EAL Learners and French as a Second Language Programs: Challenges and Possibilities

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What are the benefits and challenges of teaching French as a second language (FSL) to students who are learning English as an additional language (EAL)? This study reports on the implementation of an Intensive French program in a large B.C. school district where more than half the students are EAL learners. It also draws on implications from twelve case studies of school-wide literacy initiatives in B.C. schools with challenged populations, including (EAL), English as a Second Dialect, and Aboriginal and high poverty communities.

Facts
- Some EAL parents are highly motivated to embrace a bilingual Canadian identity as part of their (and their children’s) multilingual identity.
- EAL learners in Intensive French (IF) outperformed EAL learners in the regular English program on measures of oral and written French proficiency.
- Reasons for strong EAL performance in French and English: 1) some prior development in linguistic and metalinguistic skills; and, 2) IF provides literacy-rich curriculum and active fluency/accuracy-focused pedagogy.
- We can use what we learn from school based action research in literacy development to improve FSL programs.
  - Action research in B.C. schools on literacy in richly diverse school contexts dealing with vulnerable students.
  - Importance of shared responsibility and leadership – creating school level conditions bringing L2 programs into the fold.
  - Building a plurilingual community for students, staff, and families.
  - Collaborative professional action is powerful, especially for teachers during the induction phase.
  - Importance of personalized student learning: balanced literacy, investment of learner, enabling meaningful assessment FOR learning.
• Common themes
  - Attend to identities of students, parent motivations; build connections to home languages.
  - Validate and celebrate home and learned languages and feelings of nationhood.
  - Invite EAL learners into FSL programs.
  - Become contributing members of school and district literacy teams.
  - Conduct collaborative professional inquiry (action research) in real school and community settings.
  - Look at different language delivery models.

Fact sheet series

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All video clips and fact sheets from this series can be downloaded from the CASLT and OLBI Web sites.

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