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# The Future of Intensive French in Canada

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**Abstract:** This article examines the oral proficiency in French of students in core French, intensive French (IF), and post-IF to determine the effectiveness of these programs. Between 2003 and 2009, students in nine jurisdictions were assessed using the New Brunswick Middle School Scale (MSS). Students were tested prior to beginning IF (multiple grade levels in four jurisdictions), after completing the intensive portion of IF (Grades 4, 5, and 6 in nine jurisdictions), and at the end of the school year for those in post-IF (two jurisdictions). Students who had experienced only core French did not achieve spontaneous communication, while average MSS scores showed the IF students did. Post-IF students maintained and improved their oral proficiency. Reasons for the results are proposed. The article concludes with comments on the future of IF and the need for changes in the school system if linguistic duality is to become a reality.

**Keywords:** SL acquisition, French as a second language (FSL), bilingualism, intensity, literacy, SL pedagogy

**Résumé :** Le présent article présente un résumé des habiletés de communication orale en français des élèves de français de base, de français intensif (FI) et de post-français intensif (P-FI), afin de déterminer l'efficacité de ces divers programmes. Dans cette étude, effectuée entre 2003 et 2009 dans neuf provinces/territoires, les résultats des apprenants ont été évalués à partir de la *New Brunswick Middle School Scale*. Les élèves ont été évalués avant qu'ils n'entreprennent le FI (à différents niveaux d'études dans quatre provinces/territoires), à la fin de la partie intensive du programme de FI (en 4<sup>e</sup>, 5<sup>e</sup> et 6<sup>e</sup> année, dans neuf provinces ou territoires), et à la fin de l'année dans le cas des apprenants inscrits en P-FI (dans deux provinces/territoires). Les résultats révèlent que les apprenants en français de base sont incapables de s'exprimer spontanément à l'oral, tandis que les scores moyens des apprenants de FI révèlent que ces derniers y parviennent, et que les élèves de P-FI réussissent à maintenir et à améliorer leurs habiletés de communication orale. Les auteurs abordent les raisons qui expliquent ces résultats et ils concluent sur une discussion de l'avenir du FI et de la nécessité de

changer le système scolaire pour que la dualité linguistique devienne une réalité.

**Mots clés :** acquisition d'une L2, FLS (français langue seconde), bilinguisme, intensité, littératie, pédagogie de la L2

This article is based on studies undertaken in eight provinces and one territory in the context of the implementation of intensive French (IF) since 2001. Earlier articles reported data from the initial research project in 23 Grade 6 classrooms in Newfoundland and Labrador from 1998 to 2001 (Germain, Netten, & Movassat, 2004; Germain, Netten, & Séguin, 2004). As the program has expanded, studies have been undertaken to assess its results and identify any significant differences among jurisdictions. The data presented extend the research findings to give a pan-Canadian perspective on the effects of both core and intensive French. Data on oral proficiency in core French from studies undertaken in several jurisdictions are given first, and then data from students after five months of IF in Grade 6, followed by data for students in Grade 5, and finally Grade 4. Last, some preliminary findings from the implementation of post-intensive French (post-IF) in two jurisdictions are given. Possible reasons for the results achieved are discussed, and the effects of these results on the achievement of the goals for linguistic duality, as stated in the recent federal government action plans, are examined. The article concludes with a perspective on the future of IF.

### Intensive French

Some background information about the program is appropriate before reporting the achievement data. IF is a transdisciplinary approach to core French, grounded in second language acquisition theory and research (Netten & Germain, 2000, 2005, 2007b). It normally begins at the end of elementary school, in Grade 5 or 6, as recommended by previous research.<sup>1</sup> Its implementation requires changes in both the organization of French as a second language (FSL) instruction and in the pedagogy used.

