

New French program

Federal government's goal that by 2013 half of all high school graduates in Canada will be bilingual."

What is Intensive Core French?

"Basically, five months of French are inserted into the Core French program," explained Dr. Netten. "Intensive Core French requires a change in pedagogy as it is a completely different type of program from the regular Core French. There must be an intense and uninterrupted period of French with three or four times the number of hours usually spent in Core French."

Intensive Core French focuses on hearing and speaking. The program takes place in Grade 5 during the first five months of the school year — September to the end of January. Sixty percent of the school day is in French. For the last five months of school, students return to the regular curriculum with 10% of time spent in French.

"The program is implemented in elementary school because students can absorb language by using it and are still interested and motivated to

learn," said Dr. Netten. "It is implemented at the end of the elementary school cycle so students can go into an enriched program. And, there is still a classroom teacher who is aware of all aspects of the curriculum."

Differences between programs

In Intensive French, there is no teaching of academic content in French. Instead, the program is theme-based, for example, the class may study the environment.

"Speaking is a skill and the skill must be developed first," said Dr. Netten. "We start immediately with communication and correction. Learning to speak is not based on rules." She used the example of learning to swim. "In Core French, the teacher explains the movements of swimming while in Intensive French, the students get right into the water — with supervision.

"Children learn vocabulary as they talk and they learn in sentences. We start with family and daily life themes. Less time is spent on grammar but this is replaced with oral communication and correction."

How can the school curriculum be compressed to accommodate the In-

tensive French program? Dr. Germaine explained that because learning a second language develops cognitive and general knowledge skills it is possible to reduce the time spent in English language arts and still meet all the objectives of the curriculum. "There is no extra homework!" he said. "We look at the goals for the regular curriculum and then include similar cognitive tasks, for example, students may grow plants and graph their growth.

"Our aim is for students to speak with some spontaneity and they need to have at least 250 hours in French to reach that level."

Outcomes

Dr. Germaine reported that after five months in Intensive Core, most students will speak as well as students who completed Grade 12 Core French.

"Results of testing show that students' written work, overall, is similar to that of Grade 3 Quebec francophones. This is a remarkable outcome. Accuracy is at the Grade 3 level. Fluency similar to Grade 4. These are very encouraging results. We found no negative effects and there is no drop in English assessment results.

"In math, the test results showed the Intensive students outdid those in the English classes. In fact, cognitive development, problem solving, creative thinking, English language skills all improved with second language development. Intensive Core French students consistently outperform children not in their program.

"The program is helpful to low achievers as it gives children a second chance to relearn how to read and write. And, because they feel they can speak French, their self esteem is given a boost. There is also an increase in autonomy, personal organizational skills and motivation to continue to study French."

"Intensive Core French has been found to enhance cognitive, social, and personal skills. We think all children would benefit. We don't want it to be an optional program, we want everyone to be included," concluded Dr. Netten and Dr. Germaine.

To learn more about Intensive Core French see our web site, www.cpf.bc.ca.