

# A Reflective Guide for French Immersion Leaders

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A collection of essays on topics relevant to French immersion  
educators across Canada

Association canadienne des  
professionnels de l'immersion



By Gordon Campbell and colleagues  
with the support of ACPI and Heritage Canada  
Canada



# A REFLECTIVE GUIDE FOR FRENCH IMMERSION LEADERS



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# Introduction: The Purpose of This Guide

Numerous books have been written on educational leadership and the inherent skills and qualities of a good leader, but what are the skills, qualities and characteristics that make a good French immersion leader? Does a French immersion leader require a unique set of skills and understandings beyond those of leaders in a regular school program?

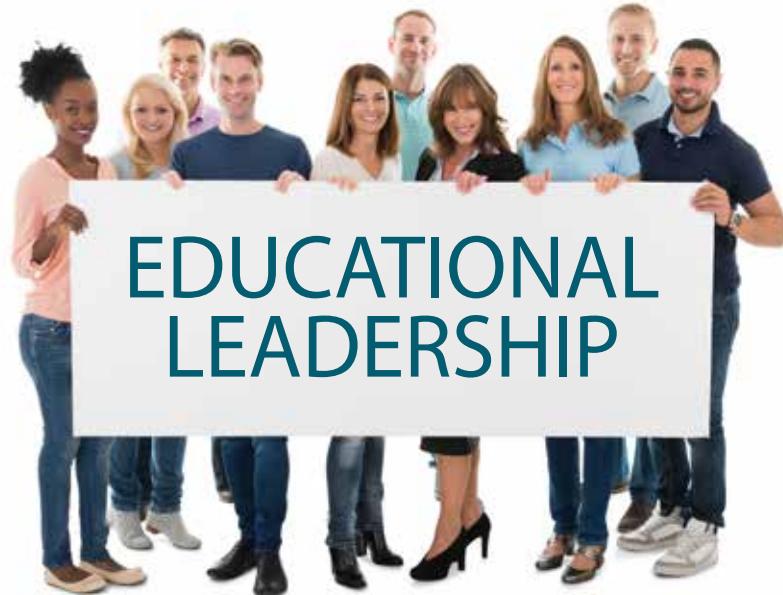
How does one define leadership in French immersion and what does it encompass?

Who is a French immersion leader?

How can French immersion leaders use their skills to enhance the program and create a rich educational experience for all students?

The goal of this resource is to provide guidance for French immersion leaders by helping them reflect on issues pertinent to the program, so that all immersion students may receive the highest quality education possible.

The guide has been written in English as there are many school leaders working in a French immersion environment who do not speak French fluently and yet are interested in furthering their knowledge of the program. Each chapter is followed by a set of questions to encourage the reader to reflect on the issues presented. Subsequent to the chapters, a Facilitator's Guide is available for those leaders wanting to continue the reflective process and include their staff in discussions for improvement. The Facilitator's Guide includes a synopsis of each chapter in French, followed by several reflective statements. The intent is that leaders use these synopses to facilitate discussions with staff.





## About the Author:

Gordon Campbell has worked in French immersion for more than thirty years, beginning by teaching Grade two in 1982. He has taught at various levels, including early, middle and senior years as well as university. He has been a principal/vice-principal of both a dual track school and an immersion centre. In 2011, Gordon was awarded Le Prix André Obadia from the Canadian Association of Immersion Professionals, ACPI, for his contribution to immersion education. In 2012, he received the Manitoba Minister of Education's Award for Excellence in Educational Administration as well as an honorary life membership to Les Éducateurs franco-manitobains. He holds a Master of Education degree with a specialty in immersion education. Gordon has been a member of the ACPI Leadership team since its inception and has conducted leadership workshops across the country.

## Acknowledgments:



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# Chapter 1: French Immersion Leaders

## A. Who is a French Immersion Leader?

Traditionally educational leaders are principals and vice-principals, head teachers, etc. French immersion leadership comes from many sources. Principals and vice-principals are key leaders in schools and although their ability to speak French is an asset to their understanding of the program, those not well versed in the language can still be strong proponents of the program. French immersion teachers are also educational leaders. Therefore, their communication with parents and the larger community as well as their skills in the classroom determine the quality of the program and enhance the reputation of the school. Parents also play a vital role in the success of French immersion. *Canadian Parents for French* provides a great deal of leadership across the country while local parent councils work hard to support the program and provide rich educational opportunities for their children. It was due to the efforts of a diligent group of parents in St. Lambert, Quebec that the immersion program first took root in the 1960s and parents across the country are crucial to the success of the program. Trustees, superintendents, and curriculum consultants all have roles to play in supporting the French immersion program. Their belief in bilingual/multi-lingual education and their understanding of issues particular to French immersion can significantly impact the program. French immersion students can also be leaders. Mentoring, peer-coaching, twinning programs, and partnerships can all have an influence as well. Senior students who have developed advanced language skills are often seen as inspirational role models for younger students. Therefore, opportunities where the two groups work together can positively impact the program and improve retention rates. Graduate students, who continue to use their French skills and who return to schools to encourage students to remain in the program throughout high school, can also be a strong motivating factor.