Changes in the organization of instruction are required in order to achieve the degree of intensity necessary to develop and maintain spontaneous communication and the literacy goals of the program (Germain & Netten, 2005). The importance of intensity of instruction

was brought into prominence by the research on intensive English in Quebec (Lightbown & Spada, 1989, 1994). Currently, in most schools, during the intensive five-month period of instruction in the first year of the program, 65%–70% of the school day is devoted to the learning of French through activities that use the target language; mathematics and some other subjects frequently taught by specialists, such as physical education, art, and music, continue to be taught in English (for details, see Netten & Germain, 2004b, 2005). During the non-intensive five months, when students follow the regular timetable for the grade, it is recommended that a degree of intensity be maintained by combining two shorter periods of French so that students receive approximately 80 minutes twice a week. Ideally, students receive a total of 345 hours in French in the intensive year.<sup>2</sup>

To attain the communication and literacy goals of IF, teaching strategies were created based on current theories of first language literacy development and second language acquisition (Germain & Netten, 2008; Netten & Germain, 2007b). The paradigm underlying IF is that spontaneous communication requires implicit competence (Ellis, 1994; Segalowitz & Hulstijn, 2005), that explicit knowledge does not become implicit competence (Paradis, 1994, 2004), and that the development of oral competence precedes reading and writing (Germain & Netten, 2005), although the three follow each other in quick succession with students in the elementary grades who already possess considerable L1 competence. IF is based on the generally accepted hypotheses that the development of second language communicative competence requires comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985; Segalowitz & Hulstijn, 2005) and comprehensible output (Swain, 1985). In addition, output is characterized by fluency and accuracy, both of which must also be encouraged in the classroom (Carullo, 1999; Germain & Netten, 2001; Netten, 2001). Specific teaching strategies have been created for each of the four aspects: modelling of appropriate language structures; use and re-use of these structures in authentic situations; use of complete sentences; and consistent oral correction. To encourage *spontaneous* communication, the same structures are used and re-used many times, but with personal adaptations, to develop 'creative automaticity' (Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 2005). For reading and writing, strategies are adapted for the second language from those used in first language primary and elementary classrooms. They are based on a conception of language learning fundamentally different from that at the root of teaching strategies generally used in core French, in which reading and writing tasks are often presented before students have some oral familiarity with the language they are being asked to use.

Our experience demonstrated that teachers were not able to use these teaching strategies when basing their lessons on activities in currently available curriculum resources for FSL.<sup>3</sup> Differences between the concepts of second language acquisition underlying these resources and IF were too great. Therefore, it was necessary to develop a teaching guide in order to enable teachers to follow the recommended teaching strategies. Furthermore, in undertaking an analysis of the curriculum resources generally used in the core program, we identified three areas where there is confusion between learning goals and the activities recommended to attain these goals (Germain & Netten, 2008). In IF, we have made a deliberate attempt to distinguish clearly between teaching oral language and teaching written language, between development of knowledge and development of skill, and between the respective roles of implicit and explicit grammar. Details of the teaching strategies for oral competence, reading, and writing are found in table format in the introduction to the second edition of *Le français intensif – Guide pédagogique interprovincial* (Germain & Netten, 2007).

In our earlier articles, the program was presented as an insert into core French at the end of elementary school. IF has now become a program that extends to the end of secondary school. The first year of the program is generally referred to as IF; the subsequent years are generally referred to as *le français approfondi* (FA) in most jurisdictions, or post-IF in New Brunswick. This change was brought about based on the results of our follow-up study undertaken in Newfoundland and Labrador from 2001 to 2003 (Germain & Netten, 2004b), further in-depth study of the curriculum resources used in core programs, and interviews with students and teachers. Originally we had hypothesized, based on research on intensive English in Quebec (Dussault, 1997), that students could return to core French in Grade 6 or 7 and continue to develop their communication skills. Although tests of oral and written production indicated that until the end of Grade 9, IF students maintained skills that were significantly superior to those of their peers in the same classrooms who had not participated in IF, interviews indicated that classroom practices in core French were radically different from those in IF, and that students from IF felt a lack of progress and a decrease in motivation because they were not adequately challenged by the core program (Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation, 2002).

