

Differences in Setting

Compiled Research of the Comparison in Academic Achievement between Dual-Track and Single-Track French Immersion Programs

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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.

1. In 1981, Lapkin and Swain published a study of comparative student outcomes in immersion centres and dual-track schools entitled: *The Immersion Centre and the Dual-Track Schools: A study of the Relationship Between School Environment and Achievement in a French Immersion Program (OISE)*. The research was carried out for the Carleton Board in 1979 and involved testing of grade 5 students in centres (6 classes) and in dual-track schools (4 classes) in both French and English. A survey of the staff was also conducted.

Results indicated that on two of the four tests (listening comprehension, reading comprehension and vocabulary), immersion centre students outperformed dual-track students. No other differences in performance were indicated. The conclusion then being that the immersion centre leads to superior achievement in French and some aspects of English language skills. The questionnaire data indicated the centre students might use more French in out-of-classroom contexts than dual-track students. Evidence within the responses indicated that centre students have more exposure to written and spoken French in the school environment than their dual-track counterparts.

Furthermore, teachers in centres appeared better satisfied with resources available in their schools and with their overall teaching situations. In interpreting the results, they speculated that the support of French was more pronounced in the centre setting where they found school corridor displays featuring more material in French, assemblies conducted in French, administration and other staff more likely to be bilingual and so on. She states: *"The presence of French outside of the classroom walls was palpable, and doubtless had a positive effect on French performance."*

2. In October of 1990, Lapkin published an article entitled: *Uses and Misuses of Research in School Board Decision-Making: Examples from French Immersion (OISE)*, where she sites examples of the above research was used to bolster opposing points of view and how research is often used as after-the-fact rationalizing of politically motivated decisions. Even though the study did yield important findings, she cautions about the use of a single evaluation focussing on one grade only, with no subsequent replication, being used as proof positive that the centre proved optimal housing for immersion programs. She states that is cannot be safely generalized. Regardless, she

claims that the study shows that the recipe for successful implementation included encouraging actively the use of French outside of the classroom but within the school “so that the language is perceived as an authentic means of communication for a social purpose that goes beyond academic learning within the class and pervades the life of the school.” She finishes by cautioning unwarranted generalisations from a single study does not translate into a single recipe for success in program delivery. A host of other factors, different from the context where the study was carried out, must be considered.

3. The following table was used as research for the development of immersion programs in Estonia. The education department studied the differences in program delivery and the following table explains the advantages and disadvantages regarding the facility, staffing and community feedback. It does not look at academic achievement.

APPENDIX 3

Analysis of Advantages and Disadvantages of Single and Dual-Track Schools in the Canadian Context

Dual-Track Schools	Single-Track Schools
Facility: Advantages	Facility: Advantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect the de-facto bilingual nature of society • Helps all students in the school appreciate the country’s two languages and two cultures • Non-immersion students are exposed to the immersion language used in school • Both staffs interact with, supervise, and teach students in the regular program, and foster an increased use of the immersion language • Immersion students and regular students intermingle, thus promoting tolerance and understanding • Immersion students have access to home language resources in the library • Collaboration by both staffs promotes exemplary practices in the immersion and regular program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of target language in all aspects of the school day: announcements, sports, songs, displays, contact with support staff
Facility: Disadvantages	Facility: Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immersion students speak the immersion language less outside the classroom • More difficult to use the immersion language in assemblies and hallways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception that immersion is an elitist program

Dual-Track Schools	Single-Track Schools
Staffing: Advantages	Staffing: Advantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers of both programs benefit from each others' expertise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bilingual staff, principals, teacher-librarians, secretaries, increase the opportunity for students to use the second language outside the classroom
Staffing: Disadvantages	Staffing: Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School administrators must manage two distinct schools in one building Finding qualified teachers is difficult Unilingual support staff may not be as able to meet the needs of students and teachers in the immersion program Unilingual regular program staff may feel threatened by the immersion program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finding fully bilingual staff is difficult
Parental/Community Feedback: Advantages	Parental/Community Feedback: Advantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community involvement is enhanced because the school is usually close to the children's home Integration of the two cultures fosters understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less involvement if the school is not in the community
Parental/Community Feedback: Disadvantages	Parental/Community Feedback: Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers, students and parents may fear the displacement or disappearance of the regular program The regular program may seem "second best" Immersion students' exposure to the second language may be limited to the classroom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased time spent travelling from home to a central location

