



CANADIAN  
PARENTS  
FOR FRENCH

# Learning French in the Early Years

*For a Bright  
Bilingual  
Future!*



Advocacy-Oriented

Research Brief 2022

## How did you and your family introduce French into your daily life prior to your child beginning school?

We introduced French to our first child with music, books, Sesame Street, movies, etc. And since we live in an officially bilingual province it was easy to find French events for children we could attend as a family. With our second and third child, we did the same but it was much easier because our first child was already speaking French and was actively reading French books, playing French games, and watching French videos and movies.

**Parent, Sussex, NB**

The BC Family French Camp was so very transformative as an experience for both my child and my partner. I think many people think that they cannot belong to a linguistic community (French in this case) without speaking the language. But nothing could be further from the truth. Parents in French Immersion are a vital component of this linguistic community, just as they are part of their child's hockey and soccer communities or band communities without playing the sport and any musical instrument.

**Parent, Coquitlam, BC**

When our children were young, my husband and I would use French as a secret language. Sometimes we'd look at each other and quietly say, "Should we get some 'crème glacée'?" Our kids were ecstatic when they figured out this secret code and would gloat about understanding what we said. *Au coucher, même en tant qu' anglophone, je disais toujours aux enfants, "Bonne nuit, beaux rêves."* *C'est une belle petite phrase musicale qui fait sans doute mieux dormir que la version anglaise.*

**Parent, Richmond, BC**

In the early years, we just had French television on in the background while the kids would play. There was a show on early Friday evening that had dancers at the intro ... and my pre-school aged kids would get up and dance. My adult daughter now tells me that's how she knew the weekend had started and that French people were more fun! You never know the values you are teaching!

**Parent, Ottawa, ON**

These remarks were submitted by CPF members and their families in response to a CPF National questionnaire, Fall 2021.



# Early Language Learning for a Brighter Bilingual Future

BY **WENDY CARR** PROFESSOR EMERITA, FACULTY OF EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA, CPF DIRECTOR AT LARGE

In Prime Minister Trudeau's 2021 mandate letter to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, he indicated that building a Canada-wide early learning and child care system was an immediate priority to "ensure all kids get off to the best possible start". The Federal Government announced in April 2021 that over \$30 billion would be offered over 5 years to offset the costs of a national program\* to provide high-quality, affordable and flexible early learning and childcare. Thereby the associated benefits, such as improved graduation rates, future earnings, lifelong wellbeing, and social equity (Gov Can, 2021a).

Early childhood is not only a critical stage in a child's cognitive, emotional and social development; it is also a significant time for language acquisition, which is the focus of this brief. Interventions that bring French and

other languages into a child's life can occur in a wide variety of contexts from prenatal services to pre-kindergarten classrooms, including home- or facility-based child care, community centres, family services, and more. In our lead article, Ibtissem Knouzi and Sophie Morgan outline many ways that families and external services support early language learning to enrich children's dispositions and skills for lifelong learning.

Currently, there is no specific focus in the federal or provincial/territorial early learning mandates (Gov Can, 2021b) on learning a second or additional language. As such, Canadian Parents for French seeks to highlight the many reasons why this should be part of any discussion about provision of services for families and early learners. Consideration for French language education is stipulated for

**Early childhood in this brief refers to birth through the transition to the early school years. This broad concept includes the parents' experiences, the prenatal stage and the preschool period.**

young children in fully French and exogamous\*\* families (OCOL, 2016); however, second or additional language learners are not generally mentioned in service provision discussions. Fortunately, there are some Francophone community organizations that are establishing dialogue with other families interested in exploring the learning and preservation of French (OCOL, 2016), which is a key point for potential cooperation.

**The early years are a time of intense learning and development with significant changes occurring in the brain over a short period of time. In the first year, about 700 new neural connections per second are being built. Scientists now know that this process is dramatically influenced by children's early experiences with people and their surroundings.<sup>1</sup>**

**Research shows that play-based learning leads to greater social, emotional and academic success. In fact, play is considered to be so essential to healthy development that the United Nations has recognized it as a specific right for all children.<sup>2</sup>**

With the increase of life opportunities afforded by learning languages – in addition to those linked to early learning in general – why would Canadian families not want to maximize possibilities for their young children by selecting options that feature a second language? In countries such as Finland, multilingualities are introduced as an important 21st century competence in the education of young children through playful, multimodal and cross-disciplinary pedagogy (Kumpulainen & Sefton-Green, 2019). In Canada, there is an increasing number of promising initiatives related to early language learning, some of which are featured in this brief (pages 6-8), but many

more are needed across the country, particularly in rural areas. As is often the case in CPF's work, the role of family members and caregivers is a critical one, particularly in the highly formative years from birth to pre-school (CMEC, 2014). Suggestions for how to support early learning are outlined in the **Tips for Parents** section on pages 10-11.

Numerous challenges will need to be addressed to mount the proposed national program, not the least of which is a shortage of child care facilities and space (particularly in rural areas), inconsistent &/or insufficient wages and benefits for EC educators and childcare providers (CBC, 2022; UNIFOR, 2022), need for post-secondary training (especially for bi/multilingual EC educators), greater access to high-quality care for Indigenous families, and increasing physical accessibility, to name a few. Many of these challenges are faced by fully French and exogamous families as well as those with French second-language learners. Synergizing advocacy efforts around building and sharing resources will be important.

This is a time of great opportunity to make a difference for the youngest Canadians, their families and the future. Momentum is building to

implement long-term, sustainable, quality early learning and childcare programs across the country. Our **Calls to Action** section outlines some of the areas where Canadian Parents for French members can inform themselves and others and influence decision-makers at various levels to ensure that early language learning is considered a foundational component that benefits all children.