During the years of post-IF, the total number of hours of instruction normally devoted to French does not change; there is no overall effect on the timetabling of other subjects in the curriculum. In some cases, if post-IF students are distributed through several classes at the same

grade level, some adjustments need to be made to bring all post-IF students together for their French class. However, combining 40-minute periods of instruction into blocks of 70 to 80 minutes for the entire year is required. Our experience has shown that the recommended teaching strategies cannot be used effectively in shorter blocks of time if spontaneous communication and the literacy nature of the program are to be maintained. These strategies remain essentially the same as those used in the intensive year, but with some adaptations for older students. Teaching guides have been developed for the middle and secondary school to ensure the continued use of these teaching strategies, a factor crucial to the success of the program.<sup>4</sup>

### **Intensive French Project in Canada**

The pilot project in Newfoundland and Labrador demonstrated that IF was an effective way of improving the core French program for students in Grade 6 (MacFarlane, 2005). It also demonstrated that results were similar in both urban and rural milieus and for boys and girls participating in the program; furthermore, students with learning difficulties were able to participate with some degree of success in the program. In addition, it established that as long as the teaching strategies recommended by the program are used, a minimum of 250 intensive hours is necessary to achieve spontaneous communication. However, that length of instruction without the recommended strategies does not lead to spontaneous communication. The project also indicated that more than 250 hours with the appropriate strategies enables a higher percentage of students in the classroom to achieve spontaneous communication and enables students with learning challenges to make greater progress.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, more than 250 hours using strategies other than the recommended ones does not lead to spontaneous communication. Fewer than 250 hours, no matter what teaching strategies are used, does not lead to spontaneous communication. These findings led to the hypothesis that teaching strategies are as important as hours of instruction in developing oral proficiency (Germain, Netten, & Séguin, 2002; Netten, 2001; Netten & Germain, 2005).

The implementation of IF in other jurisdictions across Canada raised several issues. First, it underscored ongoing questions about the effectiveness of core French. During the 1970s, Stern had questioned the validity of the core French model (Stern, 1976; Stern, Swain, & Maclean, 1976; Shapson & Kaufman, 1977). In 1987–1988, the Ontario Institute

for Studies in Education (OISE) undertook a study of achievement in the four skill areas that involved 574 students in seven jurisdictions. The results of this study showed that scores at Grade 8 did not vary significantly whether the starting grade was kindergarten, Grade 1, 3, 4, 6, or even Grade 8 (Harley & Lapkin, 1988, as cited in Lapkin, 2008). From 1985 to 1989, Canada's most wide-scale national education research study, the National Core French Study (NCFS), was undertaken (Poyen, 1990). The recommendations of this study proposed a new model for the core program (LeBlanc, 1990). Many jurisdictions developed FSL documents based on this model (Vandergrift, 1995), and commercially published curriculum materials followed. It appeared that the recommendations of the NCFS had made their way into the school system. However, despite these outward signs that core French had become more effective in developing communication skills, doubts still lingered. With the exception of New Brunswick, jurisdictions did not have empirical data on its effectiveness, and in spite of the trend to an earlier start for core programs, no jurisdictions had evaluated results at the end of the elementary grades. New Brunswick data on the oral production of core French students were less than encouraging. The Price Waterhouse Coopers report (2000) on the FSL program review indicated, 'Over the past five years [1994–1999] 25% of core students [who took the oral test] . . . have achieved the proficiency level goals of the FSL programs' (p. 6). In addition, for the years 1998 and 1999, the report states, 'There is a 7% retention rate through Grade 12 by core enrolment in the FSL programs' (Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2000). Across Canada, students dropped the program once they had completed their compulsory years of core French (Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation, 2002; Canadian Parents for French, 2004; Netten, Hewlett, & Riggs, 1999). As almost 15 years had passed since the OISE research and the recommendations of the NCFS, it seemed appropriate that new data on the effectiveness of core French be collected.

Second, the Newfoundland study had demonstrated the effectiveness of IF in one province. Whether the results of this study could be generalized to other jurisdictions was not known. As education in Canada is a provincial matter, many variations in both socio-political and pedagogical factors influence the teaching of FSL. These factors could cause IF to be implemented differently in different jurisdictions. While some variations in implementation might be permitted, the fundamental parameters of IF would have to be respected if similar results were expected.

