

**Proceedings of the Canadian Parents for
French Roundtable on Academically
Challenged Students in French-Second-
Language Programs**

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Welcome

Robert Rothern

Robert Rothern, Executive Director, Canadian Parents for French (CPF) welcomed participants to the workshop. He then introduced the keynote speaker, Graham Fraser, Canada's Commissioner of Official Languages.

Keynote Address

Graham Fraser

Graham Fraser thanked Canadian Parents for French for inviting him to speak at this round table. He said that the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages has always considered Canadian Parents for French to be one of its closest partners, adding, "As Commissioner, I hope to maintain and strengthen the ties between our two organizations."

Since 1977, CPF's work encouraging Anglophone parents to consider French second-language education for their children, both in and out of the classroom, has shown impressive results. Canadians are becoming more and more bilingual, in large part thanks to improvements in core and immersion programs—exactly the approach CPF has been promoting for 30 years.

Mr. Fraser noted that he has followed Fred Genesee's work on students with learning disabilities in immersion with great interest—as he knew everyone present also has.

Through multiculturalism, Canada recognizes the potential of all Canadians, encouraging them to integrate into their society and take an active part in its social, cultural, economic and political affairs. But "diversity" is not only a question of one's country or language of origin—Canadians must also reflect on what makes a society diverse. Canadians should work strenuously to eradicate all forms of discrimination in our society—so it is important to not stay silent when Canadian students are subjected to discrimination in school because of how they learn. Transferring a learning-disabled student out of French immersion could take away that individual's opportunity to become bilingual.

Every Canadian child should have the opportunity to become bilingual so he or she can participate fully in this country's economy, governance and society. However, the reluctance of school boards and school authorities to adapt to the needs of students with learning disabilities in immersion has created an unfortunate dynamic.

Children who have any kind of learning disorder are often excluded from immersion programs for fear of compounding their problem. Yet removing children from immersion does not help them more easily overcome their learning disabilities.

For example, children with executive function disorder have difficulty expressing what they know, communicating details in an organized fashion, and telling a story in the right sequence. This has nothing to do with language in and of itself. Yet when a child is diagnosed with this disorder, the school's automatic response is to remove him or her from immersion—as if second-language learning were the cause of the difficulties. The result has been that children with any kind of problem have been systematically weeded out of the immersion stream and placed in the English stream.

Then the school, or the school board, or the ministry of education or the media complains that immersion is an elitist program.

“Well,” said Mr. Fraser, “it is elite only because the system has generated this dynamic.” Removing all the students who have special learning problems from immersion and sending them to English programs creates this elitism. This not only creates an inappropriate process for students, it also creates an entirely misleading impression about the nature of the challenges of learning in a second language—and ultimately it challenges the pertinence of immersion by reducing it to “an elitist process.”

This false perception exists because, so often, students who run into a problem are excluded from immersion. Children should not have to adapt to the needs of immersion programs; immersion programs should be inclusive and meet the needs of all students. When children in immersion struggle with learning difficulties, their parents should inquire about special educational support within the immersion program rather than simply transfer them out.

It would be healthier if provincial departments of education, school boards, and schools provided the same level of behavioural- and learning-problem support in immersion programs that they currently provide in the English stream. This would solve the artificial restrictions we now have in the immersion population: no one but students without learning problems.

As an inclusive society in a bilingual country, Canada must understand the importance of inclusion in French immersion education.

“This brings me to question the paradigm of our education system,” said Mr. Fraser.

Teaching kids is not like assembling cars on a production line. Whether you teach math, science, or art to children, and whether you teach it in their first or second language—there is no unique “method.” Teachers and parents agree: every child is different and learns in his or her own way, and at his or her own pace. But our education system—still, after all the research that has been done and all the innovations that have taken place—is built on a factory-production model of mass production and conformity. It puts aside children who don't fit the mould and stigmatizes them as “challenged”—sometimes for the rest of their lives. It also imposes on those children a linear, restricted academic path, believing that they don't have the capacity to succeed according to the plan the system imposes on them.

Every businessman or businesswoman, every politician, every person in this room would agree: our world is becoming more diverse. Because of immigration, of technology, of the environment—our world is changing at a pace that has never been experienced in all of human history. No one can anticipate what the world will be like in the next 50 years—in fact, we can barely anticipate what it will be like next week—so how can we educate our children for the 21st-century economy with a public education system that was created in the 19th century to meet 19th-century needs?

Sir Ken Robinson, author of The New York Times bestseller *The Element*,¹ gave many speeches and interviews about how schools kill creativity and how our education systems should be not just reformed, but revolutionized. In his view, public education is not adapted to modern realities. It was built at a time when not everyone agreed that education should be given equally to all children—including to street kids and working-class children, whom many people thought incapable of learning and reading and writing.

So though the school system was driven by the economic imperative of the time, this intellectual model ran through it: in public education systems, there are only two types of people—academic and non-academic, or, if you prefer, smart people and non-smart people. The consequence is that many brilliant people think they are not brilliant, because they have been judged according to this skewed view.

Mr. Fraser said that he agreed with Ken Robinson: though this model has benefited some people, many people have suffered from it. It has caused chaos in many lives.

Immigrant children are also victims of this archaic way of thinking. When it comes to French immersion, they tend to be thrown in the same boat as the academically challenged students. School boards, principals, pedagogical advisors and teachers tend to advise immigrant parents to not put their children into immersion—even though the evidence shows that the immersion experience can be positive for immigrant children, who end up learning both official languages. Mr. Fraser said that he has personally observed and discovered that that learning a third language is easier than learning a second language.

That channelling of immigrants into the English-only stream further creates an artificial environment within immersion: a predominance of students without learning problems and from a traditional background. Immersion students would have a more rounded educational experience if their classrooms had the same diversity that we see in English-stream classrooms.

Immersion is much more than academic courses; it goes beyond school walls. Why shouldn't an "academically challenged" student benefit from such an exposure to a different, more challenging way of learning? "Challenging" doesn't have to mean "impossible." What academically challenged children need is exactly what immersion learning offers: an out-of-the-box way of learning. These kids are already out of the box. They already know they don't fit in the "traditional" pathway. Sometimes a different

way of learning, immersed in a second language, could help them take pleasure in learning.

If a child is unhappy in immersion and experiencing difficulties in learning, then the success of that learning path may be uncertain. However, if a child is happy in immersion and making progress according to his or her own abilities—despite the difficulties—immersion should not be blamed for learning problems that would have been there regardless of the immersion program. The child’s well-being should come first. Immersion or not, children who are happy and challenged make better learners than those who are overwhelmed and unhappy.

If Canadians want French immersion to survive in the 21st-century Canadian school system, they need to adapt that system to the reality of their world. Inclusive practice needs to be the norm, not the exception.

Mr. Fraser concluded by saying that he hoped that today’s round table would allow participants to better see and understand the dynamics of academically challenged students in language immersion. “Together, perhaps we can find new ways of establishing strategies and techniques to support such students.”

“I believe all Canadian children should have the opportunity to become bilingual. As an inclusive society in a bilingual country, we must understand the importance of inclusion in French immersion education and leave no child out,” he said. “We must establish a new paradigm. As parents and educators, that is our challenge—not our children’s.”

Setting the Context: Panel Presentations

Callie Mady: Closing the Window to Open the Door: Preparing for More Inclusive French-Immersion Classes

Callie Mady, PhD, is a Professor at the Schulich School of Education, Nipissing University, Nipissing, Ontario

Nice image, nice class. This is often the image one conjures up when speaking about French immersion. This image has been reinforced by study after study after study about the academic effectiveness of French immersion. And so, with that picture of the class, it’s no wonder that parents are attracted to that program. As Fred Genesee reminded us in 2007, many research studies tell us that Anglophone students can achieve in French immersion. Their French skills exceed those of students in core French and their receptive skills (listening and reading skills) are comparable to those of Francophones. It is no surprise, therefore, that parents are attracted to this program.

The debut of French immersion programs gave rise to a lot of research. Initially, academic concerns were central in people’s minds. Then we started to look at the social impact and again, study after study that gives us messages about the social impact of

French immersion. “But that’s where I’m going to suggest that the class is not looking as bright as it once did,” said Dr. Mady. Those studies tell us that French immersion attracts and retains the brightest students, those of higher socioeconomic status, and those without additional challenges. As the Commissioner reminded us, those may be limited to Anglophones. And of course, those may be limited to students who do not have learning disabilities.

Dr. Mady quoted teacher-candidates referenced in an upcoming article she co-authored:

- “LD kids—they probably end up not going to immersion for the most part. They are probably being kept out of it.” Immersion, therefore, may be a window and not a door.
- “The students have already mentally shut down and stopped doing work. They don’t comprehend something. So to immerse them in French while teaching other subject matter would definitely enhance that shut-down mechanism.”
- “In immersion we don’t have students on individual education plans.”
- “In my school board we give them a test to see if we will let them come in.”

“We therefore know that continuing this way has risks,” said Dr. Mady. Some of the risks are unanticipated. For example, teachers and administrators question whether a student with a learning disability can cope with core French. All French immersion educators wonder what the changes to the French immersion program in New Brunswick will do in the long term. There will be fewer functionally bilingual graduates. And finally, capable students who have a learning disability believe themselves to be incapable.

System barriers

To improve access, it is important to first identify some of the barriers before choosing how to “close the window and open the door.” System barriers exist — nationally, provincially, at the board level. Administrators, curricula, and teachers also present barriers to inclusive French immersion programs.

Nationally, Canada does not have a national curriculum. This means that not all Canadian students have an equal opportunity to study French as a second language. No mechanisms exist to address this on a national level.

Provinces — and provinces are responsible for education in Canada — do not have specific policies to say that students with learning difficulties should be included in immersion or FSOL programming. (The emphasis here is on “second official language because the study that confirmed this [Mady & Black, 2012] focused on Allophones.) Some provinces, such as British Columbia, have policies specifying that some students can be exempt from obligatory FSL courses.

Boards of Education can control points of access. For example, they chose whether to offer early, middle, or late immersion — or not. Dr. Mady referenced the Peel District School Board’s web text “How can you tell if your child will be successful in French immersion?” (<http://www.peelschools.org/parents/facts/french.htm>) that recommends who should be considered for inclusion in French immersion programs. It says that a successful French immersion candidate has the following characteristics:

- is verbal and likes to talk
- has strong skills in his or her first language
- enjoys books
- imitates easily
- has a good memory
- is confident
- is a risk taker
- enjoys new challenges
- has demonstrated a successful transition from home to school.

Some of these characteristics favour females at 5 years old, noted Dr. Mady. The neighbouring board of Halton show similar recommendations that might make some parents hesitate to register their children in French immersion, particularly if the children are boys or have shown that they may have a learning challenge.

Within Boards of Education, administrators wield considerable power. For example, they can determine which students get tested to see if they have a learning difficulty. They can organize support for students who have been identified. They hold the purse strings and can determine where the money they receive goes in terms of programming. Their beliefs can impact those of teachers. Potentially these administrators may not be second-language educators.

In Ontario, the curriculum presents a barrier to equitable access. For example, high schools have only an academic stream for French immersion. Ontario has a new curriculum coming out and educators are waiting to see if it includes an applied stream for French immersion. The curriculum does not offer advice for teachers about how they can best support the students that come to their classrooms.

