

CANADIAN PARENTS FOR FRENCH
Advocacy-Oriented Research Brief 202
LEARNING FRENCH IN THE EARLY YEARS

1. In this Brief you will find a review of current early language learning literature conducted by Ibtissem Knouzi and Sophie Morgan to identify key findings that support the value of introducing languages during a child’s formative years before school starts.

This is a key moment and opportunity for CPF to ensure that there is equitable access for all Canadian children to early language learning as part of the Government of Canada’s promised national early learning and childcare system. It is also a point where CPF can expand its advocacy focus from K to 12+ to Birth to Grade 12+.

Benefits of early bi/multilingualism

- Early bi/multilingualism does not confuse nor delay language development, but, rather, provides several cognitive advantages.
- Dual language learners can differentiate appropriately between languages and speakers with whom they interact, using separate sets of vocabulary, structures, word order, etc.
- Early bi/multilingualism can lead to larger conceptual vocabularies and metalinguistic awareness.

Influence of at-home support for language learning

- Different strategies have an impact on early language learning, particularly if more than one language is used in the home.
- Active exposure to and use of home languages is more conducive to learning than passive exposure.
- Even if parents are not bi/multilingual, they can bring resources and activities into the home to enhance language learning.

Daycare and pre-school centres can have an impact on early language learning

- Multisensory approaches help children develop their language/s before they start school.
- Play-based learning and routine language exchanges are beneficial for early learners.

Dual language programs support language learning

- These immersive approaches foster additive bilingualism (where a second language is learned at no expense to the first).
- Literacy strategies are enhanced through cross-connections between languages.

Specialized training is essential for early childhood educators

- The younger the student, the more significant the educator’s qualification must be.
- Early childhood teacher education courses and programs (and ongoing professional development) need to stress deliberate and pedagogically sound language learning processes.

2. The Brief describes a number of **promising government-led and school district-led early French literacy initiatives** across Canada.

Centres de la petite enfance in QC

- Affordable, high quality ECE centres that value French language learning even if French isn’t the student’s first language.

FLORA – French Learning Opportunities for Rural Areas (developed in NB; used in NS, ON, NT)

- Online French learning modules for young school-aged children.

Intervention préventive en lecture-écriture (in NS, PE and some school districts in BC, YK, MB)

- Individual literacy support for early French immersion students.

EarlyON Child and Family Centres in ON

- Free, high quality family service centres for children 0 to 6 years (some of which offer services in French).

Two-Year Bilingual 50/50 Kindergarten in Ottawa

- A two-year seamless French/English kindergarten experience; contributed to increased French immersion enrolment.

3. Various **national and provincial organizations** – as well as a host of **resources and tools** – are highlighted for their support of children and families in developing literacy at home, e.g., Families Canada, Canadian Children’s Literacy Foundation, Canadian Child Care Federation, LEARN (Leading English Education and Resource Network), *Fédération des parents de la francophonie manitobaine*, CBC/Radio Canada podcasts, public library Virtual French Story Time, *Groupe Média TFO*, Storybooks Canada and the Read to Me Project, to name a few.

4. A **Guide for Parents and Caregivers** outlines a multitude of ways to introduce French to their babies, toddlers, and preschoolers, taking advantage of community resources, family activities and daily routines – even if parents/caregivers are not bilingual themselves.

5. As an Agenda for Change, Canadian Parents for French recommends that:

- The Government of Canada includes learning French as a second or additional language within its early learning mandates.
- The Government of Canada increases investments in the inclusion and expansion of bilingual options for daycare and preschools.
- The Government of Canada prioritizes and fund recruitment, training, and retention of early childhood educators, particularly those able to deliver service in French and English.
- Ministries of education, faculties of education and community colleges prioritize specialized training programs for early childhood educators with specialized pedagogical preparation to support early language learning.
- Provincial and territorial governments launch public awareness campaigns about the importance of accessible, high quality early childhood education with options for language learning.
- School districts include FSL programming in planning, funding and policy related to early childhood learning.