

The Importance of French as a Second Language



Introduction

A common frustration expressed by French teachers is that their subject is not always valued by students, by parents or sometimes even by teaching colleagues and school administrators in the way that it should be. This has obvious repercussions in the FSL classroom where students may be difficult to engage, resources may be less readily available and having a designated French classroom may be but a distant dream for many teachers. Even negotiating wall space for French can often be a challenge making it difficult to create a French ambiance in another teacher's classroom. The importance of FSL is highlighted in the introduction of *The Ontario Curriculum: French as a Second Language: Core French, Grades 4-8; Extended French, Grades 4-8; French Immersion, Grades 1-8, (revised) 2013* and *The Ontario Curriculum: French as a Second Language: Core French, Extended French and French Immersion, Grades 9-12, (revised) 2014*, hereafter referred to as the Revised 2013-2014 FSL Curricula, (pgs. 6-7) Here, the various benefits of learning French, or “positive outcomes for students”, are presented clearly and concisely so that all stakeholders can be made aware of the considerable advantages of proficiency in both of Canada's official languages. Moreover, the struggle to make the importance of French more visible to stakeholders was given a considerable boost with the recent release of *A Framework for French as a Second Language in Ontario Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12, 2013*, hereafter referred to as A Framework for FSL, K-12. In fact, the valuing of French is one of the six guiding principles of this Ministry document which states that “teaching and learning French, as one of Canada's two official languages, is recognized and valued as an integral component of Ontario's education system.” (p. 10) The document, which begins by presenting a summary of the many benefits of learning French as a

second language, seeks to strengthen and clarify the position of FSL in the eyes of teachers, students, parents, administrators and policy makers.

“While the knowledge of any language has value, French is not only a global language but the mother tongue of many Canadians and an integral part of the Canadian identity.”

The Revised 2013-2014 FSL Curricula for elementary and secondary (pg. 7)

It is now up to us, as FSL educators, to pass on this message and make FSL a truly valued area of the curriculum both at school and in the community at large. But how can this be achieved at a time when many people's preconceptions of the value of learning French are so often detrimental to student success in the FSL classroom?

“Why do we have to do French?”

Whether it be through unhappy childhood memories of uninspiring French classes spent endlessly reciting verb conjugations, or frustration at leaving school and being unable to communicate in French in the real world, many parents are not able to pass on positive messages about learning French to their children. The first step in overcoming these negative attitudes towards FSL is to engage and inspire our students to such a degree that they become our best advocates in promoting French both within the school walls and beyond. Students with positive attitudes towards French will pass these on to their parents who, in turn, will speak enthusiastically about how much their children are

now enjoying French to their friends. Good news, as they say, travels fast. Of course, the single biggest influence in determining whether students have a favourable experience in French class belongs to the teacher. No single factor can affect student attitude more than the degree to which the teacher can bring passion, creativity, caring and sound pedagogy into his or her classroom. Engaging the students in this way will certainly help win them over to French at least in the short term. The question is, how can we instill in them the belief that proficiency in French is something to be valued not just while still at school, but also in their lives beyond grade 12? How can we convince them that becoming lifelong language learners can actually make a real difference in their lives academically, professionally and even socially?



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What are the Benefits of Learning French as a Second Language?

The benefits of learning French as a Second Language can be summarized as follows:

- Bilingualism is at the core of Canada's national identity and being able to communicate in both official languages can open up many opportunities.
- Learning a second language has been shown to bring cognitive and academic benefits. Numerous studies suggest that learning a second language can lead to an increase in mental flexibility, brain power, creative

thinking, problem solving and listening skills, and even an improved memory.