Teachers can also be a barrier to inclusive programming, although they can conversely be a great support. Some teachers discourage students with challenges from enrolling in French immersion, particularly for early immersion programs. Teachers can influence administrators and parents if they believe that a student will not succeed in the program and should continue in or transfer to an English program. Many teachers, however, do not get the supports they need to help academically challenged students succeed in the French immersion program. That lack of support allows them to maintain their beliefs.

One student's story

Dr. Mady told the story of “Bob.” In kindergarten, Bob met with a speech therapist who noticed that he had difficulty pronouncing certain sounds: *r*, *n*, and *th*. Bob’s mother worked with him to improve his speech. When his mother wanted to put him in French immersion, the kindergarten teacher and principal would not recommend it. The mother enrolled Bob in French immersion anyway.

In Grade 1, Bob experienced difficulties so his mother met with the teacher who had not noticed any difficulties. The same thing happened in Grade 2 when Bob’s mother noticed that he was having difficulty with reading and writing. Again, the teacher did not recognize any difficulties. When Bob was in Grade 3, his mother asked the principal to put Bob on the list for testing. The principal laughed because Bob was not a behavioural problem. Bob had learned some strategies to compensate for his learning difficulties, and his teachers did not recognize that Bob needed additional support.

Luckily, said Dr. Mady, Bob’s parents could afford to have him tested privately. He was diagnosed with a severe learning disability under the umbrella group dyslexia. He scored in the range of 0–5 for decoding, meaning that in either language, Bob’s reading out loud could not be understood. However, in terms of comprehension, Bob was at the other end of the spectrum with a score of 95th percentile. Bob’s mother returned to the school with the test results and suggested strategies to help Bob. Both the teacher and principal refused to provide the support and the superintendent backed them up. Bob’s mother then moved him to the English stream.

When Bob was to enter high school, the special education department recommended that he not continue in core French, but his parents disagreed. A change of teachers in Grade 9 led to a very successful year for him.

Dr. Mady then shared the fact that “Bob” is actually her son, commenting on how this is not only an academic issue for her, but is also an issue of heart.

Opening the door to greater inclusion

Sharing information is one way forward. Those in the room are aware of these issues, but not all teachers and teacher-candidates are. Researchers know that although teachers can be a barrier, they can also help open the door to more inclusive classrooms. If teachers believe that academically challenged students should be included in French immersion and FSL programs, they are more likely to make accommodations for them. However, research also shows that teachers are not well equipped to do so.

Equipping teachers could involve several strategies. The first is traditional professional development for in-service teachers. Dr. Mady then described a project she worked on with CASLT that provided access to research as part of a professional development opportunity. After a six-week exposure to research showing that academically

challenged students can benefit from French immersion programs, teachers and teacher-candidates were prepared to change their views.

Students are very good at coming up with their own strategies. Teachers need to do certain things in the classroom that are necessary to help students with learning disabilities. What's interesting is that these tactics and strategies also help all students. French immersion teachers are very busy and may think that taking on additional work would be too difficult. However, the strategies for responding to the needs of students with learning challenges do not necessarily take more time. They include demonstrating certain techniques, using manipulatives, supporting oral language with writing, judiciously using students' first language, pre-teaching vocabulary, rephrasing and restating, using simpler language, teaching explicit strategies, and pacing lessons. Other strategies include highlighting text, modifying text, modifying grading systems, varying the length of assignments, chunking tasks, and using a variety of assignments. Dr. Mady referenced the work of Katie Arnett whose dissertation at OISE found that changing the environment (preferential seating, room arrangement, and signals to focus attention) also worked well in core French.

"By identifying the barriers we will be better able to address them with the goal of moving forward to greater inclusion of students with learning disabilities," concluded Dr. Mady.

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Fred Genesee: *The Suitability of Immersion for All Learners: What Does the Research Say?*

Fred Genesee, PhD, is a Professor in the Department of Psychology, McGill University, Montréal, Québec

Dr. Genesee thanked CPF for giving him a chance to talk about this topic that is “near and dear” to his heart and for the agencies that have supported his research over the years. These include the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada; the Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network; the Centre for Research on Brain, Language and Music; and McGill University. Dr. Genesee said that despite working in this area for many years and working with the Montréal School Board, many schools are not aware of this research.

Context

He first set the context by noting that the concerns of many in this room and over the past 34 years have focused on areas of official bilingualism — English and French. As has been noted, the origins of Canadian Parents for French can be traced to the *Official Languages Act* and parents who were concerned about how to promote French-language learning across the country. Keith Spicer, the first Commissioner of Official Languages was proactive in supporting CPF “and thank goodness,” said Dr. Genesee. “CPF has been the mainstay of progress in Canada in the last 40 years.”

The linguistic landscape has been changing, and Canada is now part of the global village. It therefore is worth considering second-language learning not only in the context of official bilingualism but in a broader context of globalization. Within the English-speaking world and this country in particular, Canada faces a dilemma. Because English is a global language — probably *the* global language of all time — there is a tendency to think that if children know English it's good enough because everyone will be speaking English eventually. However, it's now estimated that there are more second-language speakers of English than there are main speakers. This is an extremely important statistic, from both an educational point of view and a political one. It means that while

learning English is definitely an asset, knowing only English is probably not enough. Graduates will be entering a world in which many other people speak English as well as other world languages such as Chinese, Spanish, Arabic, and Russian. Dr. Genesee opined that as responsible educators and politicians, Canadians need to consider this new reality as they plan education programs for their children. Canadians have an advantage in that they started down the road to bilingualism many years ago and are regarded as world leaders in this sphere. However, Canada needs to turn the page and start talking about these issues from a global perspective and not just from research and policy perspectives.

There are both functional and cognitive advantages to knowing two or more languages. Researchers Ellen Bialystok (2004/2007) and Jacques Mehler (2008) show that the advantages of second-language learning are evident in very young children exposed to more than one language. Bilingual children have an advantage in executive control functions, intellectual development, critical thinking, and academic development in general.

There is growing evidence that bilingualism provides advantages not only on national and global scales but also at a personal level. Despite this evidence, there is still reluctance to raise and educate children bilingually, especially for children with learning challenges. Dr. Genesee shared a typical email he received about this reluctance:

My knowledge of the problem was leading me to believe that adding yet another language on a child having difficulty mastering his mother tongue would be putting too much pressure [on him] and setting the child up for failure.

Complex issue

This is a complex issue

On the one hand, said Dr. Genesee, we have this picture of enormous advantages accruing from being bilingual, but on the other hand, a whole sector of the student body is being excluded from those advantages. Arguably, sometimes children with learning challenges would benefit inordinately from learning another language because it is a significant job skill. The advantages associated with bilingualism are considerable.

Dr. Genesee suggested that there are ethical issues with the way French immersion — and increasingly core French instruction — is offered. Informal and formal policies thwart attempts for more inclusion. Should children with learning challenges be systematically refused access to the advantages that bilingualism offers? In effect, Canada has a publically funded school system that is offering enriched forms of education but is restricting access to it.

A related issue is Canadians can justify publicly supported education in the form of French immersion whereby these children are not given full access to all the resources

they need to succeed in this program. In effect, we have a school system within a school system where some kids get full resources for learning and some kids don't. There are serious ethical as well as legal issues here.

On the flip side it's complex because it's not simply a matter of showing that these children can do well. There are a number of pedagogical issues that need to be addressed. Research has a significant role to play in this. We have begun to answer some of these questions but there are many more yet to answer.

One such question is "How do we identify these children reasonably well so that we can give them the additional support they need?" It is not a straightforward issue when it comes to second-language learners. Are there forms of immersion that are more suitable to some children? Is core French versus immersion more or less effective for children with certain kinds of challenges? There is also a question of entry. Are there reasons why some students might not be encouraged to go into immersion because maybe there really are impediments to their succeeding in these programs compared to mother-tongue programs? We don't know because we haven't really done as much research as we should have, said Dr. Genesee.

Suppose these students are admitted into the program. How are they identified after they are in the program and what we do with these them? What kind of additional support do we give them? It is difficult providing these students with additional support even if it is in their mother tongue, so what about in their second language? Does the support get provided in the language of instruction or in the second language, or bilingually? These are all questions that need to be researched. What is the nature of those services and what are the nature of the competencies that teachers need to provide those services? One of the huge challenges is how to help teachers. This is not a straightforward issue.

Dr. Genesee pointed out that there are many children who struggle at school for whom we do not have research evidence on. These include children with severe cognitive, perceptuo-motor, or emotional difficulties.

Dr. Genesee's research compares children with learning challenges in French immersion and those with similar challenges in native-English-language programs and those in native French-language programs. Because most of this research has taken place in Montréal, it is also concerned with how well the children can function in French. Today, Dr. Genesee focused on the early French immersion program, which is but one possible model. This model first introduces English in Grade 3; in Grades 5 and 6, the day is equally split between French and English.

Students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds

Children from low socioeconomic backgrounds struggle with school compared to children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. However, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds in immersion perform just as well in English-language

development and academic achievement as do students from the same socioeconomic backgrounds in English-language programs. At the same time, they function much more confidentially in French as do students in the English-language program.

Students with low academic ability

Similar findings occur with students with low academic ability (as defined by a low IQ test) in French immersion programs. Researcher has shown that low levels of general intellectual ability put students at risk for low achievement in any school program. However, below-average students in immersion programs perform at the same level as do below-average students in first-language learning programs.

Students from minority backgrounds

Students from minority language backgrounds are also often at risk for low achievement in any school program. However, these students perform at the same level in immersion as do students in non-immersion programs.

Students at risk for language impairment

Language impairment is a clinical diagnosis for children who have difficulty learning language. In every aspect, they are developmentally normal. There are no obvious neurological, perceptuo-motor, sensory, or intellectual problems. They differ from their age mates in a number of ways: communication skills, acquisition of grammar, comprehension skills, etc. These children are often at risk academically because their language skills are not as strong as those of their age mates. Often they have trouble learning to read.

The commonsense view says that if children have trouble learning their native language, they will have trouble learning another language or learning two languages simultaneously. The belief is that the neuromachinery responsible for language learning will break down or have further trouble learning a second language.

However, research supports an alternative view. The fundamental difficulty these children have is neurological. Although the machinery may not be working at 100%, the machinery will work the same way whether learning one or two languages. One criterion for assessing or identifying children with learning impairment is determining if they are impaired in one or both languages. Research by Maggie Bruck in Montréal (1978, 1982, 1984) found that children with language impairment performed the same whether in immersion or non-immersion programs. Dr. Genesee said that work is underway to update this research based on new criteria for identifying children with language impairment. The difficulty is conducting this research is that children are often referred out of the program before researchers can study them. This kind of research requires long-term funding to follow students.

Research on children with a language impairment who grow up bilingual shows that the bilingual children are no more impaired than are monolingual children with language impairment. They have the same types of impairment in their two languages. This is powerful evidence to indicate that the neurocognitive machinery that allows a child to learn language — even when it's not fully functioning — is capable of bilingualism. This machinery that children bring to the classroom is extremely powerful. It is virtually impossible to stop this machinery from working, even when a second language is introduced. Children do as well as they can within the limitations they face.

Caveat

Dr. Genesee emphasized that all children are different. Each child's performance should be considered individually. Therefore, it does not follow that every child should be in immersion programs.

Struggling readers

Researchers estimate that between and seven and ten per cent (and perhaps as high as 20%) of students have reading impairments or difficulties. In most cases, students with reading impairment may be entitled to or may be legally obligated to receive special services. Students who struggle to read usually benefit from early intervention. The sooner children are identified as having a reading difficulty and get help, the more likely they are to overcome this difficulty and avoid subsequent academic difficulties.