As previously mentioned, the list of educational leaders in French immersion is extensive. Each group has a role to play in developing a quality program, whether or not they speak both English and French. A thorough understanding of the French immersion program, including its strengths and challenges, as well as the ability to advocate for the program are essential components in the development of strong leadership, which is a necessary prerequisite for effective programs.

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### Questions for Reflection:

1. Who are the key leaders of immersion programs at the school and district levels?
  2. How does one foster leadership in the French immersion program? How are leaders selected and supported so that their skills can develop over time?
  3. How do leaders impact the program at the local level?
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## B. The Importance of the Leader's Vision: A Personal Reflection

As a teacher and as a principal, one must start with a basic philosophy: all students can experience success if they have the necessary support. If this is not a fundamental belief, the program will only succeed in the short term, and immersion will become a program for the elite rather than one for all Canadians. As teachers, our role is to meet the needs of our students the best we can, knowing that even our best efforts will not always meet the needs of every child. The role of leadership is to support teachers in their search for strategies and resources that will enable them to succeed with all students.

School leaders must get to know and trust teachers as well as the wider school community. The principal is the link between the students and the teachers, the teachers and the parents and also between the school and the school division.

The principal's vision, inspired by a passion for what we do, for the students, for the teachers and for bilingual education, is primordial in creating a vibrant and successful school. This vision comes from the heart of the director and does not simply involve the plans or annual initiatives that each school must undertake. This vision reflects our personality, our soul; who we are and how we share our beliefs and our identity with the whole school community. Each teacher has a unique personality, and each class has its own personality. In an excellent immersion school, the principal has a clear vision and the whole community is invited to share and contribute to that vision.

As a school principal, the success of all my students was paramount. I have worked with some teachers who believed that if students experienced problems, they should transfer to the English program. My role as a principal was to, not only convince them that all students could succeed, but also to find a way to make this happen.

My vision involved using the arts and emphasizing our social responsibility towards others in order to create a school where the entire community (students, teachers, families and the wider community) would feel included and accepted, as well as being an integral part of the school's success. I used my personal interest in the arts to establish links with teachers and to create engaging activities for students. I feel that visibility is very important for a principal and every year I conducted at least one creative activity in each class. These initiatives helped me to get to know the students and they always responded with enthusiasm.

Other endeavours included community evenings, short and long-term cultural activities and international exchanges which helped open the minds of students to the idea of becoming global citizens. Support for teacher professional development is also a key factor in fostering the enthusiasm and initiative necessary for the growth of a school.

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### Questions for Reflection:

- 1.** What is your vision for French immersion education?
  - 2.** How has that vision been shared with the community? Is that vision animated by a passion that transforms the school into a stimulating learning environment?
  - 3.** What role has the district and the school community had in the development of your vision?
  - 4.** How has each group contributed so that it is a shared vision? Do all the teachers and the community understand and participate actively in order to achieve this vision?
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## C. Identity

As a French immersion leader, your fundamental belief must be in valuing both English and French as languages of instruction so that students are able to become bilingual/multilingual learners.

The French immersion program should never be considered an elite program for gifted students. It must be able to respond to the needs of all learners. The choice of program should always lie with the parents and students. A leader's role is to make the program accessible and viable for all learners.

A French immersion leader understands the importance of a bilingual education and the significance this has in the life of the learner. French immersion education is a long-term process as language skills are continually developed throughout life. A leader understands the language acquisition process, facilitates learning opportunities so that French language skills are progressively developed and fosters an openness to French cultural experiences.

Not all leaders of the French immersion program speak French but this should not prevent them from actively supporting the program and understanding how language skills are developed throughout a student's education.

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### Questions for Reflection:

- 1.** What are your personal beliefs about French immersion? How have those beliefs been developed? How have you shared these beliefs with staff, students and parents?
  - 2.** How do you demonstrate your support of the French immersion program?
  - 3.** How are the French language and culture important in your own life, and that of your school?
  - 4.** Who do you look toward for support in areas pertinent to the French immersion program when you are faced with challenges?
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