



The Benefits of Extra-Curricular Second-Language Experiences for Your Child

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As a parent you play a crucial role in your children's education. Encouraging them to participate in extra-curricular second-language activities to enhance second-language learning motivation, inspire self-confidence and enhance proficiency is an important factor.

Enhanced Proficiency

Studies have found "statistically significant connections between out-of-class language use and proficiency gains." [Smemoe *et al* 2010] Second-language students who participate in extra-curricular activities enhance proficiency through additional time spent in the target language regardless of the student's proficiency level. [Mady 2009a; 2009b]

It is important to remember that "...communication with real people in real life situations involves more than simply knowledge of linguistic structures. It involves knowledge of other areas of language such as discourse patterns, pragmatic knowledge and also knowledge of native speaker speech patterns." [Regan 2010] Extra-curricular activities also provide opportunities for second-language students to interact with native speakers, to incorporate vernacular expressions and to enhance confidence in second-language skills. [Regan 2010; Saindon *et al* 2011]

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Greater Motivation

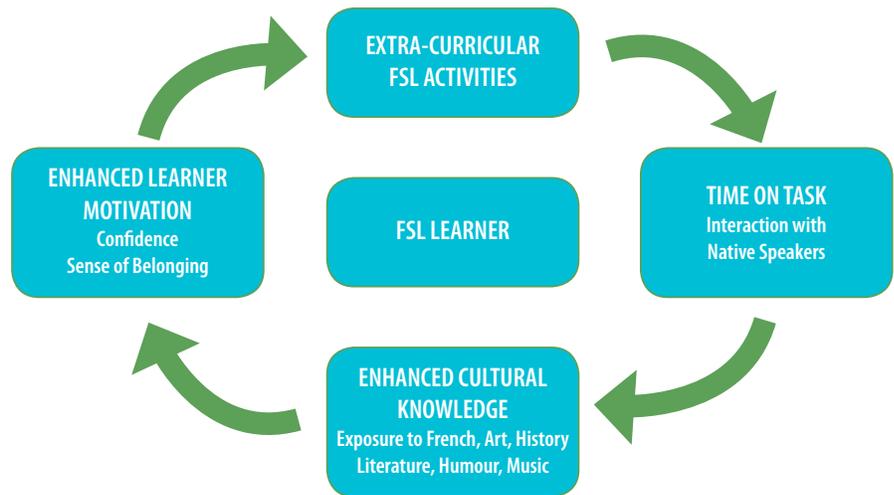
It has been demonstrated that exposure to French outside the classroom increases motivation to learn the language. Participants in the SEVEC sponsored *Living and Learning in a Bilingual Canada* forum in 2008 clearly acknowledged the importance of being bilingual in Canada and the resulting social, academic and professional benefits. The benefits of such exposure to French language and culture out-of-class are not limited to success in language learning. An emphasis on diverse skills can help increase student motivation and understanding for the long-term benefits and improve willingness to hang in and continue language studies when the going gets tough. [Mady 2009c] Educators and parents see that students are motivated to learn a subject when the students express interest in the subject and devote leisure time to learning in the field.

1 Students who are motivated to learn languages for practical purposes — including the ability to use a second language to widen professional opportunities — may be described as instrumentally motivated. Integrative motivation, in contrast, is illustrated when a student is learning for personal growth or cultural enrichment often with the desire to interact with speakers in the target language. [Lightbown and Spada, 2006].

2 Beyond the expected second-language based learning exchanges and forums focused on the benefits of bilingualism, parents and educators can focus on the other skills developed when students participate in extra-curricular and out-of-class volunteer experiences ... in French.

Preparation for Post-Secondary Second-Language Studies

For teens, and those preparing applications to post-secondary institutions, participation in extra-curricular experiences may be even more valuable. Students who manage various activities in high school will learn some vital time-management skills. Showing up on time for practice and sticking to a certain schedule helps students to master the responsibility necessary to succeed in college or university. At the post-secondary level, study groups or group projects require students to work together to achieve one goal. Certain extra-curricular



activities also can teach career skills. For example: a student editor for a high school newspaper learns the skills needed to work in the news industry or other related fields. Students who have experience using their second-language demonstrate confidence and an openness to risk taking — attributes that can translate into an application for post-secondary study.

Need to Increase Student Awareness and Participation

Although opportunities already exist at the community, provincial/territorial, and national levels, many young people are not aware of them. Indeed, some students feel that learning a second language is not always supported in their schools, communities or families: resources are insufficient and opportunities to practice are too scarce or little-known. The effort required to learn a second language is significant and they see a large number of their friends give up for a variety of reasons.

The various agencies and organizations offering youth-oriented services promote their activities individually, but students participating in the *Living and Learning in a Bilingual Canada* forum felt there was a need for a web-based portal listing all the educational programs and exchanges focusing on bilingualism, something similar to Services Canada, but targeting youth (SEVEC 2008).

Educators and parents should focus on sharing information on the various extra-curricular opportunities with students and encouraging them to participate. School based programs may benefit from the fruits of students' second language volunteer experiences,

and gains in student motivation and confidence are of importance due to their potentially positive effects on L2 (second-language) acquisition. [Mady 2009c]

How to Involve Your Child in Extra-Curricular Activities

- Look for opportunities for your child to extend him or herself.
- Ask about sports opportunities and teams at school and in your community that are offered in French.
- If friends or neighbours are involved in a particular activity in French and your child shows an interest, joint participation is likely to motivate them to stay involved. Being part of a team seems to increase motivation as children enjoy being with their friends, and don't like to let them down.
- Parents can pass on positive attitudes and appreciation of the value of activities that take place in the second language. Research shows that when parents participate in an activity, their children will be more motivated to continue the activity even when parents are not with them.
- The way we involve our children in music or sports matters. Just signing them up for a team, sport, or music practice may have a positive effect, but going beyond and linking this activity with second-language learning improves long-term motivation, participation, and success for our children.

Recommended Extra-Curricular Activities



Sports... in French

In the early grades, these programs focus on building physical skills, learning about good sportsmanship, understanding game rules and developing social skills. Children who are involved in sport also have stronger social networks than children who do not participate in sport.



Arts... in French

Children involved in music and arts activities typically have better memory skills, demonstrate creative thinking and a higher ability for emotional expression which can translate into improved intercultural understanding in various problem solving situations.



Scouting... in French

Children involved in scouting-type activities learn real-world skills and get in touch with nature while developing their confidence and making new friends. Programs often focus on character-building, citizenship and physical fitness.



Academic Clubs... in French

Some schools offer academically-oriented clubs that provide an extra-curricular way to learn about a specific subject such as French, science or math. These can take the form of lunch-time clubs that meet during a recess period, or a pre- or post-school activity. ■

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