**A number of framework documents have supported decision-making, policies, initiatives and learning approaches across Canada in recent years (e.g., CMEC Early Learning & Development Framework, 2014; Pascal, C. (2009), With our best future in mind: Implementing early learning in Ontario; Association of Canadian Deans of Education (2016), Accord on early learning and early childhood education).**

\* Provincial/territorial early learning and child care agreements: <https://www.canada.ca/en/early-learning-child-care-agreement/agreements-provinces-territories.html>  
While the Government of Québec supports the general principles of the Early Learning and Child Care Framework, it does not adhere to the Framework as it intends to preserve its sole responsibility in this area on its territory. Québec has been a pioneer of affordable early learning and child care since 1997 (institution of the Québec Educational Childcare Act).

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\*\* Exogamy is defined as a union between two people with different mother tongues and cultural backgrounds.

1 Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2009). In brief: The science of early childhood development. Cambridge, Ma. [developingchild.harvard.edu/](http://developingchild.harvard.edu/)

2 Fact sheet: A summary of the rights under the convention on the rights of the child, Article 31. [unicef.org/crc/files/Rights\\_overview.pdf](http://unicef.org/crc/files/Rights_overview.pdf)

# Learning Languages at an Early Age

BY **IBTISSEM KNOUZI** ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, DEPT. OF LANGUAGES, LITERATURES AND LINGUISTICS, YORK UNIVERSITY AND **SOPHIE MORGAN** MA STUDENT, UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO



**E**arly Language Learning refers to learning one or more languages at a young age. Depending on the timing, sequence, and status (dominant vs. minority) of the languages learned, the processes experienced by young “dual language learners” (Genesee, 2015) include bilingual (or multilingual) first-language acquisition (Quay & Montenari, 2016), simultaneous bilingualism, immersive bilingual education and/or instructed learning of a language following acquisition of a home language.

Contrary to widespread assumptions that monolingualism is the typical and most positive language learning experience for children, there is consensus in recent scholarly literature that early bi/multilingualism is a common, sophisticated process that does not confuse or delay language development but, rather, presents several cognitive advantages. Studies that traced the language development of first-language bi/multilingual children have consistently shown that these children “achieve the same fundamental milestones in language development with respect to babbling, first words, and emergence of word combinations as monolingual children within the same time frame despite the fact that they have less exposure, on average, to each language than monolinguals” (Genesee, 2015, p. 7). This applies to typically-developing children as well as children with language learning difficulties (Genesee, 2016).

By the time dual language learners start talking, they differentiate the phonological, lexical, pragmatic and grammatical properties of their two languages. As an example, Byers-Heinlein et al. (2017) found that children discriminate between their languages using auditory and visual cues. By age 2, children’s bilingual processing becomes even more sophisticated as they can detect single-word language

switching (Kuipers & Thierry, 2012) and code-switch deliberately (Meisel, 2004). They also differentiate between the morphosyntactic rules and word order of each language (De Houwer, 2005) and apply these rules consistently when speaking each language. Young bilingual children also develop separate lexicons in their languages as evidenced by their ability to produce equivalent translations (i.e., knowing that ‘dog’ and ‘chien’ are the English and French words for their pet animal) and their ability to code-switch as an efficient communicative strategy.

**Code-switching** (often stigmatized as evidence of lack of control over the two languages) is neither random nor arbitrary. Maneva’s (2004) analysis of the linguistic choices of a trilingual toddler revealed that the child regulated her code-switching or **code-mixing** in response to the social context and her assessment of the linguistic abilities of her interlocutor (e.g., she did not code-mix with monolingual relatives). These findings demonstrate that bilingual children are aware of the boundaries of their languages, can differentiate each language’s properties and use them appropriately with specific interlocutors. This supports the hypothesis that bilingual-to-be children develop and integrate two language systems in a way that is qualitatively different from a monolingual child’s language competence.

Research has documented several cognitive advantages of early bilingualism (cf. Peal & Lambert, 1962). Maneva (2004) explains that bi/multilingual children develop a higher level of **metalinguistic awareness** “because of the constant decision-making regarding language-choice” that they must make (p. 110). There is also consensus that these children develop larger conceptual vocabularies (i.e., the combined lexical knowledge in the two languages) even if their

language-specific vocabulary might seem smaller than that of a monolingual child, and they tend to perform better on tasks that require executive functions, which, according to Poulin-Dubois et al. (2011), is a consequence of the need to deploy greater attentional control during simultaneous language activation.

With the robust and coherent findings confirming the processes and advantages of early bilingualism, scholars have acknowledged and attempted to explain the potential sources of variability in children's bilingual attainment. A consistent finding points to the impact of contextual factors, especially those related to the home environment and family language/s.

At-home bilingual language learning occurs spontaneously, especially in exogamous families who might adopt different discourse strategies to encourage and support children's language development. A well-documented strategy is One-Parent-One Language whereby each parent consistently speaks one language to the child. Maneva (2004) states that this strategy is especially useful as it helps the child understand the boundaries of the different codes and provides balanced input that covers several functions in each language.

Given that both the amount of exposure and quality of input in home languages play a crucial role in determining the child's bilingual outcomes, Quay and Montanari (2016) suggest that each parent speaks in their strongest language to ensure they provide appropriately varied and complex input that helps the child extract language-specific information. This is especially important when one parent speaks a minority language. The authors cite research findings (e.g., Lanza, 1997; Quay, 2012) that show that when these parents used strategies such as "minimal grasp" (i.e., pretending not to understand what their children say in the majority language), the children were more likely to become active bilingual speakers. Furthermore, Maneva (2004) notes that active exposure to the minority language (i.e., exposure that involves the participation of the child as an active interlocutor) is more conducive to learning than passive exposure (i.e., child hearing the minority language in their environment), implying that parents should, in general, engage children in active rich conversation in the home language(s).

Naturally, in a home environment, the bilingual-to-be children interact with other relatives besides their parents. These interactions can align or diverge from the parents' discourse strategies. Grandparents and older siblings can play a major role in supporting a child's bilingualism.

Early childhood education settings, including daycare and preschools, can also play a key role in supporting early bilingualism. The creation of an inclusive early learning environment that welcomes bilingual preschoolers allows them to thrive and build not only confidence but also pride in their bilingual abilities. Examples of inclusive activities and practices include the provision of bilingual and multicultural resources (e.g., books, toys), designing activities that reflect the cultural and linguistic experiences of the children and their families, and maintaining sustained and meaningful communication with the parents (Clarke, 2009).

