

**Nurturing Success of Students with Learning Disabilities in French Immersion with Teachers' and  
Parents' Support and Collaboration**

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### **Abstract**

This paper draws upon my six years of teaching French as the second or foreign languages as well as my academic experiences in the Master of Education program. Within the past six years, I have perceived the second language acquisition to be an enjoyable and pleasant journey for all my students similar to what I experienced as a child. However, having faced various learning styles and needs as well as the uncertainty of some parents about the placement of their children with learning disabilities in French Immersion, I gravitated to inquire more into the compatibility of this program for my at-risk students. The French Immersion program is suitable for the students with learning disabilities if they can be provided with proper support in positive and motivating learning environments, such as school and home. This knowledge would benefit the teachers and parents who need to be ensured that the inclusion of the students with learning difficulties in French Immersion is educationally sound. Through the analysis of different strategies and accommodations, this paper discusses how the students with learning disabilities and their families can address their concerns and avoid some challenges, such as transition to English-only programs after having built several years of connections and friendships and the associated social-emotional impacts. This paper also seeks to convey the message to the teachers that learning disability should not hinder language acquisition. The implications emerged from this awareness are that educators and parents can advocate for the students with learning disabilities through their collaborative efforts, so that they can have equitable access to learning French in supportive and inspirational learning environments.

*Key Words: French Immersion, learning disability, second language acquisition, inclusionary practices, home-school collaboration*

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **My Journey as a Teacher**

As an educator in a French immersion school, I have been witnessing how the FI programs have been increasingly rising in popularity and becoming more competitive every year. Enrolment in FI programs is widely regarded as a better opportunity for higher self-esteem, improved cognitive and social skills, and educational and career advancement for learners. Also, “bilingual children develop the ability to solve problems that contain conflicting or misleading cues at an earlier age, and they can decipher them more quickly than monolinguals” (Fortune, 2012, p.11). Despite all these mentioned benefits, which I agree with, I have encountered some indecisiveness and uncertainty about the suitability of FI program for the children who struggle academically and cognitively. This ambiguity has not been restricted only to parents as there are still some educators who have unanswered questions in regard to supporting at-risk children in their practice. It is worthwhile noting that since learning disability is a broad and diverse topic, my paper focuses mainly on the at-risk students with low intellectual competences due to clinical and non-clinical factors and does not address the special needs resulting from the sensory-motor, hearing, visual, and severe cognitive impairments.

### **Developing my Interest in supporting at-risk students in French Immersion**

In addition to what I observed and experienced in a professional setting, doing my M.Ed. at Thompson Rivers University sparked my curiosity of learning more about this topic, the recipe for success of at-risk students in FI programs. One of the courses that provided me with an opportunity to delve into the concept of students with learning disabilities in FI by analysing the scholarly articles, statistics, data, research, and studies done in this field was the Research Methods. The knowledge I gained from this course enabled me to take one step forward to raise my awareness of the struggles that students with learning disabilities encounter in FI as well as the strategies I could implement to accommodate their needs. While the Research Methods course greatly contributed to my research

knowledge, some other courses, such as Diversity, Constructing Social Realities as well as Curriculum, Teaching and Learning also broadened my vision on how this concept can be explored through the lens of equity and diversity. This understanding empowered me to question my values, beliefs, and assumptions more profoundly and reflect on my practice in terms of providing all my students with an equitable learning environment.

### **Significance of the Topic**

This topic will not only benefit parents but also educators who need to be ensured that inclusion of students with learning difficulties in French Immersion is in their interest provided that some conditions will be met. Retaining students in FI programs will require informed decisions as well as further instructional strategies and support which need to be implemented in collaboration with a team of professionals, educators, and parents. This topic also emphasizes the importance of having equitable access to learning opportunities and bilingualism for all the learners regardless of their intellectual ability.

### **Presenting the Argument**

This paper argues that the success of students with learning disabilities in French Immersion relies on the support they receive from their teachers and parents. This support and collaboration facilitate learning of at-risk students in a much more positive and motivating learning environments for them. If educators and parents can be informed of how interventions and differentiation can support at-risk students in FI, they might refrain from transferring learners to the English-only programs as the only choice which can negatively influence their self-esteem and confidence. I hope the knowledge emerging from the study of at-risk students and their academic ability would encourage a greater awareness of the measures required to support this group of learners and make the FI more inclusive.

