Leading Successful Language Programs

A Tool for Educational Administrators of Additional Language (L+) Programs

Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers
Association canadienne des professeurs de langues secondes

Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT)

Leading Successful Language Programs: A Tool for Educational Administrators of Additional Language (L+) Programs

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Introduction

Leading a language program can be highly rewarding yet incredibly challenging. Research is clear regarding the benefits of additional language (L+) learning for students and stakeholders. The value that L+ learning brings to students, their families, the community, and society at large is profound. Leaders of language programs play a critical role in ensuring the success of their language programs, including through:

- Recruiting and selecting teachers for staffing assignments
- Ensuring that teachers have the needed skills, knowledge, support, and resilience to flourish in the program through professional learning, communities of practice, and building collegial relationships
- Supporting teachers through their classroom challenges

- Leading the learning community to ensure that programs effectively meet the needs of the students and stakeholders

School and system leaders have a tremendous impact on teachers. Leaders influence recruitment and hiring, pedagogical knowledge and skills development, and retention. It is essential to recognize that language teachers face unique challenges beyond those faced by regular classroom teachers, and language teacher recruitment and retention are at a critical stage across Canada. The Executive Summary in the report *Second Language Teacher Attrition, Retention, and Recruitment: A Literature Review on Issues, Challenges, and Strategies for French as a Second Language Teachers*[1] (Masson & Azan, 2021, pp. 4-5) identifies the following:

Factors Unique to L2 Teachers That Contribute to Attrition

- Teachers' confidence in their pedagogical content knowledge (i.e., knowledge and skill in teaching a foreign language).
- Teachers' confidence in their target language proficiency (i.e., knowledge of and ability in the target language).
- L2 [second language] program conditions.
- Support and value for L2 teaching.
- Respect and value for L2 teachers.
- Relationships with other L2 teachers.
- Lack of suitable employment opportunities.
- Difficulty finding their first L2 teaching position to enter the profession.
- Inconsistent federal funding (i.e., for programs such as LINC).
- Lack of job security (i.e., lack of stable full-time positions with benefits, and low salaries).
- Feeling overworked and isolated in their L2 teaching practice.

Factors Unique to FSL Teachers That Contribute to Attrition

- Difficult working conditions in FSL [French as a second language].
- A lack of French immersion instructional materials.
- Challenges with fostering positive professional relationships with non-FSL administration, non-FSL colleagues, and parents.
- Difficulties with FSL classroom management.
- Inadequate initial training received and unmet career aspirations.
- Not having access to a dedicated FSL classroom or an FSL consultant in their schools.
- A lack of funding for FSL-related activities.
- A lack of French-speaking supply teachers, consultants for students with special needs, and French-speaking support staff.
- Feeling more valued by their administration than by the community at large (including colleagues, parents, and students).

Reproduced from Masson & Azan, 2021, pp. 4-5

Teachers are the most critical element of program success, and leading language programs requires considerable attention to teacher support. However, leaders must also consider the needs of other stakeholders and broader elements, such as members of the wider learning community, the language and cultural communities, and the essential administrative functions that support the success of language programs.

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1   https://www.caslt.org/en/product/teacher-attrition-lit-review/

Structure of This Tool

This tool is divided into four main sections:

1. **Teacher Recruitment and Selection for Staffing Assignments.** This section focuses on leadership strategies:

   - ☑ Prior to and During Recruitment
   - ☑ During Teacher Review and Selection
   - ☑ During Teacher Assignment

2. **Teacher Retention and Resilience.** This section focuses on leadership strategies to support:

   - ☑ Teacher Professional Learning
   - ☑ Communities of Practice
   - ☑ Mentorships and Collegial Relationships
   - ☑ Recognition, Encouragement, and Valuing

3. **Supporting the Teacher Through Classroom Challenges.** This section focuses on areas that are frequently identified as requiring extra support:

   - ☑ Maximizing Student Learning
   - ☑ Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners
   - ☑ Student Assessment

4. **Leading the Learning Community.** This section focuses on leadership strategies for:

   - ☑ Organizing and Managing Effective Programs
   - ☑ Ensuring Effective Staffing for Programming
   - ☑ Building a Culture that Promotes Languages, Cultures, and the Program
   - ☑ Promoting Success for All Students
   - ☑ Supporting Opportunities for Students Beyond the Classroom
   - ☑ Recognizing Success

The Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT) designed this tool to serve a range of language leaders. It focuses on educational administrators and system leaders such as principals, program managers, assistant principals, department heads, curriculum coordinators, and consultants. The content of this tool is based on current research and successful field-based practices.

How to Use This Resource

This tool may be used individually or in workshops, study groups, peer-support groups, or professional learning committees as a basis for personal or group reflection and discussion. It can help leaders and emerging leaders:

- Engage in reflection and record their thoughts regarding the current status of their programs

- Use a common tool for reflection and discussion with colleagues and staff about the state of their programs and potential next steps for improvement

- Reflect on areas of strength and need for further focus or improvement

- Understand, discuss, or identify potential next steps for improvement, especially for goal setting and building program improvement plans

- Increase staff engagement
- Increase staff and leadership knowledge and skills

This document may be useful:

- As part of an annual planning or review process

- When establishing a new language course or program

- As part of a team building and vision alignment process for leadership staff

- As a tool for a leader who is new to a school to learn about the elements of the school's language classes or program

- As a tool to support the development of teacher and leader professional growth plans

- As a basis for discussions among administrators, teachers, and stakeholder groups

Note:

This tool is intended to provide school, divisional, and provincial leaders with the opportunity to reflect on their effectiveness in leading language programs and offers helpful suggestions for next steps, current research, resources, tools, and follow-up activities. Leaders may use parts of this tool or the tool in its entirety for reflection and improvement planning. It is not exhaustive but may serve as a starting point for thoughtful reflection in supporting the next steps for growth as leaders of language programs in Canada.