Educators can help all students find success in early language learning through multimodal language-teaching approaches that include gestures, songs, games and movement-oriented activities (Peker et al., 2018; Regalla & Peker, 2015). There is ample evidence that multisensory approaches that incorporate the learners' auditory, visual, tactile, and kinesthetic learning modalities (Regalla & Peker, 2015), using visuals and videos, facilitate exposure to rich and authentic language input and are highly beneficial for both typically developing children and children with special needs. Clarke (2009) points out that both free play and adult-directed play support language development because they allow children to engage in predictable, routine language exchanges that, in turn, solidify their receptive and productive language knowledge. Goldernberg et al. (2013) add that a consistent teaching approach that uses "play as context for learning" has proven cognitive-academic as well as social-emotional benefits for dual language preschoolers.

In Canada and the US, the widely adopted dual language programs, defined as "enrichment education programs that foster language equity and are organized with the goals of bilingualism and biliteracy for all children, language minority and mainstream students alike" (Torres-Guzman, 2007, p. 50), have been recognized as successful in fostering additive bilingualism where a second language is acquired at no expense to the first language. They encompass the immersion language education model, first created in Canada in the 1960s, and other models such as the developmental bilingual education, and Indigenous revitalisation immersion. Tedick and Lyster (2019) explain that successful dual language programs prioritize the development of biliteracy through explicit and pre-planned connections between (emergent) literacy skills developed in the two languages and the creation of strategic opportunities for cross-lingual transfer while maintaining separate instructional times for each language. Special attention is given to promoting students' awareness of similarities and differences in the two languages. In this



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regard, collaboration between language teachers can support and promote this literacy transfer through activities such as bilingual reading where children hear different parts of the same story read in the two languages (Lyster et al, 2009).

It is crucial to recognize the importance of specialized training for early childhood educators. Contrary to popular belief, the younger the student, the more significant the qualification must be (Hanušová & Najvar, 2006; Uysal, 2020). To ensure that early language learners can reach their full potential, teacher education programs should include rigorous and consistent early childcare education certifications and early childhood-related preparation, with special attention to teachers' language proficiency and pedagogical qualifications. Such preparation should include continual professional development centered

around (a) an examination of the nature and advantages of early bilingualism and efficient ways to promote it, as well as an awareness of some of the widespread misconceptions, (b) strategies to monitor and assess students' proficiency in the two taught languages, and (c) best practices to establish and maintain fruitful communication with and engagement from the families.

This brief article about a) recent research on language development in young learners, b) the role of the family language ecology, c) and recommended pedagogical approaches in day-care/preschool settings, affirms the cognitive and social advantages of early bi/multilingualism. It summarizes evidence-based views and practices that can offer guidance to parents and early childhood educators as they make decisions about how to support children to become active bi/multilinguals.

# Promising Initiatives

## Government-Led Early French Literacy Initiatives



### QUEBEC

#### *Centres de la petite enfance (CPE)*

In Quebec, most daycares are supported financially by the provincial government. As a result they are both affordable and held to a high educational standard. In addition to preparing young children for their transition into grade school, the Centres value language-learning and promote the benefits of learning French even if French isn't the first language of its students. These educational childcare establishments offer children from 0 to 5 years an educational program adapted to their age and also to the amount of time they spend in their care.

This educational program is mainly play-based in order to assist children in their learning process, foster their overall development and promote healthy lifestyles (eating habits, active play, etc). Centre personnel also promote the sharing of knowledge about children's experience to help prepare them for a smooth transition to the school system. CPEs advocate for the value of bilingualism in early childhood education and try to prepare non-Francophone students for a successful transition to school.

[mfa.gouv.qc.ca/en/services-de-garde/parents/programme-educatif/Pages/index.aspx](https://mfa.gouv.qc.ca/en/services-de-garde/parents/programme-educatif/Pages/index.aspx)



### NEW BRUNSWICK

#### *FLORA - French Learning Opportunities for Rural Areas*

This initiative is designed for young school-aged children by NB Education and Early Childhood Development. The benefits of FLORA are that it can be taught virtually or in hybrid format (online and in-person), and accessed in rural areas, it aligns with the NB curriculum, CEFR and global competencies and is based upon the **neurolinguistic approach** to learning language. The website, which provides support, training and resources for teachers, has four learning levels, each with five modules. Each module has four to five activities. The entire program is downloadable to tablets.

Pre-pandemic, there were 13 pilot schools using FLORA as a hybrid program, with resources for French learning. When schools went online during the pandemic, the program was opened to all schools in NB and became a vital French immersion support and enrichment for virtual schooling and at home learning. There was also interest in the program from other provinces in Canada (NS, ON, NT) and in the US, with more users in ON (7000+) than in NB (5600+) and 30,000 users in the US, demonstrating that there is interest and potential for this type of easy-to-use FSL online program. The website has been viewed over 500,000 times. Adult users do not have to be bilingual to use the website, making it accessible for French second language (FSL) teachers or parents with limited French to successfully offer guidance and support.

[flora.nbed.nb.ca](https://flora.nbed.nb.ca)



## NOVA SCOTIA / PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

### *Intervention préventive en lecture-écriture (IPLÉ)*

*IPLÉ* is a school-based literacy intervention that has been implemented for over 10 years, primarily with the *Conseil scolaire acadien provincial* (CSAP) and now across the English Regional Centres for Education targeting Grade 1 French immersion students with one-on-one support for 20 weeks. *Intervention précoce en littérature* is focused on small groups working with teachers to gain more confidence and skill in reading. *IPLÉ* agreements are arranged with the Canadian Institute of Reading Recovery, and a trainer-of-trainer model is used to guide and support classroom teachers. This allows a school board or district to build its capacity to deliver the program effectively. The goal of *IPLÉ* is to bring students up to the level of their classroom peers: there are early readers and those who take time to learn to process reading skills in their first or additional languages.

