulary), the two groups performed similarly on most measures, including French vocabulary and French reading.

Multilingual children can thrive in French immersion programs.

Why do parents enroll their children in French immersion?

We conducted semi-structured interviews with families of children with ranging developmental and learning disabilities in French Immersion programs.

Questions and topics of discussion included: enrollment/retention decisions, language ability, parental advocacy, supports, benefits and challenges, as well as factors that influenced these areas.

The interviews revealed common themes that emerged across families.

Findings from the interviews

- Provide children with long-term advantages, both socially and academically
 - There is a need to increase supports and improve accessibility to support services
 - When asked if they would advise other parents of children with disabilities to enroll in French Immersion, responses suggested that careful consideration be given in each scenario, as every child has unique learning needs
-

Four of the 5 families interviewed were retaining their children in French immersion.

Summary

We are encouraged by these positive and timely findings, which increase our understanding of the diverse French immersion population today. We are happy to share more detailed findings with you and/or provide additional practical strategies to help your children. We look forward to hearing from you!