1. Teacher Recruitment and Selection for Staffing Assignments

TOPICS IN THIS SECTION

- ☑ Prior to and During Recruitment
- ☑ During Teacher Review and Selection
- ☑ During Teacher Assignment

Teacher Recruitment and Selection for Staffing Assignments

Leaders make crucial decisions regarding the staffing of their language programs. Recruiting and staffing competent, effective, engaged teachers are key to a program's success. While all teachers need strong general pedagogical skills, knowledge, and experiences, language teachers require the following additional skills, knowledge, experiences, and attitudes to achieve the highest levels of confidence and success:

- A range of effective, current, research-based second language pedagogical practices for diverse student populations (including subject matter pedagogy in cases where the subject matter is being taught in the target language)
- Strong target language proficiency, including an understanding of variations of the language
- A strong understanding and appreciation of the cultures of the target language and the development of intercultural skills and knowledge in students
- A positive attitude toward lifelong learning for themselves and a positive attitude toward language learning for all learners, including students with a broad range of needs, interests, and abilities

All four of these elements are important. For example, while a high level of proficiency in the target language is a sought-after quality in a language teacher, the teacher's level of proficiency should not take precedence as a hiring criterion over a robust second language methodology, a solid understanding of the target culture, and a positive attitude. Being fluent in a language does not necessarily mean one knows how to teach it.

Many teachers begin their language teaching careers with gaps in their skills, knowledge, and experience (e.g., gaps in their second language pedagogy or target language and cultural proficiency) compared to the demands of their teaching assignment. Leaders must understand that teaching skills and knowledge are developed over time and that providing ongoing support for further, career-long development can contribute to teacher confidence, competence, satisfaction, and retention rates.

The questions below may assist leaders in reflecting on and considering further developments in their practices as they recruit, select, and staff their language programs.

How can I more effectively support language teachers?

☑ Teacher Professional Learning (continued)

How effectively do I ensure that teachers have access to opportunities to continuously use and potentially improve their **target language proficiency**?

This could include:

- Supporting teachers to access:
  - ▸ Courses in or about the target language
  - ▸ Local, national, or international language and culture immersion experiences
  - ▸ Language summer institutes, activities, or programs in the language
  - ▸ Networking with other same-language colleagues within the school, school district, region, etc.
  - ▸ Communities of practice focusing on the language
  - ▸ Funding or funded opportunities that may be available locally, provincially/territorially, or federally to support language proficiency improvement
  - ▸ Opportunities to experience variations of the language or further develop subject-specific language knowledge

MY REFLECTIONS

MY NEXT STEPS

Masson, M., & Azan, A. (2021). *Second language teacher attrition, retention, and recruitment: A literature review on issues, challenges, and strategies for French as a second language teachers.* Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers. https://www.caslt.org/en/product/teacher-attrition-lit-review/

O'Brien, M. (2017). *Literature review on the impact of second-language learning: Executive summary.* Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers. https://www.caslt.org/en/product/l2-lit-review/

O'Brien, M. (2019). *Literature review on the characteristics of successful second language programming.* Edmonton Public Schools. https://epsb-resources.sellfy.store/p/literature-review-characteristics-of-successful-second-language-programming/

Tools and Activities

Tools

- *Literature Review on the Impact of Second-Language Learning*[70]
- What the Research Shows[71]
- Why Learn Languages?[72]

Sample Activities

Leaders could review the listed resources outlining the current research on the benefits of learning additional languages. This could be conducted individually, with other leaders, or with their staff. A discussion could then focus on how to communicate, effectively and efficiently, to share these benefits with students, other staff, families, the community, and the general public to garner understanding and support for the program.

Tools

Key provincial, school, and local school division documents, such as:

- Vision, mission, and strategic documents
- Related policies and regulations
- Business, budget, and financial plans
- Curriculum documents

Sample Activities

Leaders could gather and review the documents individually, with other leaders, or with lead teachers from their language program. Guiding questions could be used for the review, such as:

- Are our language programs included in or represented in these key documents?
- Can we connect our program to, or "see" our program in, these documents?
- How well do our practices align with these documents?
- Is there anything we should do to further align our program with these important documents?

An action plan could be made to strengthen the alignment of the program to these documents.

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70 https://www.caslt.org/en/product/l2-lit-review/
71 https://www.actfl.org/research/what-the-research-shows
72 https://www.caslt.org/en/why-learn-languages/

Leading a language program can be both rewarding and challenging. This resource explores the critical role of language program leaders in ensuring success through effective teacher recruitment, professional learning, and community engagement. Divided into four main sections — Teacher Recruitment and Selection, Teacher Retention and Resilience, Supporting Teachers Through Classroom Challenges, and Leading the Learning Community — this tool offers research-based strategies and practical insights. Designed for educational administrators and system leaders, it provides a reflective framework to enhance program effectiveness, support teacher growth, and promote a culture that values languages and cultural diversity.

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