Currently, six teacher leaders, all with a deep understanding of literacy processing theory in French as a first and/or second language, guide and support 75 teachers in 60 schools. The provinces of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island support provincial implementations, while *IPLÉ*'s strong roots are established in multiple school districts located in British Columbia, the Yukon and Manitoba.

[rrcanada.org/francais](http://rrcanada.org/francais) – *IPLÉ* of the Canadian Institute of Reading Recovery website.



## ONTARIO

### EarlyON Child and Family Centres

EarlyON Child and Family Centres offer free, high-quality programs for families and children from birth to 6 years old. Parents can learn and play with their child, joining in fun activities such as reading, storytelling, sing-alongs and games; meet people to connect with other families with young children; and get advice from early childhood professionals to find out about other family services in their community. Many centres are open weekdays, evenings and weekends to fit the needs of families. There are nearly 400 EarlyON Child and Family Centres and an additional 700 locations operating out of libraries, schools, parks and community centres across Ontario. Some centres are located in communities requesting or requiring services available in the French language. French literacy support resources are available.

Many Ontario based school boards operate EarlyON Child and Family Centres (formerly known as Parenting and Family Literacy Centres) in elementary schools. While at the Centre, families can discuss with the program facilitator and share information a) about parenting, child development, nutrition, play-based learning and other topics that support the role of the parent/caregiver, b) become familiar and build positive connections with the school, c) obtain information on community resources, d) and access a multilingual book lending library. Additionally, school boards may operate an Infant Toddler Preschool managed via the Early Learning Department.

### Full Day Kindergarten

Full-day Kindergarten is available to all of Ontario's four- and five-year olds in publicly funded schools. Full-day kindergarten offers a two-year program designed to create a strong foundation for learning that promotes all areas of a child's development; an environment that supports learning through relationships, play, exploration and inquiry; and optional programs before and after school hours designed to complement the regular school day based on parent demand. A teacher and an ECE work together to implement a carefully planned play-based program that is challenging and geared to each child's level of development, especially in the areas of problem solving, language and literacy, mathematics, and social, physical and emotional skills.





## Promising School District Led Early French Literacy Initiative

### Implementation of a Two-Year Bilingual 50/50 Kindergarten

In September 2016, the Ottawa Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) established a two-year bilingual kindergarten program for all students. The language of instruction for the two-year kindergarten programs is 50% English instruction and 50% French instruction. As all enrolled students participate in this 50%-50% bilingual program, the entry point for early French immersion changed to Grade 1 from Senior Kindergarten. The goals of this program are to provide a two-year seamless kindergarten experience aligned with a new provincial kindergarten curriculum program (full day) and to provide equity of access for all students to learn French. This provides all parents an opportunity to see their children (including ESL and children in unrepresented or marginalized neighbourhoods) as language learners prior to the FI enrolment decision in Grade 1.

Principals, in consultation with their Early Years teams, determined whether the program at their school would be delivered as a half day French/half day English model or an alternating day model with one day in French and the next day in English. Support was provided to schools in the areas of French classroom and library materials, FSL cultural funds, professional learning for both teachers and early childhood educators and learning support services which include Early Learning Intervention Program, Kindergarten Speech Language Intervention Program.

An update was scheduled to be brought forward in Spring 2022, when the first cohort of students enrolled in the program would have participated in the Grade 3 provincial assessments of reading, writing, and mathematics in May 2021. The timing of the update will be adapted due to the effects of the pandemic. Data have confirmed to date:

- Enrolment figures have remained stable though the implementation of the program.
- There continues to be a pattern of increasing enrolment in Early French immersion and decreasing enrolment in the English program with core French.

In recent years, a number of provinces and territories have combined their Ministries of Education with those of early childhood learning and development, which is helpful in addressing the transition from home to school and in **broadening our CPF advocacy efforts from K-12+ to birth to 12+**.

### As of 2022, combined responsibilities for delivering early years, child care and publicly funded education, birth to Grade 12, within the Ministry of Education:

- NT Department of Education
- PE Department of Education and Lifelong Learning
- NB Ministry of Education and Early Childhood Development
- NS Education and Early Childhood Development
- ON Ministry of Education
- MB Education and Early Childhood Learning
- SK Ministry of Education
- NU Department of Education
- NWT Department of Education, Culture and Employment
- YT Department of Education
- BC Ministry of Education

### Responsibilities separated over two Ministries:

- In AB, the Ministry of Education for K-12 with the Ministry of Children's Services responsible for child care and early childhood development.
- In QC, *Le Ministère de la famille et de l'enfance* (birth to transition to school) with *le Ministère de l'éducation* responsible for preschool (4 year old kindergarten), elementary, and secondary education (to Sec V).

# Key Organizations



## Families Canada

[▶ familiescanada.ca](https://familiescanada.ca)

Families Canada is a national association of family support centres. Members are community-level organizations that provide hubs of free services, programs, and resources to primarily low-income and disadvantaged families in communities across Canada. With over 500 members, impact is felt by approximately 500,000 families per year. For over 40 years, Families Canada has helped its members meet the evolving and complex needs of families by:

- piloting, adapting, and scaling evidence-based programming,
- developing and disseminating evidence-informed resources
- providing professional development opportunities.

Families Canada partners with private, public, non-profit and academic organizations to turn knowledge into practice.

Working with scientific experts, resources that support early childhood development have been developed, including a [YouTube webinar series](#) and a [podcast series](#). These series focus on brain development, play, use of technology in early years and many other important topics that support early learning. Several [free downloadable resources](#) on parenting, community engagement and intergenerational connections are also available.



## Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation

[▶ childrensliteracy.ca](https://childrensliteracy.ca)

Founded in 2017 by Heather Reisman, founder and CEO of Indigo and Chair of the Indigo Love of Reading Foundation, and Heather Munroe-Blum, Chairperson of the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board, established the Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation (CCLF), the only national charity dedicated exclusively to children's early literacy. Its mission is to build a brighter, more literate future for all children in Canada by promoting and developing literacy initiatives, championing literacy partners across Canada, and empowering people to build literacy skills in their homes and communities.