- Proficiency in both of Canada's official languages brings many economic benefits, and can lead to improved employment opportunities and greater career flexibility both in Canada and around the world. In an increasingly global market, bilingual staff is becoming highly sought after in many areas and tends to earn a higher average salary than people with just one language. Moreover, the Internet has made global communication even more important.
- Research has shown that learning a second language can have a positive effect on first language development. The transfer of literacy skills from one language to another leads to both languages being enhanced. This, in turn, can result in improvement in other areas of the curriculum.
- Acquiring a second language makes it easier to learn a third, fourth or fifth language.
- Students with a second language tend to perform better at standardized tests in reading, language and math.
- The social aspect of learning a second language can also be significant. Not only does it develop the learner's social and interpersonal skills, it can also give the learner a more global perspective by making it easier to meet people from different backgrounds, to experience new cultures, and to travel to various countries around the world.
- There are also emotional benefits associated with learning a second language such as improved self-esteem and self-confidence.
- Learning a second language leads to greater appreciation of, and sensitivity towards, linguistic and cultural diversity in Canada and around the world. This can also lead to a broader understanding of global issues;
- French is the first or second language of over 40 countries and is spoken on every continent. In fact, it is thought that 200 million people around the world speak French. English and French are the only languages spoken on all 5 continents and taught in every country in the world. It is estimated that 100 million people are learning French. The number of French speakers has tripled in the last 50 years. France is also the world's most popular tourist destination.
- Speaking French opens doors to the worlds of music, cinema, fashion, art, and literature.

WHY LEARN FRENCH?

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French for the Future
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200 MILLION PEOPLE IN THE WORLD UNDERSTAND, SPEAK, READ OR WRITE FRENCH • FRENCH IS AN OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OF 29 COUNTRIES • FRENCH IS THE MOST WIDELY TAUGHT SECOND LANGUAGE AFTER ENGLISH • FRENCH IS SPOKEN IN OVER 43 COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD • FRENCH IS THE 9TH MOST WIDELY SPOKEN LANGUAGE IN THE WORLD • SPEAKING A NEW LANGUAGE HELPS YOU TO GET TO KNOW AND UNDERSTAND ANOTHER CULTURE • FRENCH IS THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OF THE UNIVERSAL POSTAL UNION • FRENCH IS THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OF THE RED CROSS • FRENCH RESTAURANT MENUS WILL BE EASIER TO DECODE • FRENCH IS ONE OF THE TWO OFFICIAL LANGUAGES OF THE OLYMPIC GAMES • FRENCH IS ONE OF THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES OF THE UNITED NATIONS, NATO AND UNESCO • TO BE ABLE TO SAY MORE THAN "OÙ SONT LES TOILETTES SVP ?" • IN CANADA, FRENCH IS AN OFFICIAL LANGUAGE IN NEW BRUNSWICK, QUEBEC, THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES, THE YUKON AND NUNAVUT • FRENCH IS A MAJOR LANGUAGE OF HIGH TECH AND BUSINESS IN THE WORLD • FRENCH OPENS DOORS TO CAREERS IN TEACHING, BUSINESS, DIPLOMACY, RESEARCH, TRANSLATION, INTERPRETATION, TRAVEL, AND MORE • FRENCH IS SPOKEN IN 2 OF THE G8 COUNTRIES • IF YOU BUMP INTO JOHNNY DEPP OR SIDNEY CROSBY, YOU COULD HAVE A CONVERSATION IN FRENCH • THERE ARE WELL OVER 33 MILLION FRENCH-SPEAKERS IN THE AMERICAS • OVER 100 MILLION STUDENTS IN THE WORLD ARE LEARNING FRENCH • LEARNING ANOTHER LANGUAGE CAN HELP YOU TO UNDERSTAND YOUR OWN • FRENCH IS THE LINGUA FRANCA OF ART, CUISINE, DANCE, AND FASHION • SPEAKING FRENCH ENHANCES YOUR TRAVEL OPPORTUNITIES • THE NUMBER OF FRENCH-SPEAKERS HAS TRIPLED IN THE LAST 50 YEARS • FRENCH IS THE ONLY LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH TAUGHT IN EVERY SINGLE COUNTRY IN THE WORLD • THERE ARE OVER 700 FRENCH-LANGUAGE UNIVERSITIES IN THE WORLD • FRENCH GIVES ACCESS TO A HUGE NUMBER OF MOVIES, BOOKS, AND WEBSITES IN THEIR ORIGINAL LANGUAGE • KNOWING ANOTHER LANGUAGE LOOKS IMPRESSIVE ON A RESUME • FRENCH-SPEAKING AFRICA REPRESENTS AN AREA LARGER THAN THE USA • MANY SCHOLARSHIPS ARE OFFERED TO BILINGUAL STUDENTS • FRENCH IS THE LANGUAGE OF LOVE • SALARIES ARE HIGHER FOR BILINGUAL WORKERS THAN THEY ARE FOR UNILINGUAL WORKERS

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Pourquoi parler FRANÇAIS?