Most of the research has been on students in French immersion, meaning that they are learning to read in their second language. Reading impairment is a clinical diagnosis for children who have difficulty learning to read; it is specific to reading and the children have no other learning problems in other areas of development. However, children with language impairment often have trouble with reading impairment.

Second-language students are not at greater risk for reading impairment despite the commonly held belief to the contrary. However, they may struggle to learn to read more than children in a native English-language program, but they are not struggling for reasons related to a clinical problem. Instead, it's because they don't know the language. They are learning to read in a language they are just learning.

These children are, however, at risk of receiving delayed support. When a child in French immersion kindergarten does not seem to be learning to read in French the first hypothesis is that the child does not have enough French to support reading at a normal rate. The tendency then is to wait for the second-language acquisition, often for several grades before determining at the end of Grades 2 or 3 that the child has a reading problem. By then it's quite late and the child has often fallen behind in other academic subjects and developed a negative attitude to learning and his ability to learn. The child is often counselled out of French immersion and into the English program where he will receive additional help.

Referring to the McGill At-Risk Reading Study (Erdos, Genesee, Savage & Haigh, 2010), Dr. Genesee explained that research shows that reading acquisition involves a significant amount of cross-linguistic transfer. Skills such as print awareness, letter-sound knowledge, phonological awareness, decoding skills, vocabulary, and background-cultural knowledge transfer from the first to second language. Tests for particularly letter-sound knowledge and phonological awareness in a child's first language have enormous predictability for identifying reading difficulties in either language.

The McGill study followed 100 French-immersion students from kindergarten to Grade 6. The students were tested in English (their first language) in kindergarten reading predictors. The researchers administered second-language outcome measures (French-language development, French-language reading development, and academic achievement) at the end of Grades 1, 2, 3, and 6. This notion of transferability is called "linguistic bootstrapping." Students use the skills they have in their first language to bootstrap the second language.

Findings to date show that correlations between the first-language predictors in kindergarten and Grade 3 French reading scores range from .35 to .46. These are not astronomically high correlations, but they are significant. It is important to keep in mind that there is a four-year gap between the two tests, so to get significant correlations of this magnitude is not trivial. It means that there is information in the results of the child's first-language testing in kindergarten for predicting French reading ability four years later.

Haigh, Erdos, Genesee & Savage (2011) looked at the students' reading results in Grade 1 and classified them as being either at risk in French reading if they scored more than one standard deviation below the mean or not at risk if they scored at or above the mean. Anyone more than one standard deviation is outside the range of "normal." Based on these results, the group was divided into two groups. A similar test was done to determine whether the students were at risk of language impairment.

Results show the kindergarten testing was 74–88% accurate in predicting risk for second-language reading and language difficulties in Grade 1 students. This means that it is possible to identify at-risk learners early and provide additional support early on. Further study showed that the fall (kindergarten) predictors were reasonable, for the spring (kindergarten) predictors were better. It is possible to quite accurately predict risk for reading and/or language difficulty two to three years later.

Other factors

Although research shows that with additional supports, many academically challenged can do well in French immersion, other factors should also be considered. These include community, family, school, parents, and individual differences. Both schools and families have to provide additional supports.

Summary

Dr. Genesee concluded his presentation but summarizing three key findings:

- There is no evidence to support the belief that students who are at risk for poor academic performance are at greater risk in immersion than in English-only programs.
- At-risk students can become bilingual and attain levels of first-language and academic ability commensurate with their learning challenges. The challenge is not usually for the children, but rather is for the adults around them. Evidence shows that language acquisition systems are extremely powerful, even when they do not function normally. The challenge is how to create a learning environment in which these children's potential can be fully realized.
- Researchers can identify at-risk learners early and provide additional support early.

In closing, Dr. Genesee referred participants to the second edition of the book he co-authored with Johanne Paradis and Martha B. Crago, *Dual Language Development and Disorders: A Handbook on Bilingualism and Second Language Learning* (Brookes Publishing, 2010).

Renée Bourgoin: *Myths, Policies, and Research: The Case of a New Brunswick Grade 3 French Immersion Entry Point*

Renée Bourgoin is a Doctoral Candidate at the Second Language Research Institute of Canada, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, New Brunswick

Renée Bourgoin first described the reforms to French second-language programs in New Brunswick. About five years ago, the government eliminated the Grade 1 entry for French immersion programs and implemented a Grade 3 entry point. The rationales behind this change were four-fold:

- The later start would allow students to develop solid literacy skills in their first language (English). Traditionally, New Brunswick students had not performed as well in Canada-wide literacy tests, and the government wanted to boost those scores.
- The government believed that a more heterogeneous group in immersion programs would boost overall performance.
- It would be easier to provide interventions for all students in the early years in an English-only environment.

- Parents would be better equipped to decide on the optimum program for their children at the end of Grade 2 instead of the end of kindergarten.

Ms. Bourgoin noted that the province-wide change in programming reinforced some of the myths around French immersion. These include beliefs that students should master their first language before learning a second one, that learning a second language will jeopardize students' first language, and that learning more than one language is overtaxing for struggling learners. Unfortunately, some of these myths were being perpetuated by those within all levels of the education system, from policy makers to English and French-immersion classroom teachers.

Research, however, does not support these myths. Research shows that learning a second language does not negatively impact on the first language, that students rapidly catch up once English is introduced, that many students surpass their peers by Grades 5 or 6, and that skills in French can and do transfer to English. Research also shows that struggling learners are at no greater disadvantage in second-language programs, that these children have the ability to learn two languages despite their impairments, and that struggling readers would experience the same type of difficulties if enrolled in English-only programs.

Ms. Bourgoin said that these myths led to her doctoral research exploring the reading experiences of at-risk and non-at-risk students as they transition from Grade 2 English to Grade 3 French immersion in New Brunswick. She asked two questions:

- Do at-risk and non-at-risk students exhibit the same reading profiles in English and French?
- Do at-risk and non-at-risk students differ with respect to their knowledge of and use of reading strategies in English and French? If so, how?

Research also shows that one of the reasons children exit French immersion programs is because of reading difficulties. Reading is the gateway to successes in all academic streams. Because of this, Ms. Bourgoin focused her research on reading and the at-risk learner. The students were old enough to talk about their experience, struggles, and strategies; their reflections form part of this research. If classroom teachers are aware of strategies that help struggling learners, they can promote these strategies and provide earlier interventions.

Ms. Bourgoin's research involved more than 80 students in Grade 2 and followed 60 students who entered the French immersion program. The group was diverse: it included at-risk readers, high-performing readers, and average readers. For seven of the students, French was their third language. Three students had speech impediments, one has Asperger, one had ADHD/ODD, and one had an intellectual delay. One child was First Nations, three were being tested for learning disabilities, and ten were receiving literacy support.

Students were tested for fluency and comprehension at the end of Grade 2 (in English) and at the end of Grade 3 (in French). At the end of Grade 2 there was a difference between the at-risk students and the high-performing students. After being in French for a year, the students followed the same profile. Their reading and comprehension of both groups were progressing.

The English running records for the at-risk students in Grade 2 (with three different test points) showed that they progressed throughout the year but were not reaching the same levels as those of the high-performing students. The French running records for the same cohort in Grade 3 showed that the at-risk learners made some gains from November to March, but the gains were not as large as those for the high-performing students. This goes along with the idea that they are following similar reading profiles as they would have in their first language. What is interesting, said Ms. Bourgoin, is that even in November — after just three months of being in the program — there is a difference between the groups. This supports the notion that early intervention is much better than a “wait and see” approach. June results again show that the at-risk students are progressing, albeit at a rate below that of the high-performing students. The third-language students performed, overall, quite well.

Ms. Bourgoin pointed to differences within each group, commenting that some of the lower-performing students had the same teacher. This shows the need to provide professional development and the tools they need to support students and help them move forward.

All the students in the study had been tested in English in kindergarten at the beginning of the year for initial sound and letter naming; in the middle of the year for initial sounds, letter naming, nonsense words, and phoneme segment; and at the end of the year for letter naming, nonsense words, and phoneme segments. Ms. Bourgoin used statistical analysis to determine whether those scores in English could indicate future successes in French by providing early interventions. Findings show that letter naming at the end of the year was the most significant predictor of French reading by the end of Grade 3. Similarly, French letter naming at the beginning of Grade 3 was the best predictor of French reading by the end of Grade 3.

This research also considered how these students continued to read in English (fluency and comprehension) in Grade 3. Again, the at-risk learners are progressing at the same rate in English as the high-performing students with only 30 minutes of English per day. This supports research showing that second-language learning does not jeopardize at-risk students.

Teachers need to know about the similar reading profiles between the two streams and recognize that it is possible to identify students at-risk of reading difficulties in kindergarten — even before a child moves to French immersion. This early identification should lead to additional supports.

Because students continue to progress throughout the year, teachers, parents, and administrators should not be too eager to move children out of French immersion. This study shows that much growth occurs from November through to the end of the year. Time is needed to develop competencies.

Students' progress in French follows a similar pattern to progress in English. French immersion is not over-taxing for at-risk learners, and learning a second language does not negatively impact their English development.

Reading strategies

By conducting more than 250 interviews, Ms. Bourgoin looked at the strategies that learners employ when learning to read in English and French. At the end of Grade 2, the students were asked how they understood and remembered what they read. The at-risk learners, who had been in literacy classes for three years, gave the following replies:

- "I don't know how I remember stories."
- I read the whole story again.
- I read with the teacher.
- "I'm not quite sure about that one."
- "Say you forget all of the story except this part... you would start at the beginning again."

These comments show that the at-risk learners were generally not aware of strategies to help them learn.

The high-performing students gave different replies, showing that they used strategies:

- I remember parts of the story. When I can remember chunks of the story then I can remember the rest.
- I draw pictures.
- I create pictures in my mind.
- I look at the pictures.
- Sometimes I read a sentence and that helps me remember. I sort of look back at one word and that's how I remember.

The same questions were asked of Grade 3 French immersion students. The same students from the two groups replied as follows.

At-risk group:

- I read the story again.
- I think about the story.
- I memorize it.
- Usually I forget everything but then I think about it after a while. I try to think about what happened; then I usually get it.

High-performing group:

- I think about the story.
- I look for known words. If it doesn't make sense to me, I try to make it make sense. I use the words I know and replace them with the words I don't (*allons-y* — I know *allons*; with *moteur*, I know *motor*).
- I think of similar words.
- I skip words and go back.
- I look at the pictures.
- I think of other possible endings.

Ms. Bourgoin noted that students from the high-performing group were able to take lessons learned in one part of the curriculum and transfer it to reading. In response to a question about what the word *écraser* meant, a student was able to figure out from a unit on teeth what *écraser* meant: "*Couper, déchirer, écraser*: they cut; your canines tear and they mash."

In terms of self-monitoring, the at-risk students were not aware of strategies to use while the high-performing students were. One said, "I sound it out or use my strategies like the sounds I know.... I use the words I know or I go to the end of the sentence and then I try to fit in a word that would make sense."

When the students were asked if they used more strategies at the beginning or end of Grade 3 and how these strategies worked, the at-risk students were uncertain. One said, "I kinda use more now because I didn't really know all the strategies at the beginning of the year." Another replied, "I was using more strategies at the beginning...because it's my first year in French and I didn't know anything." Most of the students were able to transfer the strategies they used in English to French learning, but this was not automatic.

