

**The School Library Information Centre and Ontario's  
Core French Program: A Partnership Worth Consideration**

**By Joe Szekeres**

The Information Studies: Kindergarten to Grade 12 1999 document published by the Ontario School Library Association examines how the leadership role of the teacher-librarian within the school community becomes paramount as s/he continues [to develop safe, ethical and responsible practices in acquiring, using and communicating information in the twenty-first century.] (4) The teacher-librarian organizes the school library information centre to become the vibrant hub of the learning environment.

Additionally, this document specifically addresses, through stated and implied expectations, the changes in and challenges of the information explosion. This relevant fact emphasizes even further how classroom instructors and teacher-librarians must provide ample opportunity to partner in all cross-curricular divisions and help students become “information-literate”. If the education staff within the school can provide this opportunity to partner within the school library information centre, then the collaborative role of parents, teachers, and teacher-librarians can work to promote independent thinking and information problem-solving in our youth to create life-long learners. (4)

And yet, from my professional experience of nearly twenty years in Catholic education, there is one curriculum area that has posed a significant challenge when it comes to the creation of “information literacy” in partnering with the teacher-librarian – the Core French program currently in place within the Ontario English language schools. For the purpose of this inquiry report, I wish to focus on the daily Core French curriculum from Grades 4-12 as I am familiar with the Ministry expectations. During my career, I have had a variety of teaching experiences in Core French at both the elementary and secondary levels. Therefore, it is my wish that this report provide some direction for the instructor of Core French AND the teacher-librarian in establishing a partnership in the development of program needs and expectations.

As chair of the English and Modern Languages Division of my secondary school, I am very much aware of the paradigm shift in the delivery of the curriculum-driven expectations brought about by recent education reform. There is a natural extension in partnering between the study of English Language and Literature and the teacher-librarian, but less so with Core French. The centre of this issue seems to be two-fold: (1) a lack of significant Core French resources and (2) the possibility of the teacher-librarian’s limited familiarity with Core French expectations and needs.

One of my goals as curriculum leader is to increase student motivation in the Modern Languages Division. Teaching Core French remains far different in high school compared to the elementary division (time frame as one factor). Could I shape the program to become a viable elective for students after Grade 9? Motivation of both the teacher and the student is crucial for success of any language-based learning, and yet what resources could teachers of French access inside the school library to foster such motivation? I have heard second-language instructors in

my own school board lament woefully sixteen years ago how supplementary resource and teaching materials were rather limited or too difficult given the variety of language skills in students. The lack of student and teacher motivation was sorely evident, and it was becoming increasingly difficult to provide a unique, challenging and lively second language experience within the classroom for Core French.

Surprisingly enough, teachers of Core French had no valid reason to believe they walked alone in their concerns. All exemplary subject teachers, in all divisions, have continued to adapt their unique teaching styles for they are the trusted professionals who understand student achievement and growth vis-à-vis the stated Ministry expectations. Instructors of Core French and the teacher-librarian should never hesitate to approach each other in the development and implementation of curriculum resources for second-language proficiency. I have spoken with elementary and secondary teachers in other subject divisions from within and outside my home board in Durham who adapt materials and partner successfully with the school library to help students achieve stated and implied expectations. I have seen classes in the Sciences and Humanities from my own school forge a link with the school library to create information literate students.

**Partners In Action (1982)** states that teachers are encouraged to develop individualized and personalized learning activities that reflect each student's abilities, interests and needs. Teacher-librarians can be of invaluable assistance during this process as they are teachers first, plus they also bring specialized training in the identification, selection and use of a wide range of learning resources. (23) Clearly, if all subject instructors take the initiative to plan programs with the teacher-librarian to meet Ministry-based expectations, then the second language instructor must also comply in partnering in order to create and to sustain interest in any moderns based program.

When I taught elementary Core French sixteen years ago, I had to adapt teaching material since all students had not attained a similar level of language proficiency. I didn't realize until I had read recently **Partners In Action** how the teacher-librarian could have assisted me in meeting the needs of my students at that time. Many of the teachers of French in my division still have to adapt lessons in their classes for a variety of realistic reasons – split grades, language facility/proficiency – in order to meet the expectations, but the school library can offer the instructor of French another way to achieve them whether it be through the gradual purchase of computer software, knowledge of specific French language Search Engines, resource books and other media. Granted, it would be highly beneficial if the teacher-librarian has a working knowledge of French since the Ministry document states that it is to be the language of communication, but is it absolutely necessary each day? Of course not. That's why the process is called partnering as each professional educator brings his or her varied expertise and professionalism for maximum student achievement, growth and success.

