



French Second Language Education

The following information outlines the status and value of FSL education for Canadian students.

Q. Why be concerned with a single subject like French when Education as a whole is under scrutiny?

A. Learning French for Canadian students goes way beyond the parameters of a “single subject” area. Communication is recognized as being one of the basic requirements for coping in the new age. Language literacy and computer literacy combine to equate with the communication competence necessary for both the individual competing on a personal level and the nation competing on the global scale.

In addition, linguistic duality is a defining characteristic of our country, both historically and in terms of the broad geographic distribution of the people across the land, who speak English or French as their mother tongue. Some one million francophones make their homes outside Quebec.

Q. If languages are important for our students: Why French? Why not Japanese or Mandarin?

A. This is not an either / or scenario. The fact is that French is easily accessible to Canadian students in almost every corner of the country, providing a reliable expectation that language studies can continue wherever families in a mobile population may locate. The accessibility of resources makes French the logical second language for English speaking Canadian students. It provides the foundation for sound language education, given the fact that once a second language is learned, a third and fourth come more easily.

International considerations are vitally important in this day and age. French and English are the two primary international languages of the world. French is spoken on all five continents and is a major language shared by 45 countries that form La Francophonie. It is an official language of world organizations such as NATO, INTERPOL and the United Nations and its organizations.

Andre Obadia, professor of French language at Simon Fraser University in B.C., has conducted research on Immersion programs throughout the world. Mr. Obadia says, in the March 95 issue of *Educational Excellence*, the characteristic that makes a language an “international” or “world” language is its geographic spread. By that measure, Chinese, the most spoken language in the world, is limited almost exclusively to China; Hindi, spoken by almost 300 million people, is limited to most parts of India; Spanish is spoken by about 225 million people primarily in Spain, Central and South America, New York and the southern U.S.; Japanese, is spoken by 120 million people but essentially only in Japan.

Q. How many students are learning French in Canada today?

A. In the year 2007, there were approximately 309,000 students in French Immersion programs offered by school boards in all the provinces and territories. Nearly 1,578,000 English-speaking students were enrolled in Core/Basic programs across Canada. In all, over 1,890,000 Canadian students are studying French through Core/Basic or Immersion programs.

Q. Can French Immersion students really speak French when they graduate?

A. Most French Immersion graduates are functionally bilingual. They can communicate easily and comfortably in their second language. To quote Prof. Andre Obadia again; ~ “Our educational system has succeeded, for the first time in the history of second language teaching in Canada, in making English speaking students able to communicate naturally in French with a wide range of vocabulary. Their linguistic stock of knowledge includes vocabulary in mathematics, social studies, history, geography, music, physical education, etc. Immersion students are able to play, sing, talk, share their feelings, get to know other people, socialize, etc. in French as well as in English.”

Core French students study French as a subject, rather than studying subjects in French, as Immersion students do. They are generally less conversationally capable, unless they have taken an enhanced Core program and made an effort to augment their French with further study or intensive experience outside school, in such things as visits and exchanges. A number of studies have examined Immersion student competence.

Q. What effect has French Immersion had?

A. *~Approximately 25% of young people in the country aged 18-29 are now bilingual.

*~Core French programs, which had been thought inadequate by immersion pioneers, are being restructured to enable students to communicate more effectively.

*~Immersion is viewed from abroad as a successful Canadian export: studied by educators from the United States, Japan, Finland, Australia and others interested in the techniques.

Q. What are Immersion’s biggest benefits?

A. *~Learning a second language stretches the mind and creates mental flexibility.

*~Knowing a second language leads to learning a third or fourth or even a fifth.

*~Reading and understanding French opens doors to one of the world’s great cultures.

*~Knowing more than one language provides a competitive edge, opening doors to world business.

*~Knowing both English and French promotes greater tolerance and understanding among Canadians.

Q. Where can I find additional information on French Second Language Education?

A. CPF BC/Yukon Website www.cpf.bc.ca
CPF National Website www.cpf.ca