The high-performing students said that they used the same or more strategies in March. One stated, "I think it depends on what I'm reading.... Like if I had a really really hard words I would use a strategy." This group was able to make the transfer from English to French learning.

Teachers need to be able to listen to the learners to provide targeted intervention to the at-risk learners. These students do not have a well-developed metacognition and need to focus on sound work. Teachers should be given additional training.

In conclusion, Ms. Bougoin noted a review of the New Brunswick program has recommended a return to the earlier entry level for French immersion, but the government has yet to recommend a course of action. Providing support to the teachers so that they in turn can provide support for the learners is critical.

Nancy Wise: Access to Special Education for Exceptional Pupils in French Immersion Program: An Equity Issue

Nancy Wise is a Doctoral Candidate at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto, Ontario

Nancy Wise focused her report on exceptional students (those having difficulty meeting curriculum expectations) in elementary French immersion programs in Ontario. Ms. Wise explained that she is a doctoral candidate at OISE in Toronto, although she considers herself to be first and foremost a teacher. For the past 32 years she has been working as a special education teacher, 19 in a French immersion context.

Exceptional students are students with special education needs who have been formally identified by an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC). These children have learning disabilities and may have ADHD, Turret's syndrome, excessive-compulsive disorders, Asperger's, and a host of other exceptionalities. Students with exceptionalities are enrolled in both the regular English and French immersion programs in Ontario. Both programs are publicly funded. In most English-language district school boards parents have the option to enrol their child in either program when that child is ready to enter the education system. There are no provincial screening procedures in place, so no child is ineligible for French immersion.

Since the introduction of Bill 82 in 1980, it has been the responsibility of all publicly funded district school boards in Ontario to ensure that instructional and assessment practices are in place to meet the needs of children with special educational requirements in their schools.

So, asked Ms. Wise, do children with special needs in French immersion programs have equitable access to special education programs and services? "No, they don't," she

replied, adding that more often than not, the parents of these students are advised by powerful school authorities to switch their children to the regular English programs to access the necessary supports. This is referred to as “counselling out.” The counselling-out process perpetuates the elitist status commonly attributed to French immersion programs.

Ms. Wise said that in her experience, she sees firsthand that when a child has been identified as exceptional by an IPRC and requires special education programs and services, vulnerable parents are often advised that the provision of French immersion programming and special education services constitutes a duplication of programs, which is not possible in Ontario. This is commonly referred to as “double dipping.”

In many cases, prior to being counselled out, parents of these pupils are presented with very persuasive arguments, most of them based on misinformation. These arguments first suggest that children’s educational needs would be best met in the English program, despite the fact that this claim has never been substantiated by research evidence. Second, they suggest that the provincial funding model does not allow for special education services in the French immersion program; again, this is false.

In many circumstances, this transfer out brings about a change in schools, a process that is disruptive for both parents and children. In some cases, families find their children in different schools because their children have been identified as exceptional. These students with their special needs agonize over being separated from siblings and friends.

Ms. Wise addressed three major issues before presenting recommendations:

- The lack of incentive on the part of multiple French immersion stakeholders (government officials, parents, and educators) to accommodate the needs of exceptional pupils in French immersion programs.
- The impact of federal and provincial funding models on access to special education programs and services.
- The application of funding allocations by English language district school boards.

Lack of incentives to accommodate exceptional students

There is little, if any, conclusive evidence that the academic achievements of exceptional pupils in French immersion programs compare less favourably to those in the regular English program. Why then, does the status quo persist? Whose agenda does it serve to deny French immersion students with exceptionalities access to special education programs and services such as those currently available to students with exceptionalities in the English stream? Is there a significant interest in maintaining this discriminatory educational practice on the part of multiple French immersion stakeholders? Ms. Wise said that she would suggest that there is.

Ultimately, this kind of exclusion will weaken the regular English program and result in disproportionate representation of average and below-average students in it. Ms. Wise said that she has parents come to her daily to say that they are registering their child in the French-immersion program because they could not see their child in the regular neighbourhood English with all its problems. This is a common perception.

The first stakeholders are government officials. Government representatives and politicians certainly benefit from the international recognition that French immersion programs receive for their effectiveness in promoting functional bilingualism in Canada's two official languages — French and English. Members of government take enormous pride in Canada's enormously successful French immersion program. In the literature it is referred to as "the great Canadian success story." Its remarkable success has inspired other countries around the globe to establish similar bilingual education programs. It therefore makes sense that there might be some unwillingness to jeopardize the global status that French immersion enjoys.

Another group of stakeholders that may lack an incentive to change the status quo is parents. Parents want their children to have every advantage that a bilingual education affords: cognitive, academic, socioeconomic, and cultural. Some ignore the exclusionary practices because there is simply too much at stake. And many fear that retention of exceptional students will have a detrimental effect on their children's academic achievements. Why would they oppose this counselling out of exceptional students when that would only add to their own children's educational experiences? Ms. Wise said that some parents tell her they have found the ideal classroom and refer to French immersion as the "poor man's private school."

Educators are another group that lack incentive to promote more inclusionary practices. FSL educators who hold positions in the French immersion setting work with a disproportionate number of English-speaking, highly capable, well-behaved students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Many believe that French immersion is an enrichment program geared to the academic elite. Ms. Wise said that teachers come to her on a daily basis to complain about the students in their classrooms "who really shouldn't be here — they're really not well suited to the program." These teachers, however, feel inadequately prepared to meet the diverse learning needs of exceptional pupils.

Is there a conspiracy of silence? This inaction on the part of multiple French immersion stakeholders to move to a more inclusionary approach suggests a contradiction between policy and practice as it relates to exceptional students. The 2001 French as a Second Language curriculum document, pages 7 and 8 contain a section requiring district school boards with requirements to provide exceptional students with appropriate programs and services in French immersion. In other words, there is a clear expectation on the part of the provincial government that the educational needs of exceptional students will be addressed.

The current exclusionary practices have been widely accepted rather than questioned, which serves only to maintain the status quo. Is it really unreasonable for Ontario taxpayers to expect that the needs of exceptional pupils will be accommodated in the publicly funded French immersion programs in which their children are enrolled? Ms. Wise stated that she did not find this unreasonable.

The impact of federal and provincial funding models

Federal funding supports multi-year provincial and territorial FSL initiatives to promote functional bilingualism in Canada's two official languages. To this end, the Canadian government has negotiated bilateral agreements with each province and territory. It has made a commitment to contribute more than \$24 million annually for FSL programs in Ontario from 2009–10 to 2012–13.

The Ontario government provides publicly funded English-language district school boards with language grants to offset the additional costs incurred in providing FSL programs including core French, extended French, and French immersion. These language grants are calculated on the basis of individual student enrolment. This year, the specific allocation for FSL programs in Ontario was \$241.7 million. In 2011–12, Ontario school boards received \$292.90 per student enrolled in core French (Grades 4–8), \$333.72 per student enrolled in extended French (Grades 4–8), and \$373.32 per student enrolled in French immersion (Grades 1–8).

What happens to all that money? Federal and provincial monies are combined and allocated to district school boards based on enrolment figures. More funding is allocated for students enrolled in French immersion programs. It therefore may be more advantageous to retain exceptional students in FSL programs and provide them with the necessary supports even though there may be additional costs to this inclusionary approach.

Funding for special education, which is provided exclusively by the provincial government, uses a different model. The Special Education Grant (SEG), which comprises six major components to assist school boards meet the diverse needs of exceptional pupils, is projected to reach \$2.52 billion in 2011–12. The Special Education Per-Pupil Amount (SEPPA) allocation, the first component, is based on the assumption that all district school boards have a baseline incidence of exceptional pupils whose needs must be addressed. This means that unlike French funding — which is tied to enrolment in French programs, this grant is based on total enrolment in a school board. Although some district school boards in Ontario have a great incidence of students with special needs, this does not impact current funding allocations.

Additional components of the SEG support pupils with exceptionally high needs. The provincial government recognizes that the incidence of high needs students who require more intensive support varies significantly from one school board to another.

Application of funding allocations

Returning to SEPPA funding, Ms. Wise reiterated that it is not tied directly to the number of students with special needs or individual enrolment in any particular special education program; rather, it is based on the total number of students enrolled in each school board at either the elementary or secondary level. The SEPPA portion of the funding was projected to be almost \$1.3 billion.

Ontario district school boards are not required to report publicly on spending of FSL monies allocated by federal and provincial governments. Ms. Wise noted that a 2008 CPF report suggested that this needs to be closely examined because of the need to ensure that funding is used solely for its designated purpose and that school boards are not syphoning off bits and pieces to support other initiatives.

Although public reporting of special education expenditures is required, there is considerable flexibility with respect to how SEPPA funding is applied. Therefore, decisions can be made at each individual school board level to funnel the SEPPA allocation into the regular English program rather than providing funding to schools offering French immersion. Every school board in Ontario has the flexibility to do this.

Recommendations

Ms. Wise concluded by making a number of recommendations to arrive at a more inclusive French immersion programs:

- Multiple stakeholders (e.g., government officials, parents, and educators) must end their inaction. Maintaining the status quo could result in class action lawsuits aimed at ending this exclusionary practice. Ms. Wise noted that she has seen many parents storm out of school offices after having had their children counselled out of French immersion, stating that French immersion has to catch up.
- The Ontario government must commit to tying the SEPPA allocation to the number of exceptional pupils requiring support services rather than basing the allocation on total student enrolment in each school board. Schools get FSL funding for the actual number of students enrolled and the same should be true for SEPPA funding.
- School boards must be accountable for the application of SEPPA funding where required, regardless of whether the students are enrolled in regular English or French immersion programs. The government has clearly stated that the needs of children with exceptionalities will be addressed, but this is not the case for children with special needs in French immersion.

FSL teacher education programs and professional development opportunities must be available to support teachers in their efforts to meet the learning needs of exceptional pupils.

Denise Harding: *Exceptional Learners: Honouring and Accommodating a Different Way of Learning*

Denise Harding is a Partner and Academic Coach, Evoke Learning,

Denise Harding explained that she would be offering a different perspective, that of an academic coach, not an educator. She is the mother of a French immersion student with a learning disability (ADHD and executive function disorder) and of a student who is gifted but has executive function challenges.

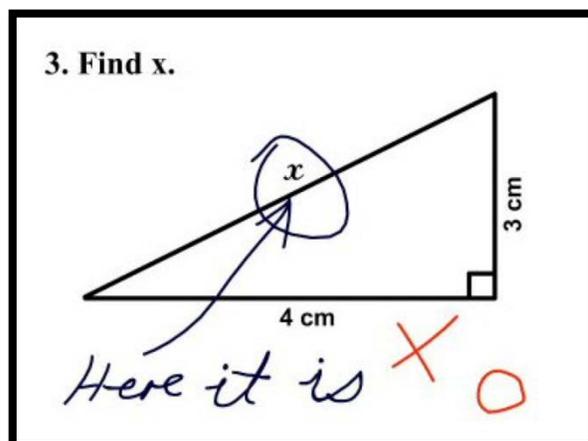
Denise explained that since her daughter's identification as learning disabled in grade school, it has been a struggle to keep her in French immersion. She described her daughter as being very artistic, a beautiful singer, and a mad scientist. She loves biology and chemistry. She is primarily a tactile student with processing, writing, and executive functioning challenges.