Third, the end of elementary school, in some jurisdictions, occurs at Grade 5. Interest was also expressed in beginning IF in Grade 4. It was

not certain that the effects of IF would be the same with younger children, given their level of cognitive development. In addition, our classroom observations indicated that students in these grades, particularly boys, take more time to complete a written task; the amount of material that could be presented would therefore be reduced.

A further question was whether the implementation of post-IF after the initial intensive year would result in continued language growth. The program would not have the same amount of time and intensity devoted to it, as the total number of hours devoted to FSL instruction in the middle school years would not change. It was not known whether it would be possible to build on the level of spontaneous communication already achieved by using the same teaching strategies with some intensity but no increase in time.

Based on these considerations, we began our investigations with four hypotheses:

- Hypothesis 1: The core French program does not enable students to learn to communicate spontaneously even after several years of instruction.
- Hypothesis 2: The oral results of an IF program in which students begin in Grade 6 are similar in other jurisdictions to those attained in Newfoundland and Labrador, despite regional variations in the pedagogical and socio-political milieu, provided that the essential parameters of the program are maintained.
- Hypothesis 3: The oral proficiency results of a five-month IF program in which students begin in Grade 4 or 5 are lower than those attained by students starting in Grade 6.
- Hypothesis 4: Participation in post-IF enables students not only to maintain but to continue to develop their oral communication skills.

### Research Design and Methodology

Oral data collected in the participating jurisdictions were used to investigate the four hypotheses. Procedures for the collection of the data reported in this article were similar across jurisdictions and essentially the same as those followed in the Newfoundland study (Germain, Netten, & Movassat, 2004).<sup>6</sup>

In each jurisdiction, once it was decided by the department of education to undertake a pilot project, schools, classes, and teachers were

identified. Responsibility for determining participants lay with the appropriate authorities in the department of education or school districts. Most teachers chosen to participate had previous experience teaching either core French or French immersion. All teachers, except two post-IF teachers, attended five-day training sessions in the theoretical foundations and methodology of IF; all teachers used the same guides. Once teachers were in the classroom, they were visited regularly by the French consultant of the district or jurisdiction to ensure that they were using the methodology of the program. At least one of the co-researchers visited each classroom a minimum of twice during the five-month intensive period to undertake classroom observations of the teaching strategies being used.

The subjects involved in the project were core French students in the participating jurisdictions. Characteristics of the students varied among districts and schools. In many schools, particularly those in the rural areas where there was only one class at the grade level, all students were included in the program; in others, participation in the program was voluntary; and in still others, the school district selected the classes. Consequently, students represented a wide range of ability levels and attitudes towards learning French. It is to be noted that in jurisdictions where FSL instruction is compulsory in the primary and/or elementary grades, many students develop negative attitudes towards learning French, particularly when they appear to make little, if any, progress (student interviews; personal communication with principals, teachers, consultants, and special education personnel between 2002 and 2006; Germain & Netten, 2004a). In addition, many students with learning challenges are present in the classrooms, particularly since these students do not opt for immersion.

An individual oral interview was conducted with each student participating in IF. The instrument used was the New Brunswick Middle School Scale (MSS) of the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI), which was originally developed for this province with the assistance of researchers from the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). The first category (novice) indicates that students have no ability to communicate; the second (basic) represents the beginning of spontaneous communication. The intermediate level represents the ability to communicate spontaneously on a wide variety of topics. We added the numerical values assigned to each level in order to make statistical comparisons of results.<sup>7</sup>

Each jurisdiction chose evaluators from among its own experienced FSL teachers who were not involved in the teaching of IF or post-IF. All the evaluators received at least a two-day training session, given by a

TABLE 1  
Levels of the Middle School Scale with Numerical Equivalents

Level	Numerical Equivalent
Novice low	11
Novice mid	12
Novice high	13
Basic low	14
Basic mid	15
Basic high	16
Intermediate	17
Intermediate +	18
Advanced	19
Advanced +	20

member of the Department of Education of New Brunswick, in the use of the evaluation instrument. Practice interviews were conducted to ensure that evaluators understood how to use the instrument. During the data collection, interviews were recorded on cassettes or by digital means so that they were available for re-listening and study by the provincial, or district, FSL specialist. A large random sample of interviews from each jurisdiction was re-evaluated by one experienced evaluator in order to ensure consistency of results.