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Deux langues... un monde de possibilités!

200 MILLIONS DE PERSONNES AU MONDE PEUVENT LIRE, ÉCRIRE, PARLER OU COMPRENDRE LE FRANÇAIS • 29 PAYS ONT LE FRANÇAIS COMME LANGUE OFFICIELLE • LE FRANÇAIS EST LA LANGUE LA PLUS ENSEIGNÉE AU MONDE APRÈS L'ANGLAIS • ON PARLE FRANÇAIS DANS PLUS DE 43 PAYS AU MONDE • LE FRANÇAIS EST LA 9^e LANGUE LA PLUS PARLÉE AU MONDE • PARLER UNE NOUVELLE LANGUE AIDE À CONNAÎTRE ET COMPRENDRE UNE AUTRE CULTURE • LE FRANÇAIS EST LA LANGUE OFFICIELLE DE L'UNION POSTALE UNIVERSELLE • LE FRANÇAIS EST LA LANGUE OFFICIELLE DE LA CROIX ROUGE • LE FRANÇAIS AIDE À DÉCHIFFRER LES MENUS DES RESTAURANTS • LE FRANÇAIS EST UNE DES DEUX LANGUES OFFICIELLES DES JEUX OLYMPIQUES • LE FRANÇAIS EST UNE DES LANGUES OFFICIELLES DE TRAVAIL DES NATIONS UNIES, DE L'OTAN ET DE L'UNESCO • AU CANADA, LE FRANÇAIS EST UNE LANGUE OFFICIELLE AU NOUVEAU-BRUNSWICK, AU QUÉBEC, AUX TERRITOIRES DU NORD-OUEST, AU YUKON ET AU NUNAVUT • POUVOIR DIRE PLUS QUE « OÙ SONT LES TOILETTES SVP ? » • LE FRANÇAIS EST UNE LANGUE IMPORTANTE DANS LE MONDE DES AFFAIRES ET DE LA TECHNOLOGIE • LE FRANÇAIS OUVRE DES PORTES VERS DES CARRIÈRES EN ENSEIGNEMENT, AFFAIRES, DIPLOMATIE, RECHERCHE, TRADUCTION, INTERPRÉTATION, VOYAGE ET PLUS • ON PARLE FRANÇAIS DANS 2 DES PAYS DU G8 • SI JAMAIS VOUS RENCONTREZ JOHNNY DEPP OU SIDNEY CROSBY, VOUS POURRIEZ LEUR PARLER EN FRANÇAIS • IL Y A PLUS DE 33 MILLIONS DE FRANCOPHONES ET DE FRANCOPHILES VIVANT DANS LES AMÉRIQUES • PLUS DE 100 MILLIONS D'ÉTUDIANTS AU MONDE APPRENNENT LE FRANÇAIS • LE FRANÇAIS EST LA LANGUE DE L'AMOUR • LE FRANÇAIS EST LA LINGUA FRANCA DE L'ART, DE LA CUISINE, DE LA DANSE ET DE LA MODE • PARLER FRANÇAIS ENRICHIT SES OPPORTUNITÉS DE VOYAGE • LE NOMBRE DE FRANCOPHONES DANS LE MONDE A TRIPLÉ DEPUIS 50 ANS • LE FRANÇAIS EST LA SEULE LANGUE À PART L'ANGLAIS QUI EST ENSEIGNÉE DANS TOUTS LES PAYS DU MONDE • ON COMPTE PLUS DE 700 UNIVERSITÉS FRANCOPHONES AU MONDE • LE FRANÇAIS DONNE ACCÈS À UNE MULTITUDE DE FILMS, LIVRES ET SITES WEB DANS LEUR VERSION ORIGINALE • PARLER UNE AUTRE LANGUE PARAÎT BIEN SUR UN CV • L'AFRIQUE FRANCOPHONE REPRÉSENTE UNE RÉGION PLUS VASTE QUE CELLE DES ÉTATS-UNIS • DE NOMBREUSES BOURSES SONT OFFERTES AUX ÉTUDIANTS BILINGUES • APPRENDRE UNE AUTRE LANGUE PEUT AIDER À MIEUX COMPRENDRE ET PARFAIRE LA SIENNE • LA MOYENNE SALARIALE DES EMPLOYÉS BILINGUES EST PLUS ÉLEVÉE QUE CELLE DES EMPLOYÉS UNILINGUES

