This presentation describes Intensive French and highlights its benefits for the development of communication skills in French. Netten sees this French as a second language (FSL) program as a positive step in leading core French students to linguistic duality.

Facts
- Intensive French (IF) was conceived to improve the regular core French (CF) program. First implemented in Newfoundland and Labrador in 1998, it is now an official FSL option in that province.
- Classes of IF exist in eight other provinces and three territories.
- Current CF programs are problematic because of assumptions underlying the program: practice of language items and learning of vocabulary precede spontaneous communication; reading and writing skills can transfer from English without specific teaching.
- CF also contributes to the development of negative attitudes towards learning French because of the lack of progress made by the students. Data from New Brunswick (2002) show that, after 360 hours of instruction, only 2% of CF students were able to communicate spontaneously.
- The belief that, for the learning of a second language the earlier one begins the better, is not substantiated by the data for CF.
- Three elements of successful communicative programs: 1) authentic language use; 2) intensity in the initial stages; and 3) literacy-based teaching strategies.
- IF is a literacy-based approach with 300 hours of intense experiential learning in the first half of Grade 6 (in most cases), followed by Post Intensive French or Le français approfondi in the intermediate grades and secondary school. It is a research-based program.
Theoretical foundations of Intensive French:

1) Paradis – knowledge does not become a skill; implicit competence is developed by focusing attention on something other than the language being learned. For Immersion – focus on learning subjects; for Intensive French – focus on authentic language use and project.

2) Cummings – interdependence of languages hypothesis: literacy skills and associated cognitive processes transferred from the first language to the second. For Immersion and Intensive French – transfer from the second to the first, once spontaneous use achieved.

3) Vygotsky – cognitive development hypothesis: not subject matter that stimulates specific cognitive processes, but tasks. Also, social interaction increases cognitive development. For Immersion – learning of subject matter in French; for Intensive French- projects which require linguistic content.

Results of the Intensive French program are extremely positive: of 655 students given the N.B. oral interview, after five months in Intensive French, 72% were able to communicate spontaneously.

Students are able to write a composition without previous preparation of at least one full page at a level similar to Quebec francophones between grades 2 and 3.

Students show a more positive attitude towards learning French.

These results have been replicated in all other provinces where Intensive French has been introduced.

Post-intensive French program – blocked periods of French twice a week to maintain some intensity; it is also necessary to continue with the same type of teaching strategies as in Intensive French and an appropriate curriculum based on cognitively demanding projects.

Conditions for success for programs to develop communication skills in French:

1) Authentic language use – French must be used regularly as the means of communication;

2) Intensity – can elevate the ability to communicate in French by 1 level;

3) Pedagogy – can elevate the ability to communicate in French by another 2, 3, or even 4 levels in the intensive context.

Intensive French teaching strategies have been used to improve communication and literacy skills in French Immersion programs in New Brunswick and Core French in Nova Scotia.

Faculties of Education need to focus on developing teaching strategies for teaching communication and literacy skills in FSL programs.

Intensive French and Immersion programs are the best options in order to achieve linguistic duality.