Pre-tests were administered in four jurisdictions in early September at the beginning of IF in order to provide information on the level achieved in core French.<sup>8</sup> Post-tests were administered in the same four jurisdictions and five others at the end of the five-month intensive period to provide information on the level attained by IF students in Grades 4, 5, and 6. To date it has been possible to administer post-tests in post-IF in only a small number of classes, situated in two jurisdictions. These interviews were given at the end of the school year, in late May or early June. Since these students were the same ones who participated in IF, longitudinal data are available for only a few students.

An average of class performance was calculated for every classroom in each jurisdiction, as well as a provincial average score. Where pre-tests were available, a gains score was also determined; *t*-tests were performed for all the gains scores. The average score achieved by grade was also calculated, and *t*-tests were performed. In addition, the percentage of students achieving spontaneous communication (14.0 or above) in each grade level was calculated.

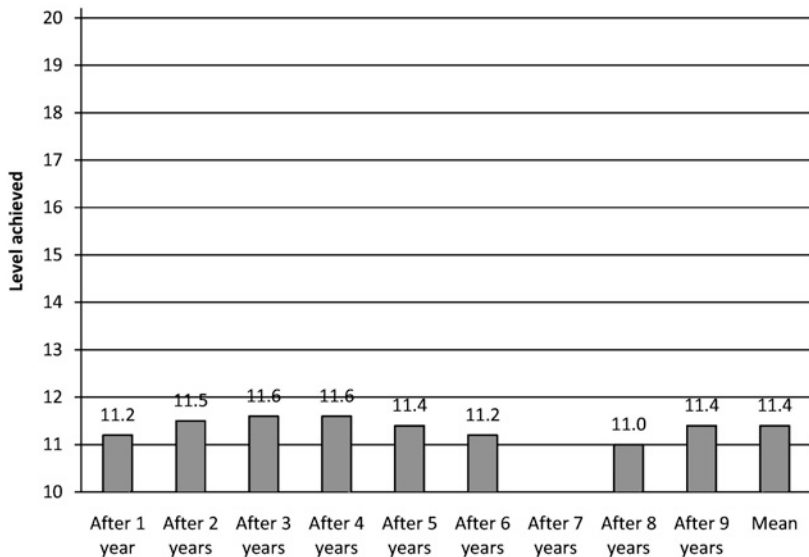
## Results

### *Core French*

Results of pre-tests administered from 2003 to 2008 in four jurisdictions to over 1,600 students indicate that students do not achieve spontaneous communication and that the number of years of instruction in core French does not make a difference. As seen in Figure 1, results of pre-tests administered in Grades 4, 5, 6, 9, and 10 indicate that the number of years of previous instruction does not change the level of oral communication attained.<sup>9</sup> The results for Grades 9 and 10 were from pre-tests done in a case study in which the use of the teaching strategies for IF without intensity was explored. In the context of the IF project, we have not encountered any students who have received core French instruction for seven years.

Given these findings, our first hypothesis was confirmed. Students in core French do not attain spontaneous communication even after several years of instruction. In fact, the findings suggest that there is no increase in development of oral communication as students in core French progress through the grades.

FIGURE 1  
Core French: Level of Oral Communication Achieved, 2003–2008.



*IF beginning in Grade 6*

Classes of IF beginning in Grade 6 were tested from 2003 to 2008 in six jurisdictions across Canada. The average number of intensive hours was 299, close to the recommended 300 hours, although variations existed from 243 to 330 hours. The results of the post-tests administered to 625 participating students indicate that an average level of performance of 14.0 (basic low, or the beginning of spontaneous communication, was achieved), as seen in Figure 2.

