



Single-Track versus Dual-Track French Immersion Programs

November 2009

B

Background...

- Dual-track schools offer French immersion and English language classes; while, single-track schools offer only French immersion programs.
- The main issues researched in this area are: student use of and exposure to French within school, stakeholder satisfaction with both types of programs, and the influence of English as a shared language within dual-track schools.

Key Findings....

Summary of what works:

- Research results indicate that there is a positive correlation between student exposure to and use of French on student achievement and test results.
- One study found that stakeholder satisfaction levels are higher in single-track immersion programs over those in dual-track settings.
- Another study reported that positive social environments are easier to create and maintain in a single-track setting and that, although it's not impossible to create the same atmosphere in a dual-track setting, it is harder work for the stakeholders involved.
- Regardless of the setting (single vs. dual), researchers agree that children benefit from learning multiple languages.

L

Key Recommendations....

- It is important for single-track immersion schools to create an environment that provides students with maximum exposure to French so that the language is seen as a way of communicating with others, not just something used in a classroom. Further, it is recommended that as much communication as possible be delivered in French, including announcements, instructions, assemblies, posters within and outside of the classroom, etc.
- Naturally, this environment is harder to maintain in a dual-track school because English is a common ground for students. In a dual-track school it is understandable that certain elements of school life like announcements and assemblies will be delivered in English; therefore it is imperative that French is spoken within the classroom at all times between students and teachers.
- In dual-track settings, school administrators and staff should focus on creating school harmony between the English and French language programs so that the participants in each program feel an equal part of the overall school environment. Further, emphasis need to be placed on portraying the French program to stakeholders as a different option, and not better or worse, than the English program.
- School administrators, in dual-track settings, also need to focus on staff relations to ensure that the educators in the French and English programs are equally satisfied with available resources.
- Dual-track schools provide an opportunity for students to experience Canada's reality of being a bi-lingual country with two distinct cultures and languages.

A

M

Empirical research in the area of single versus dual-track language programs is sparse; however, results from the available research indicate the following:

- An effective French immersion program surrounds students with French both inside and outside of the classroom at all times. While this is more easily done in a single-track school, it is possible for dual-track schools to encourage optimal use of French within the classroom.
- Effort must be put forth within a dual-track setting, to create a harmonious environment for all program stakeholders (students, staff and parents).

BOTTOM LINE ACTIONABLE MESSAGE

The following search terms were used to retrieve articles:

- French immersion
- Single track
- Dual track
- Program effectiveness
- Second language learning

References:

(The list below provides information for literature and resources used in preparing this BLAM)

Coelho, E., (2006). Inspire; Sharing Space with English and French: How to Create a Multilingual School Environment. *The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat of the Ontario Ministry of Education.*

Study looking at ways of effectively integrating multiple languages in a classroom. Ways to include languages in the school include:

- consider proficiency in a community language when hiring new teachers and other staff
- create multilingual signs, notices and announcements
- encourage students to use their own languages
- provide multilingual library resources
- train student ambassadors
- develop a dual language tutoring program
- create display material
- provide information in community languages on the website
- think about ways of including community languages in special events
- make connections with International and Heritage language classes

Ways to use student languages in the classroom include:

- learn a little about your students' languages
- learn some expression in your students' languages
- encourage students to learn some words and phrases in each other's languages
- encourage learners of English to develop ideas in their own languages
- provide opportunities for students to work with same-language partners
- develop some multilingual projects

Day, E. M., Shapson, S. M., (2001). Integrating Formal and Functional Approaches to Language Teaching in French Immersion: An Experimental Study. *Language Learning*, 5(1), 47-80.

This experimental study was designed to evaluate the effect of French language proficiency of an integrated formal, analytic and functional, communicative approach (experiential) to second-language teaching in the immersion classroom. The impetus for the study arises from previous research indicating that immersion children show persistent weaknesses in their grammatical skills despite the fluent, functional proficiency they achieve in their second language. The experimental materials, which were custom-designed for our study, highlight form-function relations, promote noticing, encourage meta-linguistic awareness, and provide opportunities for language practice.

This classroom-based study on the conditional is one of a series of studies undertaken in Canadian French immersion to investigate the effectiveness of form-focused instruction in classrooms. The results of our study, which was conducted in grade 7 early immersion, showed that the Experimental group performed significantly higher in writing than the Control group, in

both the post- and the follow-up testing. Although this was not found for speaking, an examination of the individual class data revealed greater and more consistent growth in speaking for the Experimental than for the Control classes, suggesting that they benefitted somewhat from the experimental treatment in this domain as well.

Doell, L., (2008). Differences in Setting; Compiled Research of the Comparison in Academic Achievement between Dual-Track and Single-Track French Immersion Programs. *Report Prepared for French Language Resource Centre, Grand Prairie Alberta*. Posted on *WorldPress.Com*

This report is intended to give an overview of academic research that examines the differences between dual-track French immersion schools and single-track French immersion schools, specifically concentrating on findings of differences in academic achievement. It is worth noting that research in the area is limited.

Kissau, S.P. (2003). The Relationship between school environment and effectiveness in French immersion. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 6(1), 87 – 104.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between school environment and effectiveness in French immersion. The two settings investigated were the immersion-centre school, where all students were involved in the French immersion program, and the dual-track school, in which the French immersion and regular English program co-existed. Questionnaires were developed to gather relevant information from students in Grade 7 and from teachers in both school settings. The investigation determined that immersion-centre students were perceived, by both teachers and students, to be exposed to more French and less peer pressure than their dual-track counterparts. It was also determined that there were no significant differences between the two groups in regards to student use of French or student and teacher satisfaction with the program. In conclusion, it is suggested that teachers and administrators at dual-track schools attempt to recreate the perceived advantageous conditions at immersion-centre schools in order to maximize student exposure to French and to improve school atmosphere.

Lapkin, S., Andrew, C.M., Harley, B., Swain, M., Kamin, J. (1981). The Immersion Centre and the Dual-Track School: A Study of the Relationship between School Environment and Achievement in a French Immersion Program. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 6(3), 68-90.

In this study, the Carleton Board of Education (Ontario) examined factors which influence the achievement of immersion students. Two different school settings for the program are compared: immersion programs, and dual-track schools in which both the immersion and regular English program operate. Earlier program evaluation results had led to the hypothesis that the immersion centre environment might be more conducive to achievement in a French immersion program than the dual-track school environment. A battery of achievement tests of French, English, and other subjects was administered to classes of Grade 5 students in both school settings, and questionnaires were developed to gather relevant information from students, teachers, and principals. The test results indicate superior achievement on the part of immersion centre students in several aspects of French and English skills. The questionnaire data provide information on the possible reasons for the differences. The overall implication of the study for planning immersion programs is to provide a school environment which encourages the maximum use of French.