## **Overview of Paper**

My paper is composed of four chapters. The second chapter reviews the existing studies and prior literature in regard to the second language acquisition, and the roles that teachers and parents play in achievement of the students with learning disabilities in French Immersion programs. In the third chapter, I discuss the concept of supporting students with learning disabilities in FI within the context of my professional experiences in French Immersion schools. Lastly, the fourth chapter summarizes this paper that how at-risk students in FI can achieve their goals with their teacher and parent support. This paper concludes by focusing on some of the possible implications that this topic can bring about.

### **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

This chapter draws attention to the existing literature which puts an emphasis on the role that teachers and parents play to support the personal and academic success of students with learning disabilities (LD). Through the analysis of the common perceptions of learning the second language in French Immersion (FI), teacher's beliefs, educators' professional development, inclusionary practices, and development of a positive learning environment, this paper reviews how the studies conducted in these areas contribute to a better understanding of the success of the students with LD in FI. This knowledge is enhanced further by reviewing the scholarly articles in the field of home-school collaboration and the significance of the strategies that parents utilize to help their at-risk child.

### **Common Beliefs about the Second Language Acquisition and FI**

Not surprisingly, the efficiency of the FI program in regard to language development and academic achievement has intrigued some questions. This concept has been raised in certain studies that will be reviewed here. As Lazaruk (2007) indicates, "primary among the concerns raised by parents and educators about FI programs are the effects of second language (L2) instruction on children's development of L1 skills and on their general academic achievement" (p. 10). "Acquisition of a new language has generally been associated with the fear of jeopardizing the normal ability of students to

read and write, especially when the students do not have a good understanding of their first language literacy skills” (Bourgoin, 2014, p. 4). Also, as Arnett (2003) explains, “given the fact that most students with LD do experience problems with the reception, processing, and/or expression of language, it is not surprising that many people believe that the introduction of a second language would create even more problems for students with LD”(p. 177). In response to these concerns, extensive research and testing have been conducted which have consistently shown that students can benefit from the FI without lagging behind their peers in English program in areas of language development and academic achievement. For instance,

in terms of their linguistic, cognitive, and academic development, immersion students with language impairments/disabilities were progressing at a similar rate than their English peers with similar disabilities/impairments. It can thus be concluded that students with specific language disabilities have the ability to learn two languages. (Paradis, Crago, Genesee, & Rice, 2003 as cited in Bourgoin, 2014, p.3)

One study that elaborates on the concept of the second language acquisition for the students with LD in French Immersion has been conducted by Genesee (2007) where he examines the intellectual ability of English-speaking students in French immersion and English programs and compare the results. According to this study, below-average immersion and non-immersion students have the same scores in English language and academic achievement regardless of the programs they attend (p. 659). It is important to note that while academic achievement has been mentioned in studies as one of the ways to evaluate at-risk students’ success in FI, it is not the only aspect that needs to be examined.

Cummins’ (1984) linguistic interdependence model of language acquisition also sheds light on the concept of second language learning by focusing on the function of transferability (Bourgoin, 2014, p.4). This model indicates that the skills, shared concepts, and linguistic knowledge can be transferred from the first language to the second language learning. According to Cross (2019), this transferable

quality of language learning implies that the interventions and strategies used to overcome learning difficulties are also transferable from one language to another. Therefore, it can be claimed that acquisition of the second language does not prevent the students with learning disability from developing their linguistic knowledge, but also nurtures the flexible and adaptable thinking skills. In fact, the students with LD in French Immersion “may even be at an advantage because of the repetition and review of basic skills when they are taught in both languages” (Cross, 2019).

While students should not be discouraged from the enrolment in FI due to their learning disabilities, it is essential to emphasize the importance of the availability of the appropriate strategies and interventions to support their learning. It is a well-documented fact that teachers and parents can positively contribute to providing these appropriate and effective measures to students, but the question is what these practical courses of action would be and how they would be implemented; an interesting area of inquiry which will be discussed further in the following sections by reviewing the existing studies on this topic.