CCLF is collaborating with First Book Canada to offer books to programs at reduced prices thanks to publishers from

across Canada. Visit their Get Books page on their website to learn more, as well as Tips and Resources on talking, singing and sharing books as one of the most effective and fun ways to help ensure little ones ages 0 to 3 do the best they can when they get to school and throughout life.

The **Early Words / Premiers mots** program is a collaboration with clinics, hospitals and communities to help families build strong baby brains and lay a foundation for literacy and to inspire families to start young children on a joyful reading journey by surrounding them with words right from birth.

# Introducing French to our Babies, Toddlers, and Preschoolers

## There is no downside to being bilingual – and the best time to start is early!

Research has shown that babies raised in bilingual environments develop stronger core cognitive skills like decision-making and problem-solving – even before they speak. Executive brain functions are key to success in school, and academic success is a big indicator of long-term wellbeing. Prepare your child for successful experiences as they grow, learn and transition to school.

### If you are bilingual or conversant in French:



- Consider the “one parent, one language” method. Be consistent on which parent or caregiver speaks which language to your baby, helping them know how to respond.



- Talk with your child about daily activities in French – what they are doing; what you are doing. Or set a specific consistent time when French is used – at bedtime, during bath time, or meal times. Strong oral communication skills will become a solid foundation for later academic achievement.



- Read French books to your child, preferably daily. Select a variety of books of different lengths and different subjects. Relate the pictures to the story. Follow instructions for a recipe together in French. This enhances language development and stimulates children’s curiosity and imagination.



- Develop opportunities for your child’s exposure to French music, rhythm and rhyming activities, which help the development of reading skills. Enroll in virtual parent and child music and movement oriented classes to learn together.



- Enroll your child in bilingual playgroups or preschool activities. Arts and crafts or play based activities will develop both fine and gross motor skills while also hearing and speaking French. Fine motor skills involving the small muscles of the body, for example, drawing, cutting and gluing, are important in preparation for the transition to kindergarten. Focusing on gross motor skills, e.g., catching a beanbag or large ball, serves to develop interpersonal and cooperative skills.



- Motivating children to use both languages can be the biggest challenge. This is especially true when the language is not widely used by friends in the immediate surroundings. Parents can devise strategies to motivate children to use the language by traveling, visiting family or connecting with other children who speak the language.



- Teaching your child a second language should be approached like any other parenting task: be patient. It may be difficult at times, and you may second guess yourself often, but ultimately, the effort will be worth it. Your child will thank you one day, most likely in their second language!

## The best part is that you can raise a bilingual child even if you are not bilingual!



➤ Incorporate French into your daily life. Normalizing hearing and using French at home will increase everyone's comfort level. Play French radio stations. Watch French or bilingual children's TV programming or cartoons (mini-TFO, *Passe-Partout*, change to French in Netflix and Disney). Listen to French podcasts for bedtime stories (Bododo on Ohdio, CBC/RC). Make a sensory bin filled with items for your child to explore – practise naming items in French.



➤ Treat bilingualism as an asset. Lots of French words make their way into English. Point out these words as you encounter them. Introduce common expressions and commands. *Bravo! Attention! Bon appétit! Bon voyage! À la mode...* Celebrate moments when French pops up in daily life!



➤ Introduce French through music. Singing, counting, and simple nursery rhymes help to introduce sounds, words and patterns as well as build the ability to process other auditory input, thus helping retain new words and structures.



➤ Visit your public library regularly. Sign out and read French or bilingual audio picture books. Attend French story times as a family. Read the stories aloud in your home language and then again in French. Explore your community. Look for French on signage or complete a neighbourhood scavenger hunt to learn vocabulary in French. **Visit: [amelieisabelle.com/cherche-et-trouve](http://amelieisabelle.com/cherche-et-trouve)**



➤ Download French apps (*Boukili, Idélo*) or play games on French educational websites. Many apps are free and make learning French fun using a game-like approach. These types of tools do tend to require reading, but also incorporate visual and auditory cues.



➤ Encourage other adults in your child's life who speak French – friends, neighbours, youth leaders, relatives – to strike up simple conversations with your child, reinforcing basic greetings and sharing on a few commonly enjoyed topics. Look for a bilingual babysitter proud to share their French with your child.



➤ Follow and read parenting blogs and magazines focused on raising bilingual children in Canada.

- [bilingual-babies.com/multilingual-living-magazine/](http://bilingual-babies.com/multilingual-living-magazine/)
- [multilingualmatters.com/page/bilingual-family-newsletter](http://multilingualmatters.com/page/bilingual-family-newsletter)  
(an archive of past issues of the Bilingual Family Newsletter, which ceased publication in 2010)
- [developpement-langagier.fpcfbc.ca/en.html](http://developpement-langagier.fpcfbc.ca/en.html)



➤ Treat Bilingualism as an investment. When planning your child's transition to school, consider French or bilingual playgroups, day cares, preschool and French immersion kindergarten programs. Attend parent information sessions and ask questions. Get a feel for how French language development will be supported.



Research scientist Naja Feran Ramírez (U of Washington): "Young children are capable of learning multiple languages ... and early childhood is the optimum time for them to begin." [bit.ly/3wXYOUT](https://bit.ly/3wXYOUT)



Neuroscientist Sam Wang (Princeton U.) describes some of the measurable benefits of developing a bilingual brain at an early age. [bit.ly/3wXYOUT](https://bit.ly/3wXYOUT)

# Key Organizations

## CCCF\*FCSGE

### Canadian Child Care Federation

▶ [cccf-fcsge.ca](http://cccf-fcsge.ca)

The Canadian Child Care Federation (CCCF) is a bilingual member and service-based organization, representing and uniting its affiliates and members from across Canada since 1983. It is Canada's largest national, non-profit, charitable Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) organization. The CCCF is committed to achieving excellence in early learning and child care, providing leadership on issues that impact the sector by bringing together a diverse community of

educators, policy makers, and families committed to giving the children of today the head start they need tomorrow. ECEs make up the backbone of the membership, giving a voice to the deep passion, experience and practice of ELCC in Canada and space to excellent research in policy and practice to better inform service development and delivery. The CCCF website offers family resources and free online webinars.