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- The benefits of learning a second language can last a lifetime. Recent studies have shown that having a second language can reduce the rate of mental decline in the elderly and lessen the risk of suffering from diseases such as Alzheimer's.

What Can We do to Make French More Valued in Our Schools and Our Communities?

A Framework for FSL, K-12 (pgs. 14, 18, 19, 36 and 37) and the module *Promoting French as a Second Language* both contain numerous ideas on how to make FSL more valued and our students more motivated to learn. The following "Action Plan" checklist, based on these ideas, could be discussed and shared with colleagues and school administrators to help co-ordinate a strategy designed to make FSL more valued both within the school and in the local community:

Goal	Possible Action	Coordinating Teacher(s)	Timeline	Reflection
To raise awareness of the benefits of FSL	As part of French Month, each daily announcement features one benefit of learning French. Each benefit is then incorporated into a poster and placed on the school's main bulletin board	Madame Murphy and Monsieur Roux	October	Next year, the benefit posters will also feature in the school newsletter and on the school website
To celebrate the accomplishments of students in FSL	Les élèves du mois from each class are featured in a special section in the school newsletter and on the school website	Madame Cholet	Every month, September - June	To acknowledge the achievements of a greater number of students, include "most improved" students in the awards

Goal	Possible Action	Coordinating Teacher(s)	Timeline	Reflection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To raise awareness of the benefits of FSL • To celebrate the accomplishments of students in FSL • To promote a new, more functional approach to FSL, emphasizing what each student can do in French... as outlined in The Revised 2013-2014 FSL Curricula for elementary and secondary. To make French more relevant and appealing to our students through the use of authentic tasks based on their interests and real world experiences • To bring the real Francophone world into the classroom through technology • To create and maintain a positive classroom atmosphere which prioritizes and celebrates student success and achievement • To raise the visibility of French to people in the community. Can French already be found in the community at large? (e.g., public libraries, restaurants, book stores, movie theatres, hockey teams, francophone clubs, and other community resources) • To expose students to role models who use French in their work or daily lives (particularly if they have learnt French as a second language) • To inform parents about how French is taught and what they can do to support the program • To promote French around the school, as well as in French class, so that it becomes part of the school culture • To communicate with the school administration (and, where appropriate, the home room teacher) in order to make the FSL learning experience we offer our students as effective as possible. How can a French classroom environment be created? What French resources are required to help meet the goals of the Ontario Curriculum? • To inform the public about resources available to them such as The Revised 2013-2014 FSL Curricula for elementary and secondary and A Framework for FSL, K-12. 				

Resources

Canadian Parents for French

<http://on.cpf.ca>

Curriculum Services Canada (2012). A Guide to Reflective Practice for Core French Teachers, Module 2 - Positive Learning Environment

<http://www.curriculum.org/fsl/projects/a-guide-to-reflective-practice-for-core-french-teachers>

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<http://www.french-future.org>

Ontario Ministry of Education (2013). A Framework for French as a Second Language in Ontario Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/amenagement/FLS.html>

Ontario Ministry of Education (2013). The Ontario Curriculum: French as a Second Language: Core, Grades 4–8; Extended, Grades 4–8; Immersion, Grades 1–8, (revised)

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

Ontario Ministry of Education, The Ontario Curriculum: French as a Second Language: Core French, Extended French and French Immersion, Grades 9-12, (revised) 2014

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/fsl.html>