## **The Importance of Teacher’s Role in Achievement of At-Risk Students in FI**

### ***Teacher’s Perspectives***

Educators’ beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions are generally perceived to shape the student’s learning experiences and environment. When it comes to language learning, as Cummins (2007, 2014, as cited in Mady & Masson, 2018, p. 89) asserts, educators need to rethink their assumptions and “consider the differences in learning and teaching strategies in multilingual classrooms in order to create FI programs that best serve classrooms populated by learners who have different linguistic repertoires upon which to draw”. As Bourgoin (2014) also explains, to address diversity and facilitate the implementation of appropriate instructional approaches and teaching strategies, teachers are required to first “acknowledge that students enter French immersion with different needs, interests, and abilities” (p.5).



Teachers' perspective and beliefs of the students with LD can also directly or indirectly affect the way these students are perceived by their peers in their classroom settings. As Hymel and Katz (2019) claim, "students observe the interactions that occur between their teachers and their peers, and the presence of negative teacher–student interactions or negative teacher attitudes toward an individual influence student attitudes and social acceptance" (p.333).

While accepting the fact that students with LD who do not speak French can thrive in French Immersion and adopting positive perspectives will be beneficial, it will not be adequate in enabling teachers to accommodate their students' needs. Teachers should be equipped with appropriate techniques and pedagogy strategies to ensure the best quality programming for all the students in FI. Bourgoin (2014, p.6) asserts that based on a review of professional educator journals, one of the important gaps in services includes the professional development which is worth being explored further.

### ***Teacher's Professional Development***

According to Arnett and Mady (2010, p. 28), one of the challenges contributing to lack of support for at-risk students is low efficiency of FSL teacher education program. These researchers discuss that since significance of special education is not emphasized enough in teacher education program, teachers are not prepared to address diverse learning needs of students. However, Arnett and Mady (2010) suggest that "the time has come to stop saying that FSL teachers are unprepared to meet the needs of students with diverse learning needs and start preparing them to do so in the teacher education programs" (p.32). According to these authors, it is essential to reform the teacher education program to provide teachers with the tools they need to meet their students' diverse needs.

However, it is worthwhile noting that professional development can be promoted through the school-based collaboration as well. According to Demers (2001), "systemic and consistent school-based collaborations are necessary to help both the learners and the classroom teachers in providing interventions and developing a repertoire of accommodations" (p. 2). It is beneficial for the teachers to

connect with their other colleagues and professionals to address the special needs of their students.

Lawrence-Brown (2004) also emphasizes the importance of school-based teamwork by asserting that “ongoing and effective team collaboration (involving general and special education teachers, therapists, paraprofessionals, and parents) is critical to successful inclusion” (p.57). Improvement of teacher education program and access to professional development trainings or workshops would take educators one step forward to creating an inclusive education and classroom which will be the next focal point in this paper.

### ***Inclusionary Practices***

As mentioned above, “teachers play a critical role in facilitating the academic achievements of students with learning disabilities (LD) in inclusive classes, and they are considered key players in the implementation of inclusive education” (de Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert 2010; Britzman 2012, as cited in Levi et al., 2013, p. 427). Differentiation and inclusionary practices have been consistently discussed as beneficial interventions that need to be incorporated into teachers’ planning and pedagogies to make the learning experience of diverse students more equitable and meaningful. As Arnett and Fortune (2004) clarify, inclusionary practices can be applied to an immersion context as well, “but because of the pivotal role of the L2 in the learning process, teachers must ensure that the techniques that comprise their pedagogies must simultaneously facilitate the perception, comprehension, and expression of the L2 and of the content under study” (p.3).

The practical application of the inclusionary strategies might be even easier in an immersion setting since, according to Bourgoin (2014), the “recommended teaching strategies for students with learning difficulties parallel those for teaching second language learners (alternative explanations, gestures/pictures/voice to emphasize language, repetition of key concepts, pre-teaching vocabulary, frequent questioning, and alternate forms of expression)” (p.6). In fact, the differentiation cannot only

benefit the students with unique needs, but also scaffold the second language learning of the students who are not identified as having special needs.

Incorporation of the differentiation and inclusionary practices into planning and pedagogies is also an essential element in creating a positive and inclusive learning environment. This paper continues highlighting the significance of the two interconnected concepts of inclusionary strategies and a positive learning environment in support of students with LD in multiple studies in the following section.