### LEARN (Leading English Education and Resource Network)

▶ [learnquebec.ca/early-literacy](http://learnquebec.ca/early-literacy)

LEARN is a non-profit educational organization with a mandate to serve Quebec's English-speaking community. LEARN offers a wide range of resources and services at no charge, including elementary and secondary level teaching tools and content, professional learning, community, school and parental support, as well as a full range of online services through the LEARN Virtual Campus. LEARN offers support to many

**Community Learning Centres (CLCs)** across the province that offer early childhood programming for families with children 0 to 5 years old, including the Parent-Child Mother Goose project. Its website offers links to resources for families and children including ***Naitre et grandir***, ***My Goodnight Bag*** and information on celebrating Early Childhood Week across Quebec in November each year.

## MANITOBA

### Fédération des parents de la francophonie manitobaine (FPFM)

▶ [frenchfromthestart.ca/parents-and-families](http://frenchfromthestart.ca/parents-and-families)

The *Fédération* offers programs, services, resources and training to support all families in Manitoba's French-language community, regardless of whether French is the first language, second language or one of many spoken in the home. They also support early childhood educators working to create an environment where children can thrive and flourish in French.

Their website and programs were specifically designed with the non-francophone parent in mind, recognizing the vital role they play. Parent-child programs, free at-home support

kits, as well as French language support and in person monthly activities to celebrate the diversity of Francophone cultures in an inclusive, respectful and fun environment, are on the menu. In 2020, they conducted "French from the Start" consultations for multilingual families to develop resources, tools and services to meet the challenges, needs and wishes of multilingual families. Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) provides a free 30-week preschool program, twenty minutes a day focused on developing literacy and motor skills *en français*. [lafpfm.ca/hippy](http://lafpfm.ca/hippy)

# Early Literacy Resources & Tools in French



## National



### ***Lire à tout vent/Sail into Stories - Canadian Children's Book Week***

The Canadian Children's Book Week is organized by the Canadian Children's Book Centre and *Communication-Jeunesse*. This national event celebrates Canadian children's books, in English and in French, and the importance of reading. Each May, hundreds of readings are given to thousands of children, teens and adults in over 100 communities across the country. Hundreds of schools, public libraries, bookstores and community centres host events as part of this major literary festival. Canadian authors, illustrators and storytellers virtually visit schools, libraries, community centres and bookstores across Canada throughout the week. [bookweek.ca](http://bookweek.ca)

### **Bibliovideo**

The Canadian Children's Book Centre /*Centre du livre jeunesse canadien* created a YouTube channel for young readers, librarians, teachers, parents, authors, illustrators, researchers and others who want to locate and learn more about great Canadian books for young people. New videos in both languages are added to the channel twice weekly.

[bookcentre.ca/resources/bibliovideo](http://bookcentre.ca/resources/bibliovideo)



### **Educatout.com - French online family and childcare magazine**

This French online family and childcare magazine offers, on a weekly basis, tools to support parents, educators and other stakeholders in early childhood education. The website shares a collection of themed activities and games, videos, professional advice and columns, a parent discussion forum, stories for children, distance learning and an online store. The resources and advice are provided by a team of early childhood professionals. Educatout.com is a member, of the Canadian Federation of Child Care Services (FCSGE), of the Francophone Association for Education of Children's Services of Ontario (AFÉSEO) and of the Quebec Early Childhood Resource Center (CQRPE). [educatout.com/index.html](http://educatout.com/index.html)

## CBC/Radio Canada

CBC/Radio-Canada's programming is designed to support both Official Languages while reflecting the multicultural nature of Canada. There are a number of options on its website for parents and caregivers to find quality content, without advertising, suitable for young children.

### Some highlights to support early literacy development:

#### Podcasts - Ohdio – search under children and families

- **Bododo:** offers 5 episodes of bedtime story podcasts, short stories to help young children fall asleep peacefully. Each story ends with a sweet musical piece that allows children to continue the story in their dreams.

[bit.ly/3xd0TN6](https://bit.ly/3xd0TN6)

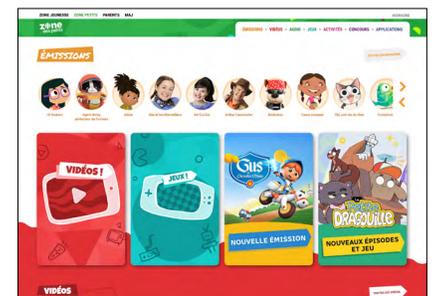
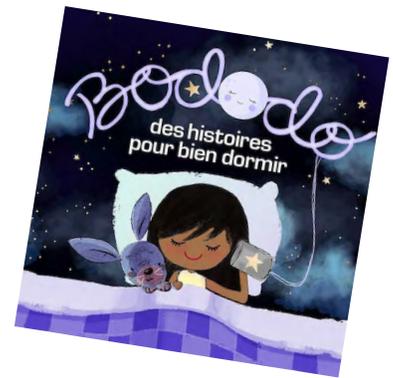
- **Albums Jeunesse:** free access to French audio tales, children's stories and albums. [ici.radio-canada.ca/ohdio/categories/1003592/jeunesse](https://ici.radio-canada.ca/ohdio/categories/1003592/jeunesse)

**Website - Zone petits** – offers content for preschoolers including podcasts, audiobooks, videos, games, activities, contests, and related apps.

[ici.radio-canada.ca/jeunesse/prescolaire](https://ici.radio-canada.ca/jeunesse/prescolaire)

**App - L'appli des petits** – a free mobile application for children aged 3 to 5, offers ad-free, completely secure, mostly video content. The audio portion may be played via a smartphone or tablet. Toddlers can easily play the audio portion on a car's player. Toddlers can navigate with autonomy, freedom and confidence in this interface designed especially for them.