Pre-tests were administered to three-quarters of the sample, 476 students in three of these jurisdictions. Results show that the average gain for these students was 2.5 levels on the MSS. In all cases, this gain is significant at  $p = 0.001$  (Table 2). Gains were significant in all classrooms.<sup>10</sup>

These findings indicate that our second hypothesis was also confirmed: the pedagogical aspects of IF are more important than are regional differences in the school system. In all participating jurisdictions, students beginning IF in Grade 6 attained a similar level of oral performance as those in the original study. This level was achieved no matter how many years of previous instruction in core French had been received (Sénéchal, 2005). With five months of instruction in IF, 70% of the students at Grade 6 (437 out of 625) attained a level of basic low or above.

FIGURE 2  
Intensive French: Post-test Scores, Grade 6, 2003–2008.

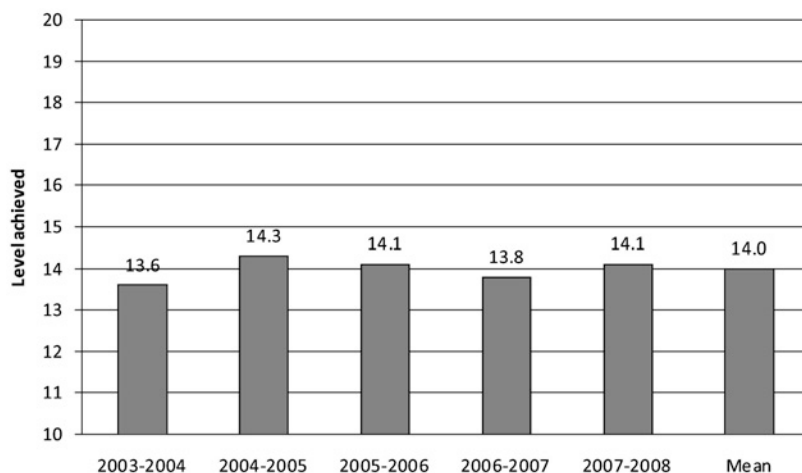


TABLE 2  
Intensive French: Pre- and Post-test Scores, Grade 6, 2003–2008

School year	No. of classes	<i>n</i>	Pre-test	Post-test	Gain	<i>t</i> -test
2003–2004	1	24	11.3	13.6	2.3	***
2004–2005	–	–	–	–	–	–
2005–2006	5	97	11.2	14.1	2.9	***
2006–2007	7	152	11.6	14.4	2.8	***
2007–2008	13	203	11.9	14.1	2.2	***
Total	26	476				
Mean			11.6	14.1	2.5	***

*Note:* Data were obtained from 26 classes in three provinces/territories ( $n = 476$ ). No data were obtained for 2004/2005.

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$

*IF beginning before Grade 6*

From 2003 to 2007, over 1,400 students in three jurisdictions participating in the IF program beginning in Grade 5 were tested. The average number of hours of intensive instruction for these students was 298, with a range from 240 to 363 hours. As seen in Figure 3, the average level attained was

FIGURE 3  
Intensive French: Post-test Scores, Grade 5, 2003–2007.

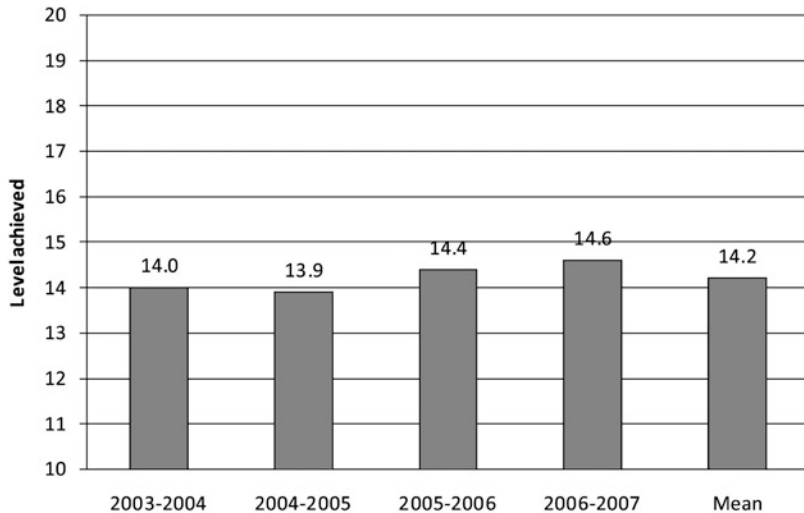


TABLE 3  
Intensive French: Pre- and Post-test Scores, Grade 5, 2003–2007

School year	No. of classes	<i>n</i>	Pre-test	Post-test	Gain	<i>t</i> -test
2003–2004	8	166	11.5	14.2	2.7	***
2004–2005	10	181	11.9	14.3	2.4	***
2005–2006	11	185	11.8	14.6	2.8	***
2006–2007	9	184	11.4	14.4	3.0	***
Total	38	716				
Mean			11.7	14.4	2.7	***