**The Ontario Curriculum Document for French as a Second Language – 1999** clearly states that students will be expected to use French computer programs as well as computer-assisted learning modules developed for second-language learners. My school library finally has a bank of thirty computers that could be accessed during class time for this very purpose. Both internet and email access (monitored carefully by the instructor and teacher-librarian during

school hours) are important innovations in the area of French language study. Therefore, I have established the question for this inquiry research project:

**Within my own school, how can the library information centre assist the instructors of the Core French program to motivate students?**

I began my research by contacting Joan Hawkins and the Canadian Parents for French organization via email. I am of the firm belief that parents must share in the education process and, if further resources are to be purchased for use by all students and instructors within the school library, it is vital to maintain a positive relationship. Mrs. Hawkins related to me that the Federal Government has recently published a new action plan for Official Languages in Education with the revitalization of Core French as a major initiative. If anyone wishes to contact the Ontario Ministry of Education, the organization should be able to tell individuals how much Core French funding is allocated to each school district, and yet it has been the experience of CPF that it can be difficult to determine the flow of funds once they leave the school district. To the best of Mrs. Hawkins' knowledge, boards no longer use a „per pupil' calculation for allocating or accounting the use of FSL funding at the school level. She did state that the Ministry of Education had allocated 1.95 million dollars for FSL texts during recent education reform, but was uncertain if any funds for school library purchases had been earmarked.

This earmarking of money proved interesting when I accessed Dr. Ken Haycock's report **The Crisis in Canada's School Libraries: The Case for Reform and Re-Investment**. Dr. Haycock explains how the teacher-librarian plays three critical roles in the learning community: teacher, information specialist and administrator. In each of these three roles, the teacher-librarian empowers students and instructors (and here I include teachers of Core French) to meet higher standards of academic achievement; therefore I conclude that some, but not all, resources for second language instruction should be purchased and remain in the school library to assist with this empowerment. Additionally, Dr. Haycock also notes how another study by Bingham, 1994, indicates that there is a significant increase in the scores of students who are taught through curriculum-integrated teaching methods in the school library over those who are not. (18)

I also had the opportunity to peruse the Federal Governments' *Action Plan for Official Languages* of which Mrs. Hawkins spoke (<http://www.pco-bcp.gc.ca>) – Education (Chapter 3). The federal government's recent plan for bilingualism (dated March 2003) involves \$137 million dollars over a five year period; therefore, there will be \$42 million dollars available each year nationally. The report does not state, however, how the money will be distributed to schools – whether it be through the purchase of textbooks or some funds given to the school libraries for the purchase of Core French materials. Page eight of this document states that the federal government wants to improve second language instruction in part renewing teaching approaches and tools used in regular English and French classes. Does this mean, then, that some monies will be available for the purchase of Core French materials to be kept in the school libraries for both student and teacher-use? Herein lies another opportunity for the teacher-librarian and instructors of Core French to partner as they search for an answer to this question from administration and the school board level.

Obviously, then, second language instructors and the teacher-librarian have a professional responsibility to earmark subject specific curriculum-integrated references in the school collection to help meet these higher standards of academic achievement, *and this includes the Core French program*. If the teacher-librarian either has a limited knowledge of French or is uncertain what would be valuable to the second language instructor, then some time must be set aside for both instructors to sit down, to examine the Ministry documents, and to decide (via a specified budget) what resources would remain in the school library that would benefit the student and teacher. This partnering must be seen as a priority in order to offer a valuable second language learning experience, and teachers of Core French must continue to maintain and to solidify this professional responsibility with the teacher-librarian.

I did have the opportunity to view and explore the school library of Sinclair Secondary School in Whitby, Ontario, where a valuable second language experience is taking place. I am both amazed and impressed with the extensive *ressources en français* section which, I am told, complements highly the Core French program. Although the school uses a good number of these resources for its' French Immersion program, the materials I had viewed indicated that, through adaptation, the range from a wide selection of videos, game boards to texts could also support the expectations-based curriculum of the Core French program offered at any school. How fortunate the second language instructors are at Sinclair to have this variety of materials for partnering and for use within their classrooms and the library. It would be short sighted if the teachers did not take advantage of the wealth of these exceptional materials.

The questions I had asked of Mrs. Hawkins led me to discussion with Ms. Sylvie Morel-Foster, Consultant for FSL for the Durham Catholic District School Board where I am currently employed full-time. Ms. Morel-Foster concurs that all good teachers, no matter the subject division, have always learned to adapt materials in the classroom. The teacher of Core French in Durham Catholic, according to Ms. Morel-Foster, are keen to adapt materials in a professional manner for use in their classrooms. Although she has not seen Sinclair's library, Ms. Morel-Foster heartily supports and believes, as well, that every secondary school library in Durham Region should have a wide selection of *ressources en français*, and that it should be the responsibility of the teacher, teacher-librarian and administrator to build a collection in a timely fashion similar to that of Sinclair. Ms. Morel-Foster did indicate to me that she was in touch with Elizabeth Kagazchi, FSL Facilitator for the Durham District School Board office, to inquire about the extensive array of materials for French at Sinclair.