[ici.radio-canada.ca/jeunesse/scolaire/applications](https://ici.radio-canada.ca/jeunesse/scolaire/applications)



### Fable Cottage - Bilingual Tales for Language Learners

15 traditional children's stories retold in modern language and translated into French with optional parallel English texts and slow audio from a native French speaker. Other languages include English, Italian, Spanish, German and Russian. The voice artists speak a bit slower than normal to aid understanding. [thefablecottage.com](https://thefablecottage.com)

### Virtual French Story Time - Public Libraries across Canada

The Public Library System offers parents programs that help them guide their child towards success by promoting language, literacy and social skills. Regular library visits helps promote family bonding and helps develop habits that lead to success. These programs are often free and offered at branches throughout cities and communities across Canada. Library programs for young children are created to include books, songs, fingerplays, puppets, rhymes and activities. These programs help build early literacy, listening, and group participation skills in preparation for school. Look for programs geared to **babytime (0 to 18 months)**, **toddertime (18 months to 3 years)**, **storytime (19 months to school age)** and family **storytime (children of all ages and their parents)**.

Many public libraries across Canada moved to offering virtual French storytime via zoom or posting recorded French or bilingual storytimes on their organization's YouTube channels during the pandemic having created a rich archive of stories for parents to discover and share with the children. In some cases, due to restrictions on recording performances, including reading books aloud, the programs are posted as unlisted YouTube videos. A link is emailed out to all registrants each month, and families are able to watch them as often as desired.

- **Vaughan Public Libraries (ON)** – Virtual French and bilingual Stories (series of 26 videos): [bit.ly/3r9Xr1M](https://bit.ly/3r9Xr1M)

# Quebec



## My French Goodnight Bag / *Mon sac Bonne nuit!*

The French Goodnight Bags project is a joint initiative between **LEARN** and **Canadian Parents for French** to offer resources for families with young children ages 3 to 5 years old, helping establish healthy habits through a bilingual bedtime routine. They are designed to support English speaking parents by developing basic French literacy skills that support student success in their transition to French immersion or bilingual kindergarten programs as well as reinforcing a strong learning link between home and school. The bags include a bilingual bedtime routine, a French story time book, bilingual activity and colouring books, a guide for local family French activities, a stuffed animal and other resources featuring local partner groups. The website offers videos from experts in the fields of sleep and child development. [hosted.learnquebec.ca/goodnightbag](https://hosted.learnquebec.ca/goodnightbag)

## Le ciel me sourit, Bilingual Children's Book, by Candace Amarante

Online accessible, bilingual flip book with audio in French and English. It can also be used to introduce children to science, as it metaphorically explains the lunar phases. [bit.ly/3NPYkq9](https://bit.ly/3NPYkq9)



# Ontario

**Groupe Média TFO** is a Franco-Ontarian public media company. Its educational mandate – on television, on digital platforms and through its initiatives and applications – is to help families discover current cultural and educational content in French.

- **Mini-TFO Website** – Offers educational videos, creative games and apps, cartoons, music, and colouring activities that welcome children aged 2 to 8 years old into a universe of fun and creativity. [tfo.org/en/kids](https://tfo.org/en/kids) MiniTFO and Kids website offers content including 96 videos without ads. [tfo.org/en/mini-tfo](https://tfo.org/en/mini-tfo)
- **Boukili App** – Provides an immersive interactive and educational reading experience for children ages 4 and up. Offers a collection of over 120 illustrated books grouped by reading level, theme and skill. Offers different modes to young readers including read alouds (listening to book) to independent reading. A customizable tool for teachers, parents and children – with a version adapted for parents to access a dashboard where they can track and guide their child's progress. [tfo.org/en/universe/boukili](https://tfo.org/en/universe/boukili)
- **Le napperon** – An interactive placemat (PDF), intended for parents and their preschool children (2 to 6 years old), presents Madame Fruitée's grocery store, a famous character from the world of MiniTFO, and a host of little amusing games accessed via augmented reality! By downloading the TFO+ app, you can scan visual elements on the placemat to see small video clips of Mini TFO characters appear. A user guide suggests fun and educational activities for parents to do with their children to practice French. [idello.org/en/resource/542-Napperon-Mini-TFO-English-Version](https://idello.org/en/resource/542-Napperon-Mini-TFO-English-Version)

# British Columbia

## **Trousse 'Bébé francophone'**

For several years, the *Fédération des parents de Colombie-Britannique (FPFCB)* has offered a free welcome kit for Francophone families who are expecting a baby, or who have welcomed a baby in the last 12 months. The kit includes resources designed specifically for families where one parent does not speak French, including: practical guides and passport to record information on the baby's health; information about birth and the care of young children; a collection of fun activities to stimulate young children's development and a CD of French songs for children. Families residing in BC may order the kit via their website. One free kit per family will be delivered to them at home. [fpfcb.bc.ca/bebe](http://fpfcb.bc.ca/bebe)

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## **1 enfant, 2 langues**

A range of resources and references is provided by the *Fédération des parents francophones de Colombie-Britannique (FPFCB)* about bilingual language development in young children living in minority settings. Information on the website is grouped under different topic headings, including the optimal age for learning a second language, the importance of reading in language development, stages of language development, types of bilingualism, and how best to correct your child's errors.

[developpement-langagier.fpfcb.bc.ca/en.html](http://developpement-langagier.fpfcb.bc.ca/en.html)

**Further Early Childhood Resources are on the FPFCB website:**

[fpfcb.bc.ca/resources-early-childhood/?lang=en](http://fpfcb.bc.ca/resources-early-childhood/?lang=en)

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## **Storybooks Canada**

This open access digital innovation developed by a University of British Columbia team (Bonny Norton, Espen Stranger-Johannessen, and Liam Doherty) in the Department of Language and Literacy Education, seeks to promote multilingual literacy for young Canadians. A derivative of the African Storybook, the website has 40 illustrated stories, in text and audio format, in 12 immigrant and refugee languages of Canada, including Mandarin, Arabic, and Swahili, as well as English and French.