Denise noted that she was a consultant for seven years at the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario and is a trained life coach. Her practice, Evoke Learning, combines what she and her business partner know about the neurobiology of ADHD, learning disabilities, and exceptional students with life coaching principals. She works with students from Grade 7 and up, including post-secondary students. Coaching takes place on three levels: executive function and learning skills, strategies for academic success, and awareness building and goal setting to help the students facilitate change.

Exceptional Learners: learning disabilities

Learning disabilities affect the acquisition, retention, understanding, organization, or use of information. They can affect any information — social, physical, or verbal. People with learning disabilities have average (or greater) abilities for thinking and reasoning. They see things differently, however; students with learning disabilities are often creative. And of course, learning disabilities range in their severity.

Five to ten per cent of Canadians and fifty per cent of special education students have learning disabilities. Its comorbidities include ADHD, anxiety disorder, executive function disorder, and giftedness.



Ms. Harding showed a slide (left) depicting the math question of finding x from the perspective of a learning disabled student.

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

ADHD is a lifelong, genetic, neurobiological disorder that interferes with an individual's capacity to regulate activity level, inhibit behaviour, or attend to a task at hand. Ms. Harding said that she often hears parents say, "When my child's ADHD goes away..." but it doesn't. It does morph and change as students grow and sometimes presents itself in different way, however.

Neurons connect to transfer information (neurotransmitters). In those with ADHD, this is an impaired process, resulting in access problems or an undersupply of dopamine. Dopamine helps parts of the brain communicate, forms part of the reward system, and helps the brain focus with the intent to learn. Ms. Harding said that she works with students to help them understand and articulate their exceptionality.

There are three Sub-types of ADHD: inattentive, hyperactive, and the combined type. The majority of students with ADHD have the combined type.

Characteristics of ADHD behavior include avoidance, procrastination, indecisiveness, impulsiveness, and compassion. Students with ADHD have a difficult time sustaining effort and managing energy, so the quality of their work and their energy levels are inconsistent. These students tend to be out-of-the-box thinker and can be quite outgoing.

Although a lot of the behavior looks like choice, it is not choice, said Ms. Harding. Parents and teachers need to be reminded of this.

Executive Function

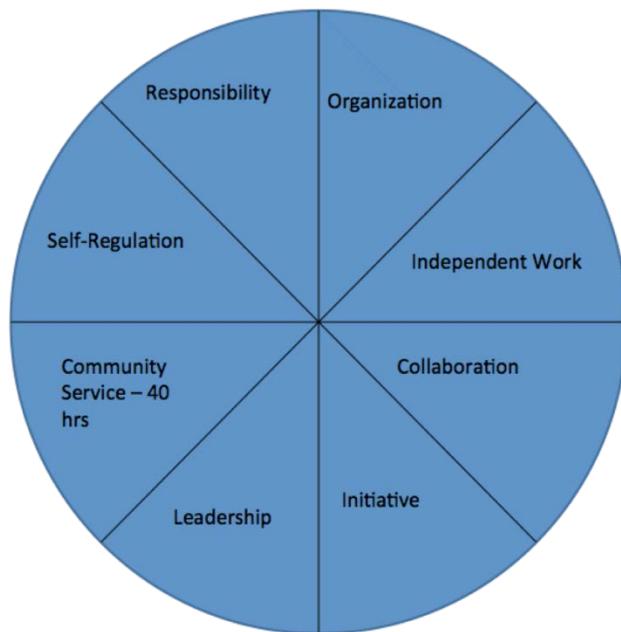
Executive function is an umbrella term for the complex cognitive processes that serve ongoing, goal-directed behaviours. It is built in but not developed at birth; rather, it is dormant and unfolds over time. Some students with strong executive function challenges outgrow many of the associated characteristics and behaviours over time. Boys take longer than girls for their executive function to mature.

Executive function is typically influenced by genes one inherits. The frontal part of the brain is in charge of these tools, so Ms. Harding tells her students that this is the engineer of the brain.

Learning disabilities and ADHD both influence and are influenced by executive function. Executive function impairs activation, effort, focus, emotion, memory, action, decisions, and self-esteem.

Executive function weaknesses translate into a massive negative effect on students' academic performance. It affects their reading comprehension, written expression, math, studying, completion of long-term projects, and test taking.

Ms. Harding showed a slide depicting a worksheet she gives her students. It contains a circle divided into eight equal sections each representing the parts of executive functioning: attention, flexibility, working memory, organization, planning, self-monitoring, emotional control, and initiation. She asks the parents and students



separately to fill in where they think they are in that area on a scale of zero to ten. A zero would be closer to inner part of the wheel while a ten would be closer to the outer part of the wheel. The two versions — the parents' and the students' — almost always look identical.

She then showed a similar wheel depicting the learning skills that Ontario students are evaluated on (shown at left). Students are expected to perform community service hours, which takes them away from their school work but are important for university applications. These skills are not taught in school yet students

are evaluated on them. And these skills correlate directly to executive function ability.

Impact of executive function

Executive function disorders have a huge impact on students' performance because it affects how they organize themselves. It has a major impact on their working memory and attention. These children have difficulty paying attention and are easily bored — “and ADHD and boredom are not friends,” said Ms. Harding. Students who are used to being on their phones and iPads experience difficulty when asked to put them away, sit still, and pay attention. These children live in a world of twenty-first century tools and learning yet most current teaching practices do not reflect this.

These children also experience difficulty processing instructional language. They face challenges with motivation because they are disengaged in the classroom. Their self-esteem is affected by being labelled and they encounter problems with reading, writing, spelling, and processing information. Children with anxiety disorders are asked to give oral presentations and are marked on their ability to stand up in front of their classmates and present information.

Ms. Harding quoted David A. Sousa who wonders whether some of the children in special education are experiencing learning difficulties or are there because schools have not adapted to their changing brains.

Challenges specific to French immersion and core French

Many of the children Ms. Harding sees in her practice are in core French. They tend to drop French as soon as possible because of the difficulty they experience with reading and writing — and French second-language programs comprise reading- and writing-based instruction and learning. Many have been lost for years in French classes and welcome the opportunity to leave.

Reading- and writing-based instruction and learning include the practice of having students conjugate verbs for much of a learning block. Students with learning challenges who have trouble concentrating in the first place have great trouble sitting through these kinds of classes. They cannot see any relevance to the “real world.” They are bored and disengaged.

These students already have trouble processing instructional language in English, so when the language of instruction is now French, it becomes even harder. Executive function challenges add to this.

Working memory challenges abound for students in French programs. These include dictée and conjugating verbs. Many French programs place too much emphasis on rote memorization and rapid recall.

Too often classroom teachers lack knowledge about non-traditional learners. IEPs do not address their needs. Ms. Harding said that some school boards including hers use the IEP in French immersion, but, she asked, “How do you say, ‘My daughter is bored in your class’ in an IEP?”

When Ms. Harding asked her learners what they thought of their French programs, they replied as follows:

- “French needs to be more fun.”
- “It’s too much of the same thing.”
- “It’s boring.”
- “I can’t speak French.”

The French curriculum does not model the English curriculum. Ms. Harding said that a comparison of the Grade 11 English and French curricula is very telling. In Grade 11 French, students too often sit in the class and conjugate verbs whereas the English students are doing some interesting work. However, this is inconsistent. Some schools

have their French classes Skyping students in France, which for many is a more relevant way of learning. All too often though, French classrooms tend to be more traditional.

The Parent Experience

Ms. Harding read a statement called "Welcome to Holland" written by Emily Perl Kingsley, the mother of an autistic child.

I am often asked to describe the experience of raising a child with a disability — to try to help people who have not shared that unique experience to understand it, to imagine how it would feel. It's like this...

When you're going to have a baby, it's like planning a fabulous vacation trip — to Italy. You buy a bunch of guidebooks and make your wonderful plans. The Coliseum, the Michelangelo *David*, the gondolas in Venice. You may learn some handy phrases in Italian. It's all very exciting.

After months of eager anticipation, the day finally arrives. You pack your bags and off you go. Several hours later, the plane lands. The stewardess comes in and says, "Welcome to Holland."

"Holland?!" you say. "What do you mean, Holland?" I signed up for Italy! I'm supposed to be in Italy. All my life I've dreamed of going to Italy.

But there's been a change in the flight plan. They've landed in Holland and there you must stay.

The important thing is that they haven't taken you to some horrible, disgusting, filthy place, full of pestilence, famine and disease. It's just a different place.

So you must go out and buy a new guidebook. And you must learn a whole new language. And you will meet a whole new group of people you would never have met.

It's just a different place. It's slower paced than Italy, less flashy than Italy. But after you've been there for a while and you catch your breath, you look around, and you begin to notice that Holland has windmills, Holland has tulips, Holland even has Rembrandts.

But everyone you know is busy coming and going from Italy, and they're all bragging about what a wonderful time they had there. And for the rest of your life you will say, "Yes, that's where I was supposed to go. That's what I had planned."

The pain of that will never, ever, go away, because the loss of that dream is a very significant loss.

But if you spend your life mourning the fact that you didn't get to Italy, you may never be free to enjoy the very special, the very lovely things about Holland.

Ms. Harding noted that parents are counselled out of French immersion over and over. Having fought their way through elementary school, parents then have to fight their way through high school. They are often forced to make a choice between the gifted program and French immersion as there is no enrichment in French immersion.

Little support is available both in school and at home, so parents often feel guilty and are left to find remediation and support on their own. Parents often question their decision to keep their child in French programs.

Misinformation abounds at the school and administration level. Ms. Harding recalled that she was counselled to remove her child from French immersion by the principal who said that her child would be illiterate because she would be struggling in two languages. However, children in early French immersion can have their learning disability or ADHD go completely undetected until middle school as teachers wait to see how they adjust.

Parents are forever navigating and negotiating through the system, and quite frankly "It's often easier to leave than it is to challenge the system," said Ms. Harding.

Interventions and Resources

In coaching, children are taught to lean on their strengths. Ms. Harding said that she reminds teachers that punishment does not change neurobiology. If a student is late handing in an assignment or is off track, giving a zero, deducting marks, or taking away a privilege does not help. Giving the student choices within boundaries does help. For example, said Ms. Harding, her son's school sent a letter home stating that the readings for next year would be taken from a list. They then read excerpts from the novels and talked about the choices, and had students from the upper grades who had read the novels talk about their experience reading the novels. "What a wonderful way to engage boy!" she said. "It gave them the choice." Choice translates to engagement.

Technology helps students organize and learn. Rather than spending 45 minutes conjugating verbs, use an app for that. Rather than memorizing dictée, pull it up on Google. Students who take a long time to write an assignment down from the board can instead take a picture of it using smart phones.

Research says to give students practice tests and review. Many need study strategies — reading their notes is not enough. Many also benefit from feedback and reflection. It helps to allow students to hand in an assignment early and receive feedback for it — both positive and negative. It helps to teach kids that mistakes are fine, that they are good learning experiences. Humour helps, as does linking success to effort.