### ***Development of a Positive Learning Environment at School***

Teachers play an important role in promoting socially inclusive classrooms for students with LD by adopting inclusionary strategies. Teachers have been characterized “as the ‘invisible hand’ that can orchestrate the classroom peer group in ways that promote peer acceptance and respect, cooperation, and interdependence” (Farmer, Lines, & Hamm, 2011, as cited in Hymel & Katz, 2019, p.333). If the teachers consider designing the learning activities that positively contribute to motivation, academic engagement, and a sense of accomplishments of the students with learning disabilities, more positive peer connections and social dynamics will be encouraged. In other words, “designing instruction in ways that highlight the strengths of all students could alter the academic reputation that these students have among their classmates and in turn their peer acceptance” (Hymel & Katz, 2019, p.334).

Another contributing factor to a positive learning environment for at-risk students is their development of social-emotional well-being. By incorporating effective social-emotional learning (SEL) interventions or programs, teachers promote social relationships and a sense of belongingness among all the students. The SEL design also “avoids the potential risk of labelling and stigmatization which may result from individualized, targeted and out of class interventions” (Cavioni et al., 2017, p. 104) for at-risk students. By providing this emotional support in a nurturing and inclusive atmosphere, these students would feel valued, respected, and safe and learn how to redirect their attention from their

stretches and limitations to their strengths; the qualities which can greatly contribute to boosting self-confidence and developing positive self-perception.

It is undeniable that the school/class environments which accommodate the social- emotional needs of students with LD are significantly beneficial. “Effective support by the classroom teacher, within a caring relationship and responsive pedagogy, signals acceptance behaviors and encouragement that promote inclusion and respect for individual educational needs, while ensuring a sense of belonging and reducing experiences of humiliation and failure” (Hamre & Pianta, 2006, as cited in Cavioni et al., 2017, p. 104).

It should be noted that in addition to the powerful influence of teachers in making positive and inclusive environments for the students with LD, the significant role that parents play in supporting their children’s learning should not be undermined. Building a collaborative partnership with the families of at-risk students is essential in supporting the shared goals of academic success and social-emotional well-being for these students. In the following section, the nature of this collaboration as well as the strategies that parents can use to help their children will be investigated by analyzing the existing literature in this area.

## **Parental Involvement and At-Risk Student Achievement**

### ***Home-School Collaboration***

As Correia et al. (2021) claim, “parents of children with a disability or special educational needs and educators mutually benefit to a great extent from effective home–school involvement and partnerships” (p. 206). However, first, it is important to elaborate on the notion of this involvement. According to Correia et al. (2021), parental involvement should not necessarily be restricted to families’ attendance in school conferences and meetings but should be more inclined to their active participation in “school decisions that affect their child’s learning, personal development, and integration in the community” (p. 206). One of these decisions pertains to creating a specialized learning plan, termed an

Individualized Education Program or IEP, which is intended to address the specific needs of a student.

“Through improved understanding of what a student needs to access the curriculum and what strengths the student possesses, teachers and parents are better able to construct scaffolds of support that provide for appropriate tools of engagement” (Shaw, 2021, p.23).

Accessibility to a student’s IEP will also grant the opportunity to parents to support their children better with their homework. “Student’s self-management skills are fine-tuned and internalized through the practice of using supports at home, during homework time” (Shaw, 2021, p.4). This consistency of the support in two different settings of home and school can facilitate student learning which can subsequently boost their self-confidence and enhance their self-perception. Despite the fact that parents of at-risk children need to be involved in the development of an IEP and communicate and collaborate with the school consistently, they might be required to take some additional measures to support their child’s learning and success. The following section of this paper reveals what these strategies are and how they can benefit at-risk students.

### ***Strategies to Facilitate Learning of Students with Learning Disabilities at Home***

“Of the many forms of parental involvement, it is the ‘at-home’ relationships and modelling of aspirations which play the major part in impact on school outcomes (Desforges, 2003, p. 87). While parents’ interventions might differ depending on the nature and severity of the learning disability, it is essential for them to focus on their child’s strengths not always their weaknesses and challenges. According to Johnson (2021), “children with special needs often have special gifts - such as sensitivity, perseverance, tenacity, and resilience”. Regardless of the program that these students attend, if their gifts and talents are reinforced positively at home, these students will have better opportunities to accomplish their academic and personal goals more successfully.