Their research addresses a range of questions including: What translation challenges arise? Which stories are most appealing to Canadian children? To what extent can the stories be used to promote early reading? How can the stories be related to the new curriculum? In what ways can the project build home/school connections? The theoretical framework draws on literacy as a social practice. [storybookscanada.ca](http://storybookscanada.ca)

# USA with Projects in Canadian Cities

## **Read to Me Project** [readtomeproject.org](http://readtomeproject.org)

This is a shared family experience centered on the love of reading and learning. The early literacy program targets under-served children to help them achieve kindergarten readiness with the knowledge, vocabulary, and comprehension skills required for school success. It empowers school age brothers and sisters to read to their young siblings at home. The Project, based in California, with projects being implemented in some Canadian cities, provides structure and opportunity for children as young as 6 months old to be regularly read to at home by their siblings in Grade 4, 5 or 6. Through regular coaching sessions, students are shown effective and fun ways to read out loud to young family members. A bin of thoughtfully curated, age appropriate books is provided to the students in their classroom for weekly check out.



**CPF has a role to play in advocacy, and our Calls to Action outline some of the areas where Canadian Parents for French members can inform and influence decision-makers at all levels to ensure that French early language learning is considered a foundational component that will benefit all children across Canada.**

### **School Districts, Communities**

- 1** Mobilize knowledge about the benefits of quality bilingual learning options for preschool, daycare programming and promote promising initiatives.
- 2** Provide outreach education to parents who wish to support their child/ren's early bi/multilingual or French language learning.
- 3** Include FSL programming in planning, funding, resource development and policy provisions for all early childhood learning contexts and opportunities.
- 4** Implement as many ways as possible to bring French and other languages into a child's life in a wide variety of contexts from prenatal services to pre-kindergarten classrooms, including home- or facility-based child care, centres in the community, family services, parent resources, and more.

### **Provincial/Territorial & Federal Governments**

- 5** Focus attention within the federal or provincial/territorial early learning mandates on the need to include learning French as a second or additional language for all Canadian learners.
- 6** Support funding for the inclusion and expansion of bilingual options for rural and urban daycares, childcare and preschool contexts. Increase support for bilingual 50/50 two-year kindergarten programs across the country.
- 7** Support funding to prioritize recruitment and retention of early childhood educators, particularly those who are able to deliver service in English and French. Continue to support French immersion kindergarten programs.

### **Colleges, Early Childhood Educator Training Programs**

- 8** Support funding for the expansion of early childhood educator training courses and practicum experiences to encompass bilingual pedagogical teaching practices for very young children.
- 9** Highlight the shortage of bilingual child care facilities and spaces, inconsistent &/or insufficient wages and benefits for EC educators and childcare providers who can deliver programming in both official languages.

### **General Public Awareness**

- 10** Mobilize knowledge about the benefits of bilingual options for early learning, childcare and preschool contexts – leading to increased life opportunities.
- 11** Promote the role of family members and caregivers as a critical one, particularly in the highly formative years from birth to pre-school, and the value of using and celebrating all family languages in raising young Canadians.

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## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Code-switching / Code-mixing:** Occurs when a speaker alternates between two or more languages in the context of a single conversation or situation. Sometimes used interchangeably, both terms are used to refer to utterances that draw from elements of two or more grammatical systems.

**Metalinguistic awareness:** Ability to consciously reflect on the nature of language and the process of language use. It is developed through cognitive control (selecting the pieces of information to comprehend) and analyzed language knowledge (recognizing meaning, language structure, word play, etc.)

**Neurolinguistic approach (NLA):** Pedagogical method focused on developing an internal grammar (the ability to spontaneously use a second language orally) and an explicit knowledge (the awareness of the way a language functions, its grammatical rules and its vocabulary) in both oral and written communication.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Canadian Parents for French would like to thank all those who contributed to this Brief including authors, reviewers and CPF Branch and National staff.

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The full Brief and the Action Worksheet in both English and French are available for download on the CPF National website: [cpf.ca](https://cpf.ca).

To obtain additional printed copies, contact the CPF National Office: [cpf@cpf.ca](mailto:cpf@cpf.ca).

ISBN: 978-0-921189-41-1

Printed in Canada.

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## What are today's parents saying about raising young bi/multilingual children?

We are a multilingual family of three: I speak English, French and Spanish (in that order), and my fiancé speaks Spanish, English and French (in that order). We mostly speak English and Spanish at home and we live in Montréal. It is an incredible gift to speak multiple languages, as it opens up a whole new outlook on the world. I am excited to pass on the gift of multiple languages to our son.

***Parent, Montreal, Quebec***

In a world where communication, empathy, and understanding seem to be in short supply, I'm excited for my son to speak more than one language and have the ability to build relationships with more people than I ever could.

***Parent, Ottawa, ON***

Although I don't speak French to my child at home, we are surrounded by languages. My child's grandparents speak Cantonese and I work in French, so he grew up hearing multiple languages. When we meet with friends that speak different languages, we got in the habit of asking them how to say hello or thank you in that language. And surprisingly, my child would remember and think to say "Aneo!" when he saw his Korean friend, or even "Xiexie!" when we went for dimsum at a Chinese restaurant.

***Parent, Coquitlam, BC***

I'm an anglophone from Ontario and my partner is a francophone from Quebec. We live in Gatineau with our 8-month-old baby. Although we're excited about raising a bilingual child, we do face some challenges. What language do we speak at home? What kind of daycare and school does our son go to? Will he mix up French and English and struggle to communicate? Although we have our concerns, we know that eventually he'll get it and bilingualism will be a gift for the rest of his life.

***Parent, Gatineau, QC***

We use grammar books, subtitles on shows, music, YouTube learning videos, and friends to help nurture our multilingual son. We also encourage a spirit of learning from our mistakes and taking linguistic risks at home. Chez nous, it's normal to speak in multiple languages, make mistakes, and ask for help.

***Parent, Montreal, Quebec***



My kids watched Mini TFO and loved the regular cast of characters. It was comforting for them to know I wasn't the only person who could speak French!  
**Parent, Toronto, ON**



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