4. A survey conducted in the Manitoba of their French Immersion Graduates in 1998 and 1999 revealed that the respondents viewed Immersion centres more favourably with regards to resource materials and academic support services. The two questions generated the largest differences between category of analysis at about 30% and 70%.
5. Donna Crawford (University of Calgary) conducted a study in 1993 entitled *Parts of a Whole: Building a Shared School Culture in Dual-Track Immersion Schools*. She did not examine academic achievement; however, she examined in depth the dual-track school culture by conducting 76 semi-structured interviews among parents, teachers, students and administration in two dual-track elementary schools.

Prior to conducting her own study, she explored ample research that examined the potential negative impacts of the English program in dual-track setting, such as: streaming (perception that students in this program are less able), second best (perception that English programs are second best), reduced staff moral, core French (perception that best students are in

immersion), switches (need to accommodate students switching out of immersion), special needs, gender imbalance and segregation. Negative impacts cited for the Immersion program were: loss of neighbourhood schools, heavy demands, staffing, streaming, withdrawal, lack of special services, bussing and segregation.

Findings were that developing a shared school culture was a great deal of work, but well worth the effort. *"A single-track immersion centre was viewed as easier, but not better, with the possible exception of promoting French Language and culture more effectively. It was viewed as inevitable that a dual-track school could not be a true total immersion experience, but to many it reflected an alternate view of bilingualism."* Some advantages listed of the dual-track school setting included: learning from diversity, exposure to diversity, chance to teach and learn in two languages, better student and parent cooperation due to choice, good FSL instruction, elimination of neighbourhood cliques, development of cultural tolerance and keeping community schools open. Furthermore, there was an implication that the development of subcultures within a school is not perceived as negative, but it can move toward protecting the integrity of groups and programs and thus facilitate in overall cooperation and harmony.

6. Scott P. Kissau (University of Windsor) did a study entitled: *The Relationship Between School Environment and Effectiveness in French Immersion* whereby he investigated the school environment and effectiveness in French Immersion. The two settings were investigated. The study consisted of questionnaires completed by grade 7 students and teachers in both settings. Results indicated that 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 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. Concluding recommendations were to have dual-track administrators attempt to recreate the perceived advantageous conditions of the immersion centre, in order to maximize student exposure to French and improve school atmosphere.
7. Adel Safty published a paper in 1992 through the University of British Columbia, *Effectiveness and French Immersion: A Socio-Political Analysis*, whereby he examined the organizational setting of immersion and the sociology of the culture. Safty questions the integration and effectiveness of dual-track schools with two different linguistic and cultural orientations. He quotes McGillivray stating that the two programs are not compatible and that they 'co-exist with difficulty'.

8. Jim Cummins writes in his article, *Immersion Education for the Millennium: What We Have Learned from 30 Years of Research in Second Language Immersion* (OISE, 2000) that two problematic areas have been noted in the implementation of French immersion programs in Canada. One noted problem is the quality of oral and written skills in French attained by the students. This problem can be understood by the lack of interaction with native francophone students, but also the lack of classroom opportunity to use French. He quotes, "Expressive skills tend to develop better in schools where the entire school is a French immersion centre rather than in schools where just one stream is taught through French; however, the latter organizational structure far outnumber the former as a result of the political difficulty of devoting an entire neighbourhood school to French instruction..."
9. Nicole Thibault, executive director of CASTL (Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers) states that their organization supports both settings of immersion. Since only 15% of the student population in Canada has access to immersion programs, they feel that both settings offer excellent access to the French language and culture. She notes that depending on the administration of the school, she has seen dual-track offer formidable immersion programs compared to single-track schools.
10. Perhaps the most significant research recently conducted in this area has been done within our province. *French Immersion in Different Setting: A Comparative Study of Student Achievement and Exemplary Practices in Immersion Centres Versus Dual- and Multi-Track Schools* (2003) published by Gilbert Guimont through the University of Alberta examines in detail which model used to deliver French Immersion to students has proven itself more successful in fostering better academic results. Guimont talks initially about the advantages and disadvantages stated in prior research concerning the two settings. McGillivray (1983) states that immersion centres often have administrative advantages by devoting staff, programs and resources all to immersion, thus making the budgeting more manageable. He also explains how centres often have specialists for remedial services which seems to account for the lower drop-out rate in centres. Drawbacks of the dual-track system included often unilingual administrators lacking pedagogical knowledge of second language learning, problems communication about educational issues, supervising and evaluating. (This has been mentioned in Adel Safty's research as well as several additional articles on immersion.)