According to *Supporting Students with Special Education Needs in French As A Second Language* (n.d.), parents can support their child’s learning by “being involved, monitoring their progress, and

encouraging self-advocacy” (p. 2). Due to transferability of language skills, some of the suggested strategies and interventions that parents, who might not even know French, can utilize include reading to children in English, encouraging English writing, and introducing English-language word games like crossword puzzles, word searches, Scrabble and Password. They can also provide opportunities to use the target language outside of the classroom, such as “borrowing or buying books and videos, finding educational websites, watching second-language TV with your child, and exposing children to second-language events and activities like cultural/ community events, sports activities, and summer/weekend immersive experiences” (CPF, 2007, p. 10).

Parents should also monitor their child’s progress and seek the classroom teacher’s help if they witness that their child is still struggling despite all the interventions and support. While up to a certain age, parents are required to advocate for their children, they should gradually assign the responsibility of self-advocacy to their children as they mature socially and physically. This way, students with learning disabilities will be empowered to express their needs to their teachers/peers, set goals, and discuss the effectiveness of the strategies used at school/home with their teachers and parents.

### **Summary**

The literature review aims to provide insights into effective strategies and considerations for parents and educators to support students with learning disabilities. The knowledge emerging from these studies can assist families and schools in facilitating and enhancing the learning experiences and academic success of at-risk students. While it has been emphasized that the intervention strategies can benefit at-risk students’ learning in French Immersion, further research should be conducted with a focus on progress in learning a new language for learners with high incidence disabilities, namely autism spectrum disorders, communication and intellectual disabilities, and emotional or behavioral disorders as well as English Language Learners. This way, the suitability of FI for other learning disorders will be examined in a larger context which can ultimately inform the policy makers, educators, and parents of

the gaps in services to at-risk students. Next chapter will describe the practical implications derived from the main findings of the studies discussed in the literature review and how they will benefit the students with learning disabilities.

### **Chapter Three: Application to my Professional Life**

While the studies reviewed in the previous chapter have advanced our knowledge of the significance of teacher and parent support in helping students with learning disabilities (LD), it is crucial to bridge the gap between theory and real-world application. This section highlights how the theoretical ideas discussed in this paper so far can be applied in a practical setting by analyzing a variety of approaches and by providing some concrete examples.

#### **Context**

The practical setting that I have chosen is the French Immersion elementary classroom where all the students regardless of their abilities seek the opportunity to become bilingual. Not surprisingly, due to all the linguistic, cognitive, and academic benefits associated with learning a second language, the FI student population, just in British Columbia, has increased by about 23 percent over the span of 10 years from 2009 to 2019 (Statistics Canada, 2019). It should be also noted that in both Early (kindergarten or Grade one entry point) and Late (Grade six entry point) French Immersion programs, learners of all different abilities, including students with LD, are encouraged to enroll without being required to have any prior or background knowledge in French.

However, despite the promotion of inclusion in FI, the success of this program, particularly for the population of at-risk students, has greatly relied on the provided level of support and accommodations. In the past six years of teaching in FI, I have been witnessing how the students with LD have been able to either fulfil their goals with proper support or not achieve their desirable outcomes due to lack of support, and as a result, switch to an English-only program. In fact, while there is a growing demand for FI, the attrition rate should be also considered. According to Canadian Parents for

French (2022), the attrition rate for Grade 1-5 in BC and Yukon public school French Immersions was 14.61% from 2020 to 2022. While many factors can cause the students to leave FI, this paper mainly focuses on the role that parent and teacher's support plays in academic and personal achievement of students with LD.

### **Teachers**

Like other educators, FI teachers interact with their students while possessing their own values, assumptions, attitudes, expectations, and beliefs. One of these perceptions pertains to the placement of students with LD in their classrooms which plays a crucial role in shaping these students' educational experiences and outcomes. I think what transformed my teaching practice was redirecting my attention from why the students struggling academically need to be in FI to what I can do to help them achieve their goals. As Bruck (1978) explains, all educators in immersion programs need to be convinced that the student with LD "has a place in rather than out" (p. 71) so that they can provide them with more effective instruction and support.

