



Passionate about Learning French: Exploring the topic of engagement



Synopsis

Learn about three dimensions of engagement and how one school district/board has begun a process of transformation that is resulting in improved engagement in learning French.



Before Viewing

Reflecting on current practice

1. How would I define student engagement in learning French?
 2. What am I doing already that makes a positive impact on student engagement in learning French? How do I know?
 3. What have I noticed about the engagement of French-language learners in my class, school or district/board?
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During Viewing

Making connections

1. Which key messages from the introductory comments would I share with my colleagues and other stakeholders?
 2. How does what students in the video share about their engagement in French compare to what students in my class, school or district/board have said or would say?
 3. Are students in my class, school or district/board motivated to learn by marks or because they want to improve their French? Why? How might engagement and learning be different if students were more focused on improving their French proficiency?
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After Viewing

Moving forward

1. How can I find out what students in my class, school or district/board believe about the perspectives and ideas shared in this video clip? Would they say they are engaged in learning French socially, academically and/or intellectually? What are their ideas on how to increase all three dimensions of engagement in learning French?
2. How can I communicate to other stakeholders the sense of urgency to increase engagement of French-language learners and stakeholders? Consider the following actions:
 - Share key messages from this resource through social media channels or online forums.
 - Discuss questions in this guide with colleagues.
 - Meet with colleagues and other stakeholders and plan ways to increase engagement of French-language learners and stakeholders at the classroom, school and/or district/board level.

“When autonomy, self-efficacy, relatedness, and relevance are combined, they have a cumulative, synergistic effect.”

– Ferlazzo (2017)

“More interaction, more creativity and more culture all are having a positive impact on engagement.”

– David Wood, Principal, Prince Edward Island

Going Deeper

Engagement of French-language learners can be viewed from the perspective of enrolment in optional French courses and programs, academic and intellectual engagement in learning French, and participation in extra-curricular opportunities in French. While enrolment in French immersion² continues to rise in a number of areas of Canada, attrition in all French programs is of concern to many stakeholders. In a pan Canadian study, researchers note that “focus-group discussions yielded one clear priority for research: finding answers to why students drop out of French in secondary school.”³

Engagement is complex and multifaceted, so educators look to the fields of psychology and educational research for a better understanding of how to engage students. According to the Canadian Education Association⁴, student engagement has three dimensions:

- Social engagement: A sense of belonging and participation in school life
- Academic engagement: Participation in the formal requirements of schooling
- Intellectual Engagement: A serious emotional and cognitive investment in learning

A number of researchers have written about the importance of paying attention to emotional and cognitive engagement as well as to behavioural engagement (Gardner, Lambert, etc.). Psychologists Ryan and Deci propose four key factors that contribute to these deeper levels of engagement:



A sense of relatedness – Students experience a feeling of belonging to a supportive learning environment characterized by positive relationships with teachers and peers. For French-language learners, providing opportunities for interactions with Francophones and other French-language learners can further enhance the sense of relatedness.

² Canadian Parents for French. (2017) *French as a Second Language Enrolment Statistics: 2011-2012 to 2015-2016*.

³ Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (2015) *French as a Second Language in Canada: Potential for Collaboration*.

⁴ Willms, J.D., Friesen, S. & Milton, P. (2009). *What did you do in school today? Transforming classrooms through social, academic and intellectual engagement*. (First National Report) Toronto: Canadian Education Association.



A belief in competence or self-efficacy – Students understand what it takes to be successful on a daily basis. They recognize their own progress and believe in their ability to learn French. Educators maintain high expectations for students. They use evidence-based practices to develop students' proficiency in French and the ability to use a range of strategies independently.



A perception of relevance – Students see connections between what they are learning in class and their own lives. They understand the usefulness in real world applications of the French they are learning. Educators consider students' interests when planning tasks.



A sense of autonomy – Students make choices regarding what and how to learn, as well as when and how to demonstrate their learning. They feel that their ideas are valued. Educators provide appropriate options so students can exert increasing control over their learning while receiving the necessary support to make progress. Educators encourage students to set personal learning goals and to use strategies to solve problems.

The four key factors that contribute to deeper engagement are the subject of four different video clips in this resource. They are interconnected and mutually supportive. Listening to what students say about how they learn best, for example, enabling them to decide when and how they are ready to demonstrate their learning, supports student success. By encouraging this type of student input, educators not only promote a sense of autonomy, but also demonstrate to students that they value their opinions, thus strengthening their relationships. By acting upon students' suggestions, educators are able to offer interesting courses and plan relevant tasks.

“Learning that invites students to engage intellectually awakens the human spirit’s desire to know.”

– Friesen (2009)

“Si tu vis dans un pays bilingue, je crois que c’est important de parler cette autre langue, pour que tu puisses communiquer avec les autres personnes de ton pays.”

– Élève du niveau secondaire en immersion

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