



Celebrating the Journey to Multilingualism

BY INNA FIGOTINA, EDUCATOR AND AUTHOR, OCT, M. ED.

“If you don’t see the book you want on the shelf, write it.” — Beverly Cleary

In December 2020, I published “Trilingual Me! Moi, trilingue!”, a bilingual children’s book written in English and French about my journey of becoming trilingual. The rhyming story promotes the joy of language learning to children and it is based on my own experience with language acquisition. I wanted to share my story and hopefully inspire others, because I know there are many children growing up multilingual who can relate to this topic.

My journey to becoming trilingual

My journey to multilingualism was filled with obstacles which I had to overcome. I was born and raised in Moscow, Russia. After a difficult birth, I faced challenges in my speech development which I overcame with the help of a dedicated speech language pathologist. I immigrated to Toronto, Ontario, Canada with my parents when I was 7 years old. When I immigrated to Canada, I only spoke Russian, but not English or French. In my first year living in Canada, I started learning both English as a second language, and French as a third language at school. Although it was definitely challenging because I’m the only trilingual person in my family (my parents don’t speak French), I have such happy memories from this time in my life. The experience of moving to another country and learning these two new languages and then being able to communicate with people who I wouldn’t be able to communicate with had I not learned these languages was an exciting adventure for me. Today, I am proud to speak three languages fluently, Russian, English and French and I am a published bilingual children’s author and an elementary French teacher in the GTA.

My memoir of language learning

When I was completing my Master of Education in French specializing in Modern Languages Education at UBC, I had the opportunity to work on a thesis project based on the research that I was conducting for the duration of my

program. I chose to research immigrant students in the French as a Second Language (FSL) program, since I myself was an immigrant student in an FSL program, and now I am a French teacher of many immigrant students, and students who are from immigrant families. I decided that I wanted to create a bilingual resource that I can use in my classroom as well as for other teachers and librarians who would love to have a children’s book on their bookshelf that celebrates multilingualism. One of the most meaningful moments when I published the book happened while I presented my book as part of my final thesis project presentation to my professors and cohort of fellow FSL educators. I was really emotional while reading my book to them, because it hit me how much I have overcome. From a little girl who had speech challenges to a trilingual young woman who is a proud French teacher and who has now officially finished her Master of Education in French, her third language and published a bilingual children’s book to celebrate her language acquisition journey.

Inspiring others with my story

My mission as a bilingual children’s author and FSL teacher is to promote the joy of language learning to children and to share my research with educators on the benefits of using bilingual books in their schools. Since publishing my book, I have had the opportunity to do author visits at schools across Canada, lead workshops for language teachers at several school districts, partner with different libraries in the GTA, present my book to FSL teacher

candidates at the faculty of education of OISE and most recently, in the fall of 2022, I was honored to be a guest speaker at the **CPF conference “French More than Words”** where I was able to share my story and my book with families attending the conference.

My advice to parents raising multilingual children

It takes time and dedication in order to acquire a language so your encouragement and patience are crucial throughout this process. Every language acquisition journey is unique and it is important to celebrate that, which is why I wrote “Trilingual Me! Moi, trilingue!”. I hope that you share my story with the multilingual learners in your life, and that it motivates them to persevere despite the challenges along the way.

Fun facts about the book

- “Trilingual Me! Moi, trilingue!” is illustrated by award-winning Canadian illustrator, Bonnie Lemaire;
- The book is meant for children ages four to twelve;
- The book is written in both English and French and it rhymes in both languages!

To learn more about Inna and her book, visit innafigotina.weebly.com.

The book is available to order online on Amazon and Indigo. ■