Alberta Learning (Learner Assessment Branch) provided two types of quantitative data: the results of all grade 6 FI students provincial achievement

tests between 1995-1996 and 1999-2000 and multiyear report tables of scores on the four core subjects taught in French. Two distinct tables were created between those enrolled in dual/multi-track schools and centres. Guimont also gathered qualitative data through taped unstructured interviews. He identified the top ten achieving immersion schools and worked with six current and former principals of five of the top six schools where the students achieved the best overall results in the four subjects taught in French (Social Studies, Mathematics, French Language Arts, Science).

Results of the quantitative data shows that students enrolled in immersion centres were achieving better results in all of the subjects, for each of the years that were used for the study. Furthermore, the difference between the means of the two immersion populations increased in all the subjects in the years examined. It is interesting to note that French Language Arts is the subject that has the least difference in Total Test Mean results between the two immersion sub-populations.

Three themes emerged from the interpretational analysis of the data gathered from the principals' perspectives, reflections and explanations in light of the quantitative data results: 1. immersion centres function like francophone (French First Language) schools; 2. common goals and resources directed at one program are best; 3. parents' characteristics. The principals talked about the students having more opportunity to be exposed to French, of the difficulty in ensuring that students speak French outside the classroom in a dual-track setting, how more exposure would enable them to remember more words and of the creation of a French community within a single-track setting. In regards to resources, respondents felt that the establishment of common goals and allocation of resources was a key factor to the success of students in immersion centres. They questioned whether parents in centres were more committed and argued that many centres have one parent who is francophone.

Guimont concludes with fourteen implications for practice. Some of which include the following examples: FI administrators in dual-track schools must be given more professional development opportunities to help them tackle the daily challenge of leading a bi-cultural staff, of promoting and respecting cultural needs, building and maintaining team spirit among colleague and working toward the realization of their school goals. Principals of dual-track schools must ensure that all their school processes reflect to the stakeholders that the school functions effectively as one school. Principals must demonstrate the value and strongly believe in the importance of second language learning. In light of the results, school authorities must ask themselves how important it is for them to provide the best setting for their immersion students to achieve the best results and to allow them to develop the best French language skills possible.

Post –scriptum

This compilation of research was requested and presented to a school board in Canada as they debated whether or not to move to the centre model for their elementary school French Immersion program in winter of 2007. Upon presentation of the research and the recognition of a declining English-strand population in the school, the decision was made to move to a centre model for the fall of 2007.

The two administrators who transitioned from the dual-track model to the centre model were interviewed in the winter of 2010 and asked to give their perceptions of the shift. After two years of the centre immersion model, they both felt strongly that the centre model was more beneficial for a number of reasons.

One benefit included the developing of a common vision and school mission. They felt that leading a team towards a goal that has two different populations was substantially more difficult. As well, managing the school was significantly more complex when there were two different tracks as the needs were different. Politically it was more sensitive as one program could not be allocated more funds than another. Prior to changing, they felt their French Immersion program was lagging as they couldn't provide the same quality of services in French as in English to the students, nor did they have the funds to. An example of this would be the ease of providing a guided reading program to an immersion population only as opposed to two populations.

The culture of the school has also had a profound impact since the transition. Both administrators concur that the acquisition of the French language is more rapid in a centre model. Announcements, intramurals, choirs, library helpers, concerts and cultural events are all provided in French. Rather than French being only a language of instruction, it is now brought alive outside of the four classroom walls. They state that the students are proud of their ability to communicate in French with other people.

Teachers were initially hesitant and fearful of the change. Some were upset about losing friendships with English colleagues. However, since the transition, they recognize they are able to have their specific immersion needs met effectively

and also have more opportunities to work in French professional learning communities.

It is the belief of the administrators that schools should initially open as dual-track programming, but with the intention of moving towards a single-track model when it becomes financially feasible for the school board.