This inclusive and positive mindset has also enabled me to deal with less friendship issues and promote more positive peer connections and healthier relationships. As discussed in my literature review, I have noticed how the tone and language that I use to address a concern or a problem with a student can contribute to how the whole class perceives that individual, and, as a result, includes or excludes them. Hymel and Katz (2019) also assert that teacher's attitudes toward a student can have a huge impact on other students' attitudes and social acceptance (p.333).

I strongly believe that teachers' beliefs and assumptions of their students with LD has a compelling influence on how they are perceived by their peers. However, to accommodate the needs of at-risk students, this positive mindset should be shared by a team of professionals as well. As an educator, I have greatly benefited from seeking my other colleagues' advice and support in addressing concerns in regard to student learning. As explained in my literature review, this collaborative approach



has enabled me to ensure that a consistent and comprehensive support system, which is also in alignment with the discussed learning goals for the student, is in place. As Lawrence-Brown (2004) explains, “ongoing and effective team collaboration” (p. 57) can result in successful inclusion. In addition to this collaboration and communication, inclusion should be promoted in a learning environment by applying some effective measures, such as inclusionary strategies.

One of the measures that I have found really beneficial in promoting the active participation and engagement of students with LD in FI is the differentiated instruction. While this approach includes providing scaffolded learning experiences based on individual abilities and strengths, it is not necessarily synonymous with lowering the expectations for this group of students but meeting them where they are. For instance, if at-risk students have difficulty expressing their ideas in writing in my class, I will provide them with an opportunity to present their projects orally or visually. Alternatively, I will assist them to organize their thoughts in French by using graphic organizers or sentence frames. Arnett and Fortune (2004) describe this approach by using the analogy of “teaching classrooms full of diverse learners as akin to preparing an all-you-can-eat buffet” (p.7) where there is a room full of happy costumers or students with an option of choosing from a lot of different dishes or learning opportunities.

To enhance language acquisition of my students with LD, I have also incorporated multisensory activities into my teaching. By using visual aids, flashcards, gestures, hands-on activities, and interactive online resources, I have ensured that language concepts are reinforced in a meaningful and interactive way. These strategies have been also beneficial for my other students who simply have different learning styles. As Lawrence-Brown (2004) explains, “availability of additional supports benefits all students, not just struggling students” (p. 40).

In addition to incorporation of these strategies in my class, I have also strived to establish a positive classroom climate by emphasizing the social-emotional well-being of my students. In a

nurturing and inclusive environment, it is more likely that students accept that each of them is unique and should be valued and respected. To support the diverse learning needs of my students, I, along with other teachers in our school, have implemented a Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) program called the Second Step (Second Step, n.d.) which has a focus on building positive peer connection through the lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion. This program has significantly enhanced the positive and inclusive culture in my class by raising students' self-awareness as well as their interpersonal awareness. In such a learning environment, students do not treat their peers with contempt due to the additional support or accommodations they receive. As Cavioni et al. explain (2017), "whilst it does not take away the importance of individual programming and targeted interventions, universal SEL supports social and emotional as well as the academic learning of students with LD within a mainstream, inclusive classroom" (p. 104).

As illustrated in my literature review, while incorporating the SEL program can contribute to creating a positive learning environment, taking some other measures, such as reinforcing students' strengths, inspiring them to set some learning goals, and guiding them to achieve them have also helped me to serve this goal better. As an educator, I tend to gain a better understanding of my students by doing a variety of activities, such as games, surveys, questionnaires, and sometimes friendly conversations. By doing so, I can ensure that I also have some knowledge about their strengths to inspire them to boost their confidence and self-esteem and to understand that they are not defined by their limitations and weaknesses. These "positive responses, such as acceptance behaviours and encouragement that promote inclusion and respect for individual educational needs, can relieve the negative impact of LD, protecting and increasing student self-esteem despite school experiences of failure (Bear & Minke, 1996, as cited in Cavioni et al., 2017, p. 104).

It is worthwhile noting that many decisions and strategies that I have adopted as an educator to support learning of my at-risk students have been successful and influential due to collaboration with

other professionals and, particularly, parents. My teaching experience has demonstrated that students with LD whose parents are more involved, cooperative, and receptive to feedback from their child's teachers or school have been more successful academically and personally compared to the individuals who have lacked this home support.