The Canadian Parents for French website ([www.cpf.ca](http://www.cpf.ca)) has developed a School Self-Assessment Tool. What I found to be of primary interest to teacher-librarians are the following numbered specific indicators, grouped under the themes of *Program Quality and Accountability*: FSL Resources, School Community, Parental Involvement, Stability, Designated Funding. Clearly, CPF supports and states that there should be a "varied collection of resource centre materials that have been designed for French second-language learners." (Indicator five – FSL Resources) With this directive, teacher-librarians must begin to examine the materials available for the Core French program and weed those resources that no longer support or are used within the school classroom or resource centre.

Note carefully indicator seventeen: Designated Funding. School administrators (and even teacher-librarians as curriculum leaders) must be aware that the funds for FSL programs are there and they are not to be re-directed for other purposes. Records should also be kept concerning the use of these funds, and these records reviewed to ensure that the funds are used effectively. There should be no hesitation on the part of the teacher-librarian or instructor of Core French to assist the principal in developing a budget for the purchase of materials to be allocated specifically for the school library. CPF believes this is crucial for the survival of French in the schools and, I believe, to revitalize our school libraries. Clearly, all interested parties should be aware of how much funding there is so consultants, instructors and teacher-librarians do not have to “beg, borrow or steal” as is so often heard in the schools today as they try to compensate for the lack of funding that is transferred to other envelopes.

## CONCLUSION

I would like to return to the question I had established for this inquiry report:

### **Within my own school, how can the library information centre assist the instructors of the Core French program to motivate students?**

With a little creative ingenuity rather than a “textbook approach”, it is possible for the school library information centre to assist instructors of Core French to motivate students. Together, any instructor and teacher-librarian should plan practical methods to motivate students at any level no matter if they are at the elementary or secondary division. Instructors and teacher-librarians are professional educators whose first and foremost concern is student achievement, so it is the same with second language instructors. There is no need for teachers of Core French to believe they are an island unto themselves – it is the responsibility of the teacher-librarian and instructor to plan and partner units of study, and the language issue should not pose any problem at all at the elementary or secondary level.

I have developed a Unit of Study where a Core French 9 Applied class can be partnered with the library. Instructors of Core French and teacher-librarians could adapt the unit as they see fit for use in the elementary and secondary schools if they wish. Other ways the school library can assist in the motivation of students:

- To obtain a copy of the assignment from the teacher of Core French in advance of the library visit in order to assist him/her with the acquisition of appropriate materials for student language proficiency. For example, a subscription to *L'Express*, *L'Actualite* or *La Selection* (Reader's Digest) can help build vocabulary.
- To create a cultural environment of a Parisian, Quebecois or Franco-Ontarian haven in the school library.
- To utilize teacher-previewed Search Engines – the Durham Catholic District School Board ([www.durhamrc.edu.on.ca](http://www.durhamrc.edu.on.ca)) has links to various Search Engines. Click on Program, Parent Resources, and High School Resources. Canadian Parents for French ([www.cpf.ca](http://www.cpf.ca)) includes other search engines.
- To incorporate virtual tours of Quebec and France ([www.bonjourquebec.ca](http://www.bonjourquebec.ca))

- To invite guest speakers, writers, and/or performers. The French Consultant/ Facilitator and the teacher-librarian could work together here to see if there are any persons who assist students in developing a respect for French culture either here in Canada or abroad. The honorariums would be paid equally from the FSL board budget and the school library budget.
- To preview the OMLTA Website (Ontario Modern Language Teachers' Association) for further strategies and suggestions – [www.omlta.org](http://www.omlta.org).
- To purchase the following text: *Le Visuel Multilingue* (ISBN: 2890377407. Publisher: Editions Quebec Amerique. Editors: Jean-Claude Corbeil and Arianne Archambaud). This excellent print reference encyclopedia for students incorporates four different languages (English, French, Spanish and German) that help build student vocabulary.

Finally, teacher-librarians should be aware which textbook students are using in all Core French classes. In my school, Pearson Canada has published Sans Frontières (9 Academic) and Autour de Nous (9 Applied). This year we are also using a supplementary text in Grade 9 Applied Express (author: Ruby Kaplan). Pearson Education ([www.pearsoned.ca](http://www.pearsoned.ca)) includes website addresses and links that support achievement of the various units of study and curriculum expectations. These websites also offer excellent opportunities for partnering and sharing in assessment, evaluation and ultimately student motivation.

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