EP accommodations can help students with learning challenges. Many types of accommodations exist:

- Memory aids help show the steps in solving a problem; they do not give the answer. Students with strong memory skills intuitively understand these steps.
- Extra time can help a student finish a task or test. Ms. Harding said that she reminds her students that the Sistine Chapel was not painted in a day.
- Breaking down tests works for some students. This can mean giving a test a page at a time or writing parts of the test in the morning and at lunch before finishing it with peers in the afternoon.
- Giving oral tests instead of written tests. French programming tends to be strongly writing and reading based, while many children (particularly dyslexic children) have strong oral communication skills.
- Giving them the right learning environment.
- Encouraging questions. This includes pausing for questions, marking children on how often they ask questions, or giving points for the most effective question.
- Modelling executive function. These children do not know what organization looks like and the teacher can help them learn.
- Providing time for application. Too many children stand at the front of the class and give a lecture and then assign homework. It can help students have time to practice the question in class and have an opportunity to ask the teacher questions.

Coaching and tutoring work are effective interventions with ADHD students. So too is giving rewards. Research showing that rewards do not work is not applicable for ADHD students. However, the rewards have to be immediate.

Kids love using technologies and thrive when given engaging and “hands on” assignments. Struggling students often have suggestions for moving forward.

Coaching

The International Coaching Federation defines coaching as “partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.” Coaching honours the client as the expert in his or her life and work and believes that every client is creative, resourceful, and whole. Ms. Harding said that this is her approach: she tells her students that they are the expert who will tell her what is going to work. She also tells them that they are not broken. Coaching also involves discovering, clarifying, and aligning with what the client wants to achieve. It encourages client self-discovery, elicits client-generated solutions and strategies, and holds the client responsible and accountable.

Coaching helps exceptional students by using positive questioning and active listening that allow the students to identify the issue, plan their own strategy for success, and set goals. A typical coaching session begins by setting an agenda for the session, follows with the coaching process, and ends with setting commitments and accountability for the next week.

To support executive functions, coaching helps the students set an agenda, set goals to stay on track, plan actions and next steps, and follow through on commitments and reminders. It also helps with reflection, self-management, and organizational tools. For example, some students may have skipped a word in an assignment because they did not understand the word and did not look it up or ask the teacher.

Coaching reinforces why the student wants to reach the goal and in the process, it helps to build confidence. It helps the student understand their neurobiology and what gets in the way of their learning. It tracks problem solving to fine-tune what works and what doesn't.

Coaching addresses emotion, stress, and anxiety. Students are provided with resources and tools for support and to foster their independence. Coach-like language promotes respect and autonomy.

Next Steps and Recommendations

- Recognize the creativity of these students.
- Transfer knowledge to the classroom teachers.
- Use technology and resources — in French too!
- Identify relevance. Students remember what makes sense and has meaning.
- Support learning skills and teach metacognition. Teach these students what they need to know about their own learning.
- Examine student engagement/canvass students.
- Offer students choices about the way in which they obtain information and the methods in which they communicate their findings.
- Employ less standardized testing for the divergent thinker. Standardized testing is for convergent thinkers.
- Put early intervention and remediation in place.

Recognize and use 21st Century learning. Children are growing up in a different environment and require specific skills for today's workplace, skills that are not being taught in most schools.

Susan Brims: Meeting Student Needs in French Immersion: Learning and Literacy Programming

Susan Brims is the Principal at École Banff Trail, Calgary Board of Education, Calgary

The Calgary Board of Education has a *Learning and Literacy* program in both the English and French immersion programs. It has evolved over the years. At first it was a segregated program in the L&L classroom with two teachers and an aide who worked exclusively on reading and writing strategies. The board discovered that the children did not feel that they were part of the school community in either the English or French streams.

Three years ago, the board decided to move the French immersion program to Ms. Brim's school and integrate it. This change was consistent with how the English program had evolved.

Much of the thinking behind the L&L program is based on Alberta Education's publication *Unlocking Potential: Key Components of Programming for Students with Learning Disabilities (2002)*.

Profile of the L&L student

Students are identified with a learning disability according to the Alberta Education criteria based on the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada guidelines.

If there are other needs such as emotional or behavioural disabilities or mental health concerns, these are not presenting as the primary need. Rather, it is more about literacy learning disabilities.

The student's language base should be solidly average to above average language skills as reflected by Verbal Comprehension scores from the WISC-IV and/or other evidence of good oral language base. Despite the complexity that a literacy difficulty adds to the demands of learning two languages, there is an affinity for learning the second language. The program looks specifically for children who are having difficulty but who are enjoying learning in a second language.

Academic achievement in both English and French literacy is very significantly delayed in relation to expected progress levels. These students are not making adequate progress in emergent/early literacy skills in Division I (kindergarten to Grade 3) despite making good progress with, and enjoying the development of, oral French skills.

While there is no single “cut score” for Full Scale Intelligence Quotient (FSIQ) to be eligible for the program, there must be evidence of a least average thinking and reasoning skills.

Program Overview

French immersion L&L is for children in Grades 4–6. At this point there is nothing beyond that, which Ms. Brims said was one of her challenges. The French Immersion L&L program is in place to support students with learning disabilities within the French immersion setting. Its goal is to assist each child in gaining skills, knowledge, and competencies to reach their academic, social, and emotional potential. The program uses the Universal Design for Learning tenets for curriculum planning and delivery. Assistive technology use in the L&L classroom has moved the entire school in the direction of Personalization of Learning for all students, as mandated by the Calgary Board of Education.

Universal Design for Learning has three main tenets:

- *Multiple means of expression, to give learners various ways of acquiring information and knowledge,*
- *Multiple means of action and expression, to provide learners alternatives for demonstrating what they know,*
- *Multiple means of engagement, to tap into learners’ interests, offer appropriate challenges, and increase motivation. (CAST.org)*

The accommodations used in the classroom are specific to the learners. Quite often, this includes assistive technology. As a result, the other children in the classroom also use the assistive technology.

Typically there are five to seven children with specific learning disabilities in the L&L classroom. The rest of the classroom is made up from the community meaning that there is a mix of abilities in the classroom. Everyone understands that everyone is different — everyone learns differently and has different strengths. The teachers work on the relationships within the classroom.

Because the school board allots two additional teachers for this program, the school decided to organize with a Grade 4-5 combined class and a single Grade 6. The teacher teams co-teach, which allow for small group and one-on-one support for the students. As well, individual teacher strengths enhance the program. The teachers have a solid understanding of the learning disabilities they are working with.

Students are provided with dedicated laptops and appropriate software (Read and Write Gold, Dragon Naturally Speaking). They are not expected to know how to use it initially but are taught how to use it and the software. For the students, the laptops are

tools. As well, scanners, printers, Smart Boards, digital cameras, flip video recorders, etc. are provided for the classroom.

Key Components of the Program

Collaboration is very important to this program. Teacher teams bring individual strengths (special education background, technology, curriculum).

Each L&L student has a specifically designed **IPP** specifically with SMART goals, strategies, accommodations, and transition plans.

Assessment is ongoing and frequent. Monitoring students' performance is important to gather information to use to demonstrate and communicate progress and adjust teaching approaches to enhance success.

Student involvement in the assessment process contributes to the development of self-advocacy skills. Intended outcomes include the following:

- Student progress toward IPP goals and objectives is actively monitored.
- Assessment results are used to adjust student IPPs.
- Student progress is clearly demonstrated through a variety of assessment techniques.
- Student progress is clearly communicated to students and parents.
- Students are involved in assessing their progress. (Alberta Education, 2002)

Accommodations include assistive technology, modified expectations, modified assignments, additional time, etc.

Parent involvement is key. Parents have access to the information needed to understand, make decisions, and find resources. Parents are active participants in and make meaningful contributions to their child's education. Children receive consistent messages from home and school regarding expectations for their academic performance and behaviour. There is ongoing communication — which is so important — between home and school.

Students are taught to **self-advocate**. They learn about themselves as learners. With teacher support, students learn to create personal academic goals and strategies to attain these goals. Ms. Brims said that the team feels it is especially important for the students transitioning to Junior High. They encourage the students to create a personal brochure or CD about themselves as learners to give to their teachers at the beginning of the school year.

Transition planning is achieved through articulation meetings with the receiving teacher/school. Intended outcomes for this include the following:

- There is collaboration in the planning and implementation of comprehensive transition plans.
- Continuity of programming is maintained across grades.
- Parents are actively involved in planning for transition.
- Students are aware of, understand, and are better prepared go the expectations of the new environments.

Beyond L&L

At this time, there isn't a French Immersion L&L program for Junior and Senior High. However, said Ms. Brims, teachers work with the schools to ensure a smooth transition for these students. The receiving schools make a concerted effort to support these students in spite of not having a formal L&L program. Every effort is made to keep the students in French Immersion. The IPP continues on with the student, communicating student strengths, needs, and successful strategies. Most Junior High Schools offer support to the students through their classroom and resource teachers. This is why self-awareness and self-advocacy is so important for these students.

Parent Perspectives

Ms. Brims recalled that one parent was initially quite reluctant when Ms. Brims suggested his child enter the L&L program, commenting that he did not want his child labelled. After considerable discussion, Ms. Brims proposed that the child enter the classroom as a community child. After several weeks in the classroom the parent agreed that his child should be part of the program.

Parents provided the following perspectives on the L&L program:

Respect and understanding: one of the first things the class was taught was that not everyone learns at the same pace and that each individual will have different personal strength. This translated into having the students understanding themselves and building personal learning strategies that worked for them.

Mentorship and leadership: the combined Grade 4-5 grouping allows for the students to help one another. The students work on a lot of small group projects.

Personal strengths: Not only was there a focus on areas of improvement, there was also a strong reinforcement of areas of strength and aptitude. This helped to build students' self-confidence and further development their skills beyond grade level performance. Students were more comfortable with asking for help, and this had been a

large barrier previously. They began to understand the need for time to plan or think about a project before starting. And they now understand that using technology is OK, so the child can focus on their strengths

Development of learning and study strategies: A parent said that her child has gained and accepted learning and study habits that can be applied to any level of study. She also said that it would be exciting to see how the students use these strategies on future challenges after having become skilled at using them at such a young age.

Understanding your child: Another set of parents said that understanding the strengths and opportunities with their child has helped them to understand and use the strategies learned in L&L in their home life. They now know and try to anticipate what aspects of life may present challenges, and they are confident enough to step back from parenting and let areas of strength continue to develop.

Reduction in Stress: Homework tasks that used to cause stress and result in tears, are now manageable. The parents said that they continue to manage timelines and tasks at home but their child now possesses the strategies to work with confidence.

And finally, one student's parents said the following:

"Having participated in the program for two years, we were very surprised with the incredible progress made and truly could not be happier with the teachers and opportunity to join the program. Our child went from being 1½ years below grade level to being at grade level and no longer requiring an IPP on many reading and writing standards on the report cards. Our child was able to continue to build on the friendships made since Grade 1, continue in French immersion, significantly improve on reading and writing, and develop learning strategies that will help beyond Grades 4 and 5."

Student Perspectives

Some of the positive outcomes for students include increased self-esteem and improved interactions. Students reported that they feel like they are part of the group. Generally, academic outcomes improved for the students, and students redefined their perception of themselves as learners. Parents have confirmed the positive impact on their child.

Students made the following comments:

- "Now I can read more accurately. I can do this because of the strategies I've learned."
- "My reading has gone right off the chart!"
- "I have excelled in my reading because of all the helpful strategies and all the practise I get at home helps a lot too."
- "L&L helps me get better marks because I can have more time on assignments."

- “We get a second teacher that will help me if I’m struggling in a subject.”
- “My computer is helpful. The reason I have this is because I need help and they gave it to me. I appreciate that.”