### **Parents**

Parents have been widely regarded as the people who know the needs and strengths of their kids better than anyone else. Therefore, as a teacher, one of my priorities is to discuss the learning goals of students with LD with their parents, who possess critical information about them, to ensure that we pursue the same objectives. As Correia et al. explain (2021), parents' "participation and input during the process of assessment, school placement, and Individual Education Plans (IEP) development is key to the success of their child's education" (p. 206). This collaboration also makes the routines, expectations, and reinforcement strategies used in school and home settings be more consistent and prevents from confusing the students with disorientations.

As highlighted in my literature review, parents also play an important role in monitoring their child's progress and informing teachers of the efficiency of the learning goals discussed for their child's IEP. For me, it has been really beneficial to know if these objectives are in alignment with the needs of at-risk students and if any progress has been made. This goal has mostly been served by ongoing support of parents and their open communication with me as their child's teacher. According to *Supporting Students with Special Education Needs in French As A Second Language* (n.d.), "if a parent finds that the current content in the IEP is not responsive to their child's needs, then it is important to discuss this with the French teacher and the Special Education teacher to review the goals" (p.6). This feedback facilitates the decision-making process when it comes to accommodating the needs of struggling students.

While parents can contribute to their child's success by being actively involved in setting their IEP goals and monitoring their progress, they are also required to adopt a positive attitude by acknowledging their child's strengths and positively reinforce them. I have observed how the students coming from nurturing home environment, where their smallest achievements are celebrated, are more motivated and willing to learn and more receptive to my feedback. Conversely, based on my experience, students whose families criticize them negatively for their disabilities and give more attention to their weak points and deficiencies possess less endeavour and determination to progress and improve their learning. This notion was also discussed in my literature review where Desforges (2003) asserts, "of the many forms of parental involvement, it is the 'at-home' relationships and modelling of aspirations which play the major part in impact on school outcomes (p. 87). Therefore, parents should take any opportunities to shape their child's positive self-perception by sharing words of courage and positive affirmations with them and by avoiding blaming their children when they experience a setback or failure.

### **Summary**

This chapter has served as a foundation for the application of theories, concepts, and strategies discussed in relevant findings and scholarly articles analyzed in the literature review; the information and knowledge which develop the parents and teachers' comprehensive understanding of the strategies they can utilize to support struggling students' learning experience and social-emotional well-being. Theories and frameworks proposed in this chapter can also empower teachers and parents to advocate more proactively for the students with LD, identify the gaps, and strengthen their contribution and impact.

Looking back on my professional experience, I have also incorporated some of the strategies indicated in my literature review, such as the differentiated instruction, universal social-emotional learning programs, and collaborative approaches into my teaching practice. These measures have

positively contributed to making the learning environment more inclusive and equitable for my students with diverse learning needs and styles and for the ones struggling academically in the FI program.

Furthermore, these measures have raised parents' awareness of their children's learning goals and how they can support them to achieve them.

#### **Chapter Four: Conclusion**

This paper has fulfilled the goal of providing valuable insights into how students with learning disabilities will be able to flourish and excel in French Immersion programs when there is a consistent support system provided by parents and teachers. The argument, approaches, and findings discussed in this paper have shed light on the claim that FI programs are suitable for the students who are struggling academically only if proper support and accommodations are in place. In this concluding chapter, I will discuss further how the preceding chapters have contributed to a better understanding of this assertion and to promoting greater awareness and inclusivity in French immersion programs.

#### **Summary**

As explained in chapter one, introduction, when I reflect on my experience as a teacher in a French immersion school, I have to acknowledge that despite the increasing popularity, competitiveness, and benefits of FI, such as the improved cognitive and social skills, parents and sometimes educators express their uncertainty about its suitability for academically and cognitively struggling students. My interest in supporting at-risk students in French immersion continued to develop during my master's program and inspired me to investigate the significance of this topic for both parents and educators. Highlighting the need for informed decisions, instructional strategies, and support to ensure the inclusion and success of students with LD in FI favour the main argument of this paper. Collaboration and support of teachers and parents are crucial for the success of at-risk students in French immersion.

In chapter two, literature review, the importance of the main argument of this paper by reviewing all the studies and scholarly articles in this field is emphasized. The findings of these studies demonstrate how students with LD can be successful in FI with teachers and parents supporting their academic and personal growth. The chapter begins by focusing on the common beliefs and concerns regarding second language acquisition for the students with LD. Research consistently shows that these students can benefit from the FI when it comes to language development and academic achievement. Then, it highlights the importance of teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and professional development in supporting at-risk students in FI. This section, first, elaborates on how teachers' perspectives and beliefs of students with LD can influence the peer connections and perceptions. Furthermore, it identifies the professional development programs and school-based collaborations as the key factors in equipping teachers with the necessary skills and strategies to support students with LD efficiently.

As the chapter progresses, inclusionary practices, such as differentiated instruction and building positive learning environment, are also explored as effective approaches in FI; the practices which are not only beneficial to students with LD but also to all students. Chapter two also describes teachers as change agents in promoting socially inclusive classrooms and fostering students' social-emotional well-being. Lastly, with the introduction of the concepts of home-school collaboration, parental involvement, and strategies that parents can utilize to support their child's learning at home, this chapter concludes that parents' role in facilitating their at-risk child's learning is equally influential. Overall, the literature review supports my argument that students with LD can thrive in FI with collaboration and support from both teachers and parents.

Chapter three, application, puts an emphasis on how the theories and concepts discussed in the previous chapters can be applied to the practical setting of an elementary French Immersion (FI) classroom; a place where students of all abilities, including those with learning disabilities (LD), should have equitable access to learning and becoming bilingual. The chapter emphasizes the importance that

teachers should prioritize providing effective instruction and support over questioning the presence of struggling students in FI. This acknowledgment facilitates the next steps which are: collaboration among educators, seeking advice and support from colleagues, and establishing a consistent and comprehensive support system.

This portion of the paper also illustrates some concrete examples, such as differentiated instruction, focusing on students' strengths, and incorporating multisensory activities that can be used in a FI class to enhance the active participation and engagement of students with LD. In addition to application of these strategies, chapter three elaborates on how a learning environment can be nurturing and inclusive by implementing a social-emotional learning (SEL) program, such as Second Step (Second Step, n.d.).

This section continues to explain how I, as a FI educator, have benefited from parental involvement by having discussions with them to align learning goals and ensure consistency between home and school environments. Derived from my teaching experience in FI and the literature review, it also demonstrates how parents can play a crucial role in their child's learning by monitoring their progress, providing feedback, reinforcing positive attitudes and achievements, celebrating successes, and fostering motivation and willingness to learn in them.

By reviewing the theories and strategies discussed in the preceding three chapters, it is true to claim that teachers and parents can support struggling students' learning experiences and social-emotional well-being effectively. This knowledge empowers educators, parents, and policy makers to advocate for students with LD, identify gaps in support, and enhance their overall impact which will be explored in the following section.

### **Implications**

This paper highlights the importance of teachers' and parents' roles in supporting at-risk students which can be informative in several ways. First, educators will be advised that any decisions

concerning the retention or transfer of at risk-students should be examined by considering all the aspects. This investigation begins with teachers acknowledging the presence of struggling students in FI and adopting inclusionary strategies, followed by consulting the school special education team and parents, and implementing an effective individualized educational plan. Every possible measure should be taken in order to ensure an informed decision has been made.

This paper can also facilitate the decision-making process for parents when it comes to the best option for their at-risk children by informing them of the strategies and the procedures of implementing an intervention plan. This knowledge will result in less confusion for parents and a realistic understanding of what to expect.

Another group who will benefit from these findings are the policy makers. This paper will make them understand how they can assist with the learning quality of at-risk students by supporting the educators as the key reformers either in theory or practice. Improvement of teacher education program and professional development training or workshops by focusing on the inclusionary strategies and allocation of more time, resources, and fund to special education will be some of the possible implications of this paper.

While the main focus of this paper gravitates toward the acquisition of second language for students with learning disabilities, the implementation of inclusive and supportive educational practices, differentiated instruction, appropriate accommodations, and collaborative support from teachers and parents can maximize at-risk students' potential for success in diverse learning environments and any educational settings. Regardless of the language of instruction, this paper also implies that access to inclusive and equitable learning opportunities for students with LD in an elementary level will enable them to be more prepared and excel better in their future endeavours, such as pursuing higher education and careers.



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