Administrative Challenges

Identification often happens when the child is in Grade 3 and therefore the child has had limited exposure to reading and writing in English. As well, the measurement tools that assist psychologists in quantifying academic progress have not been normed for a French immersion population. As well, convincing parents that we are not “labelling” their child by placing them in the program is another challenge.

School is responsible for the purchase of software and upgrading/evergreening computers. There is a frustration with some of the software programs and its French capabilities.

Transportation is another challenge. Calgary is a big city, and parents not always willing for their child to travel, sometimes up to an hour each way, to attend our school. Ms. Brims said that this is because hers is the only school in the city to offer this program in French immersion.

As schools in Alberta, and specifically the Calgary Board of Education, move toward a single inclusive education system that relies less on categories of special education needs and more on a system of varying degrees of personalization of all students, changes to the specifics of identification/placement processes could arise.

Questions and Discussion

Participants were invited to comment on the presentations and question the panellists.

Comment/question

A participant from Québec commented that every child in the Québec school system needs to learn French to have a future in Québec. Similarly, Québec needs students from the rest of Canada who have learned to speak French and want to make their futures in Québec with their families. Therefore, this is a very important topic.

He also said that he believes that the biggest obstacle to inclusion is “M. et Mme. Toutlemonde”—the parents of a typical French immersion student. He asked panelists how they would persuade these parents that the same essentials for any other subject have to come into play in French immersion.

Response

Fred Genesee replied that one way forward is to introduce inclusivity in new schools and communities that are starting new programs. These schools and programs must start out being inclusive or they risk becoming the status quo. In New Brunswick, for example, the immersion program was very exclusive, which created a terrible schism in the community. School boards need to set the right tone and provide appropriate resources to accommodate students with special needs. This would help the classroom teachers and provide support and reassurance to parents.

Most research suggests that inclusive classrooms benefit the students who need the additional support and do not harm those who do not need it. Many of the supports for exceptional students are good for all students. The needs of the special education students are not exceptional, but they are more extreme.

Renée Bourgoïn added that the Second Language Research Institute of Canada believes it is important to bring the conversation back to the essentials. At the summer institute for struggling learners, the professors refocus the discussion and work with immersion teachers to promote best practices that help all students, not just the at-risk learners.

Dr. Genesee added that the teachers are—even more so than parents—on the front line. Therefore, it's important to work with the teachers during times of transition so that they believe this is manageable. They in turn can then reassure parents. Otherwise, the teacher will not support the change a board is trying to make.

Ms. Bourgoïn said that many of the practices of an immersion teacher—for example, using visuals—are already in teacher pedagogy. This places the emphasis back on the strategies that help the language learner and the struggling learner simultaneously.

Comment/question

A participant from Alberta commented that he has been hearing about the need for qualified, competent educators. With the elitism that has been present in French immersion over the years, many teachers now in the system are saying that they have never had to deal with problems and do not know how or want to do it. And yet, he added, every other teacher who has come through the system is expected to deal with special needs students as a reality of classroom teaching today. It goes back to the message from the teachers teaching the teachers. He suggested that post-secondary institutions need to articulate this message better.

As well, in some jurisdictions the curriculum in the francophone system is identical to the curriculum in the French immersion system. Many French immersion teachers complain that they lack adequate resources when in fact those resources exist across the street but teachers can't access them. He asked how to get the two systems working better together.

Response

Nancy Wise replied that teachers can only learn so much in teachers' college; the real learning comes when teacher-candidates set foot in their first school. If they first work in a regular English elementary school they are going to be bombarded with much larger challenges than they will see in a French immersion setting, although this is changing. Ms. Wise said that in her school, 10% of the students have been identified in an IPRC as needing help. Yet her school has 1/8 of the resource staff that all the surrounding schools have. Ms. Wise stated that there have to be resources to support teachers. Special education teachers have to be equally divided between the two settings to support teachers as they navigate the challenges with these children.

Callie Mady agreed, saying that when students leave her class and enter their first year in the classroom, she stresses that their journey has not ended. She emphasizes that she has been able to give them only a bit of what they will need to know and encourages them to continue with PD. Dr. Mady added that she would like to see Ontario mandate teachers to continue PD throughout their careers and like to see teacher colleges offer training in teaching special needs students

Teachers and teacher-candidates need to be presented with opportunities to challenge their own beliefs and experiences, so that they do not have to revert to what they are comfortable with, such as verb conjugation sheets.

Another panelist pointed out that requirements differ across jurisdictions.

Dr. Genesee said that one of the real shortcomings in French immersion programs and the approach to FLS is that teachers, teacher-trainers, and parents often lack resources. Many people in the field have been waiting for 40 years for national leadership in promoting the creation of these resources. Today, it should be possible to use technology to create a national clearinghouse that will make information and resources available to teachers, trainers, and parents. Dr. Genesee noted that discussions about bilingualism are taking place in many other countries. For example, the U.S. has multiple resource centres. In Canada, CPF and ClearNet are two examples, but Canada needs something that fits the specific needs of FSL and immersion.

Comment/question

A participant voiced support for Dr. Genesee's call for a national clearinghouse that will provide resources and information for teachers, parents, and members across Canada. The beginning of such a clearinghouse exists on the CASLT site, but developing it to a true national clearinghouse will require resources from Canadian Heritage.

Comment/question

A participant from Alberta said that she had asked teachers what they need to support more inclusive programs. They replied that they need supports, for example someone who can work with immersion students in reading recovery. Many times the teacher assistants in the classroom have no training in immersion. A core French teacher said

that much of the instruction in her French class focuses on strategies; these carry over into all the other areas of learning. Teachers can provide lengthy anecdotes about students who are struggling with their other classes and yet are shining stars in French class. The French class can be the great equalizer because the students all start out in the same place of knowing nothing and move forward together. Even the most academically gifted students don't come to class knowing more than the academically challenged students. It can be exciting and empowering for the struggling learners to be able to participate at the same level as their classmates. This carries over into other areas of learning.

Teachers are also concerned about the practice of pulling academically challenged students during core French class for extra resource work. One teacher said that when she works with the whole class in core French, she has more concerns about modifying the context for religious concerns that she does for academic concerns.

Response

Ms. Bourgoin replied that this speaks to the fact that FSL teachers need to work with other teachers as a school community. When a resource teacher pulls the student with special needs from French class there needs to be more discussion about this at a higher level to benefit everyone in the system.

Comment/question

A participant commented that parents are hungry for resources and ways to help their child in a French immersion program, particularly when the parent does not speak French. She stressed the need to share best practices and encourage outside resources (such as community libraries) to offer programs for French immersion students and those with special needs.

Comment/question

Graham Fraser suggested that technology could offer an opportunity to address national inequalities. He noted that when New Brunswick developed its current program five years ago, it did so largely in the context of a preoccupation with shrinkage: shrinkage of students and shrinkage of resources. In discussions with New Brunswick prior to these changes, Mr. Fraser mentioned what had been done in Edmonton public schools in developing 14 elements of an immersion program that are key to a quality program. However, New Brunswick did look at these elements. The online resources developed in Calgary could and should be available to all school boards. Once they are put online they are available to the world.

Comment/question

A participant said that as a person, she loves and supports the notion of having students with learning disabilities in immersion programs. But when she puts on her administrator's hat, she questions how she can support that classroom teacher. Once an

academically challenged student is placed in a classroom, the teacher requires additional support. In a very data-driven environment, most of the extra supports go toward English, science, and math. Administrators know that a child who has been identified as having a learning disability in language will get the support he or she needs in English class but seldom in French class. She agreed that this is unjust, reiterating that teachers need more resources—human resources. Students who are struggling in English will struggle in French. Students who are struggling in math will struggle with parts of science because it's math embedded. Boards are trying to help but resources are limited.

Response

Denise Harding replied that teacher mentoring is quite helpful. Strategies that work for students in English work for those same students in French class. At the end of school year it can help to select teachers who have had success working with an academically challenged student and ask that teacher to share tips and success stories with the teachers that student will have next year. Then during the school year, a teacher who faces a challenge can go to the mentor teacher for advice and tips. Many of the teachers who work with applied students can provide great resources.

Resources noted

Participants noted that the following resources are available online:

- *A Handbook for French Immersion Administrators*, available in both French and English on the Alberta Education website at <http://education.alberta.ca/francais/admin/immersion/handbookimm.aspx>
- *Students with Diverse Needs: Inclusion of Students with Diverse Needs in French Immersion* available on the Alberta Education website at <http://education.alberta.ca/francais/admin/immersion/handbookimm/08needs.aspx>
- *Handbook for Administrators of French Second Language Programs* available on the Saskatchewan Learning website at http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/handbook_admin

Comment/question

A participant noted that New Brunswick also has an intensive French program. In Grade 4, it's pre-intensive like core French; Grade 5 is a full intensive French program for half a year. This program includes students who a range of learning disabilities from mild to severe. The province is grappling with parents who are questioning why their child has to be part of the intensive French program and is also grappling with the accommodations or the interventions in place for those students. While the focus thus far today has been on French immersion programs, New Brunswick is also interested in supports and interventions for the intensive French program.

Response

Callie Mady congratulated New Brunswick for offering intensive French and said that she would like to see it offered more widely in Ontario. Dr. Mady said the newness of intensive French programs and the fact that they are regionally localized mean that research is fairly new. However, some of the strategies used by teachers in core French have also been successful with students in French immersion, so she would hazard a guess that those strategies could also be applied in intensive French.

Fred Genesee added that there has been such a focus on French immersion that intensive French—or even core French—has not received the same attention. Dr. Genesee said that his understanding of the research is that a lot of the strategies for children who have learning challenges in their first language also work for their second-language learning, especially for reading-related issues. He suggested using the research on first-language learning as a jumping-off point for working with children in intensive French or immersion.

Comment/question

A participant from Ontario described how her board is in its sixth year of piloting an intensive French program. The first class will now be going into high school next year. Two factors have contributed significantly to the program's success: the intensity and the teachers. All the teachers have received training in how to teach a second language. She agreed with Dr. Mady's comments that it's all about teaching our teachers. There are no bad teachers: all teachers do their best and want their students to succeed.

Key Focus Areas and Strategies

Process

Moira White asked participants to introduce themselves before explaining the process for arriving at recommendations. Participants worked individually, in groups, and in plenary to come to a shared understanding of the issue, sort the results into areas of key focus, and describe what success would look like. Finally, they developed 14 overall recommendations for the six focus areas.

Ms. White also reviewed the expected outputs for the day:

- Key Areas of Focus with associated strategic directions and success indicators;
- A “Framework for Action” with critical activities and timelines; and
- A “Next Steps” action plan.

Please note that the Key Focus Areas are not presented in order of importance. The numbering is only for ease of identification.

Key Focus Area 1: Research

Shared understanding

As we contemplate developing support for a common position on the inclusion of academically challenged students in French-second-language programs, what are some of the issues, challenges, questions, opportunities and/or possibilities that come to mind?

In practical terms, this means...

- increasing the understanding of learning disabilities.
- dedicating more resources to learning disabilities than ever before.
- conducting more research in the field of exceptionalities (e.g., profound LD, autism) related to second-language learning.
- disseminating the research that has been conducted (making it accessible).
- ensuring that professional development is grounded in research.

Success indicators

Success will have been achieved in this key focus area if/when...

- teachers, policy makers, and stakeholders access the research.
- research funds are dedicated for quality research projects addressing issues identified today.
- research is accessible and understandable by all.
- teacher practice reflects current evidence based on research.
- research results in changes in quality classroom instruction.
- parents, educators, and policy makers access and understand research and put it into practice.
- research informs policy making and curriculum design.

Recommendations

- 1.1. That a research clearing house be established with succinct and accessible synopses of critical, relevant research findings on language and academic development of special needs students.
- 1.2. That national, provincial, and private funding agencies dedicate funds for research on special needs students and second-language learning. The funds should be between 7 and 10 per cent of funding to reflect the rate of learning disabled students in the student population.
- 1.3. That research is cited in policy and curriculum design, methodology, and documents.

Key Focus Area 2: Resources

Shared understanding

As we contemplate developing support for a common position on the inclusion of academically challenged students in French-second-language programs, what are some of the issues, challenges, questions, opportunities and/or possibilities that come to mind?

In practical terms, this means...

- having enough human resource—EAs, therapists, speech pathologists, etc.
- having better supports for resource teachers, psychologists, guidance counsellors, speech pathologists, etc.
- making sure teachers have the tools they need to succeed.
- providing parents with support for exceptional FSL learners in the home.
- providing enough funds.
- giving teachers adequate financial resources.
- developing a fair funding model.
- tying special education funding (SEPPA) to students requiring support.
- making school boards accountable for the funds they receive.
- developing tools to enable kids to take charge.
- using technology to its full advantage.
- making resources accessible to administrators, teachers, parents, and students.

Success indicators

Success will have been achieved in this key focus area if/when...

- teachers feel and are equipped to teach academically challenged second-language learners.
- resources and responsibilities are shared among school boards.
- system-wide action plans are developed to help all learners.
- teachers are informed about resources and know where to find help.

- a large number of resources—virtual and in situ—are available to parents, teachers, support staff, and administrators.
- systems, definitions, and implementation plans are flexible.
- programs are equal—between and among schools, school boards, provinces.
- PD resources exist for administrators.
- virtual national and regional resource centres exist for teachers and all stakeholders.

Recommendations

- 2.1. That a useable framework be developed at the Minister of Education level to systematically support academically challenged students in French immersion and French-second-language programs.
- 2.2. That a virtual national/regional resource centre be created. It must be user-friendly, relevant, accessible to all stakeholders, bilingual, and evidence based. It is not a wiki.
- 2.3. That Ministries of Education develop standards for inclusion in FSL programs and for professional development for administrators.

Key Focus Area 3: Perceptions

Shared understanding

As we contemplate developing support for a common position on the inclusion of academically challenged students in French-second-language programs, what are some of the issues, challenges, questions, opportunities and/or possibilities that come to mind?

In practical terms, this means...

- challenging the belief that French immersion is an elite program.
- changing public perception about FSL acquisition and the programs designed to support this goal.
- promoting French immersion to all students instead of just to the academically elite.
- breaking the cycle: charges of elitism → misinformation → lack of access → charges of elitism, etc.
- finding a way to dispel the myth that French immersion is superior to other programs.

Success indicators

Success will have been achieved in this key focus area if/when...

- French immersion is accessible to all learners at all levels.
- diversity is welcomed—not feared.
- French immersion is seen as an investment, not an expense.
- the public supports access to French-second-language programs for academically challenged students.

Recommendations

Participants identified a number of high-level steps that would be needed to achieve the results and outcomes. After debating the merits of each one, they prioritized them as follows:

- 3.1. That a realistic communications/outreach campaign be developed to show that FSL education is accessible to all learners at all levels based upon research evidence. (Provincial governments)

Key Focus Area 4: Policies

Shared understanding

As we contemplate developing support for a common position on the inclusion of academically challenged students in French-second-language programs, what are some of the issues, challenges, questions, opportunities and/or possibilities that come to mind?

In practical terms, this means...

- developing official policy statements on access to FSL (e.g., LDAC/CEC) that help to dispel myths.
- having a Charter of Rights for access to second-language learning.
- making school boards accountable for the application of special education funding where required.
- depoliticizing the issue and promoting the value of language learning.
- developing national guidelines for inclusive second-language instruction.
- influencing policy makers.

Success indicators

Success will have been achieved in this key focus area if/when...

- special education funding is allocated to boards on the basis of student need; it is not segregated by program.
- a Charter of Rights is adopted for students reflecting equitable access to second-language learning and special education programs.
- boards are accountable and report back on their special education funding allocation.
- national guidelines exist for second-language instruction.
- the intrinsic value of language learning is modelled and lived.
- professional groups (e.g., IDAC, CPA) have published policy statements about access and support for at risk/special education students in FSL programs.
- these policies are used to inform national, provincial, and local policy making and the policies of professional associations involved in decisions for special education students.

Recommendations

- 4.1. That provincial governments allocate special education funding to school boards based on student need, not on enrolment numbers.
- 4.2. That federal and provincial governments create a Charter of Rights for exceptional students' equitable access to FSL programs.
- 4.3. That school boards be accountable for how English and FSL funding is applied.
- 4.4. That all stakeholders put forward these recommendations to their respective government representatives.

Key Focus Area 5: Professional Education

Shared understanding

As we contemplate developing support for a common position on the inclusion of academically challenged students in French-second-language programs, what are some of the issues, challenges, questions, opportunities and/or possibilities that come to mind?

In practical terms, this means...

- developing best practices for interventions specific to second-language instruction.
- developing connections between specialists.
- developing appropriate teacher training.
- finding the best way to reach classroom teachers (“the front line”).
- getting all school staff on the same page regarding FSL programs.
- teaching teachers.
- ensuring that professional development supports teachers and increases their awareness of FSL issues.
- ensuring that teachers are qualified to deal with exceptional learners.
- promoting more sharing between associations, districts, and provinces.
- encouraging teachers to rely on the expertise of their peers.

Success indicators

Success will have been achieved in this key focus area if/when...

- each school community as a whole shares the same understanding that FSL programs are integral to the curriculum.
- access to job-embedded professional learning (e.g., directed in-class support, release times, etc.) is available.
- teacher education programs are required to offer special education specialization in second-language learning.
- the value of FSL is evident and accepted.

- educators understand best practices and interventions for second-language instruction for special-needs students.
- the learning “look fors” are clear to all.
- teacher-trainees doing practicums in French immersion will have taken at least one course in second-language education for academically challenged students.

Recommendations

- 5.1. That provincial governments be encouraged to create a program that increases the number of French immersion teachers capable of responding to academically challenged students.
- 5.2. That provincial governments increase the professional development opportunities for FSL educators working with academically challenged students.
- 5.3. That provincial governments require school districts to devise and implement a plan promoting FSL programs as integral to the core business of public education.

Key Focus Area 6: Curriculum and Pedagogy

Shared understanding

As we contemplate developing support for a common position on the inclusion of academically challenged students in French-second-language programs, what are some of the issues, challenges, questions, opportunities and/or possibilities that come to mind?

In practical terms, this means...

- developing student-centred programs—differentiated instruction.
- promoting methodologies that bring FSL teachers into the twenty-first century.
- mandating standardized assessments for FSL.
- developing a curriculum based on research.
- renewing an old education system.
- making oral proficiency at the centre of supports.
- understanding curriculum goals and expectations for all stakeholders.
- addressing why some students perceive French as boring.

Success indicators

Success will have been achieved in this key focus area if/when...

- curriculums reflect current research.
- academically challenged students are no longer under-represented in FSL programs.
- curriculums and pedagogy are responsive to the needs of academically challenged students.
- curriculums and pedagogy is informed by current theory and empirical evidence on language learning by academically challenged students.
- methodologies used engage students in all first-language competencies in authentic ways (best practices).
- the number of academically challenged students registered in and successfully completing French-second-language courses increases.
- learning outcomes are clear.

Recommendations

- 6.1. That curriculums acknowledge and provide alternative strategies to assist academically challenged students in FSL programs.
- 6.2. That school boards offer methodology training to all FSL teachers on second-language acquisition for academically challenged students.

Recommendations

1. Research	
1.1	That a research clearing house be established with succinct and accessible synopses of critical, relevant research findings on language and academic development of special needs students.
1.2	That national, provincial, and private funding agencies dedicate funds for research on special needs students and second-language learning. The funds should be between 7 and 10 per cent of funding to reflect the rate of learning disabled students in the student population.
1.3	That research is cited in policy and curriculum design, methodology, and documents.
2. Resources	
2.1	That a useable framework be developed at the Minister of Education level to systematically support academically challenged students in French immersion and French-second-language programs.
2.2	That a virtual national/regional resource centre be created. It must be user-friendly, relevant, accessible to all stakeholders, bilingual, and evidence based. It is not a wiki.
2.3	That Ministries of Education develop standards for inclusion in FSL programs and for professional development for administrators.
3. Perceptions	
3.1	That a realistic communications/outreach campaign be developed to show that FSL education is accessible to all learners at all levels based upon research evidence. (Provincial governments)
4. Policies	
4.1	That provincial governments allocate special education funding to school boards based on student need, not on enrolment numbers.
4.2	That federal and provincial governments create a Charter of Rights for exceptional students' equitable access to FSL programs.
4.3	That school boards be accountable for how English and FSL funding is applied.
4.4	That all stakeholders put forward these recommendations to their respective government representatives.
5. Professional Education	
5.1	That provincial governments be encouraged to create a program that increases the number of French immersion teachers capable of responding to academically challenged students.
5.2	That provincial governments increase the professional development opportunities for FSL educators working with academically challenged students.
5.3	That provincial governments require school districts to devise and implement a plan promoting FSL programs as integral to the core business of public education.
6. Curriculum and Pedagogy	
6.1	That curriculums acknowledge and provide alternative strategies to assist academically challenged students in FSL programs.
6.2	That school boards offer methodology training to all FSL teachers on second-language acquisition for academically challenged students.

Next Steps

In order to maintain momentum from this session, what needs to happen over the next 15 to 45 days? What, Who, and by When?

WHAT	WHO	BY WHEN
Deliver preliminary findings to Joan Hawkins	Moira White	June 23, 2012
Deliver draft "As was said" report to Joan Hawkins	Moira White	June 30, 2012
Send the "As was said" report to all participants	Joan Hawkins	July 4, 2012
Review report and recommendations	CPF Board	June–September 2012
Assign responsibilities for promoting recommendations	CPF Board	June–September 2012
Incorporate recommendations into CPF Report	Joan Hawkins	October 2012

Closing Remarks

Robert Rethon discussed the next steps, saying the CPF is committed to maintaining this initiative. Equitable access to FSL education for academically challenged students as well as for allophone students and those in small and remote communities is, and will continue to be, a major concern for Canadian Parents for French. Over the next year CPF will extend the reach of its deliberations and recommendations with the *State of French Language Education 2012*, which will be launched in October at CPF's national conference in Ottawa. CPF will also produce fact sheets, podcasts, and other educational materials.

Mr. Rethon committed to bringing the recommendations forward to CPF's national Board of Directors and asked participants to do the same within their organizations and ministries. The CPF National Board will look at the recommendations that fall within its. It will also communicate with its partner organizations to promote all the recommendations and find appropriate homes for them.

In closing, Mr. Rethon thanked all participants for their time and hard work and gave special thanks to Canadian Heritage for its long-standing support, for its support in making this round table possible, and for sharing its expertise today. He also thanked the Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers for helping to publicize this round table and all the presenters who generously gave of their time and expertise.

Appendix 1: Participant List

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