*Note:* Data were obtained from 38 classes in two provinces/territories ( $n = 841$ ).

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

14.2, or basic low. After five months of IF, 80% (1,141 out of 1,431) of the students in Grade 5 attained a level of basic low or above.

Pre-tests were administered to slightly more than half of the sample, 841 students in two of the jurisdictions. As Table 3 shows, when pre- and post-test results are compared, the average gain was 2.7 levels on the MSS; this gain is significant at 0.001. In all classrooms the post-test score was significantly higher than the pre-test score. It is interesting to note that there was no significant difference in average post-test scores for students who had selected to participate in the program and those who for whom participation was compulsory. This is the only cohort for which this factor could be studied.

In another jurisdiction a pilot project in which students began instruction in Grade 4 was undertaken. Students in these classes received an average of 271 hours of intensive instruction; the range of hours was from 260 to 276. Post-test results for nearly 300 students from 2004 to 2007, given in Table 4, show that the average score attained was 14.0. A pre-test was also administered to all students

TABLE 4  
Intensive French: Pre- and Post-test Scores, Grade 4, 2004–2007

School year	No. of classes	<i>n</i>	Pre-test	Post-test	Gain	<i>t</i> -test
2004–2005	4	87	12.0	14.0	2.0	***
2005–2006	6	106	12.0	14.0	2.0	***
2006–2007	6	92	11.4	14.1	2.7	***
Total	16	285				
Mean			11.8	14.0	2.2	***

*Note:* Data were obtained from 16 classes in one province/territory ( $n = 285$ ).

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

participating in this project. The average gains score for the three years, 2.2 levels on the MSS, is significant at the 0.001 level of confidence. All gains scores for all the classrooms were significant. These results indicate that of the students beginning IF in Grade 4, 69% (197 out of 285) attained a level of basic low or above after five months of intensive instruction.

These findings indicate that our third hypothesis was not confirmed. Virtually the same percentage of students who began IF at Grade 4, 5 or 6 attained the same level of oral proficiency, basic low or above.<sup>11</sup>

### *Post-IF*

Testing of the results of post-IF is in its initial stages. Most jurisdictions are just beginning to implement a post-IF program. Until recently, the few students who did not opt for late immersion in the provinces of eastern Canada were integrated into classes with students who had not participated in IF. In Ontario and the West, the number of students in IF has been limited. However, as the number of IF students increases, more students continue in post-IF.

Preliminary data from post-tests administered to date indicate that students not only maintain their oral competence but are able to develop increased spontaneity. As Table 5 shows, students advanced on the average nearly one level (0.8), from 14.3 to 15.1. By the end of Grade 6, after one year of post-IF, students attained an average level of basic mid on the MSS. This gain is significant at the 0.001 level of confidence. After one year of post-IF, the percentage of students

TABLE 5  
Post-intensive French: Pre- and Post-test Scores, Grade 6, 2005–2006

	Class 01 ( <i>n</i> = 16)	Class 02 ( <i>n</i> = 13)	Class 03 ( <i>n</i> = 11)	Class 04 ( <i>n</i> = 13)	Mean ( <i>n</i> = 53)
Pre-test	14.4	13.8	15.0	14.1	14.3
Post-test	15.0	15.4	15.6	14.6	15.1
Gain	0.6	1.6	0.6	0.5	0.8
<i>t</i> -test	**	***	**	*	***

*Note:* Data were obtained from four classes in one province/territory (*n* = 53).

\**p* < 0.05

\*\**p* < 0.01

\*\*\**p* < 0.001

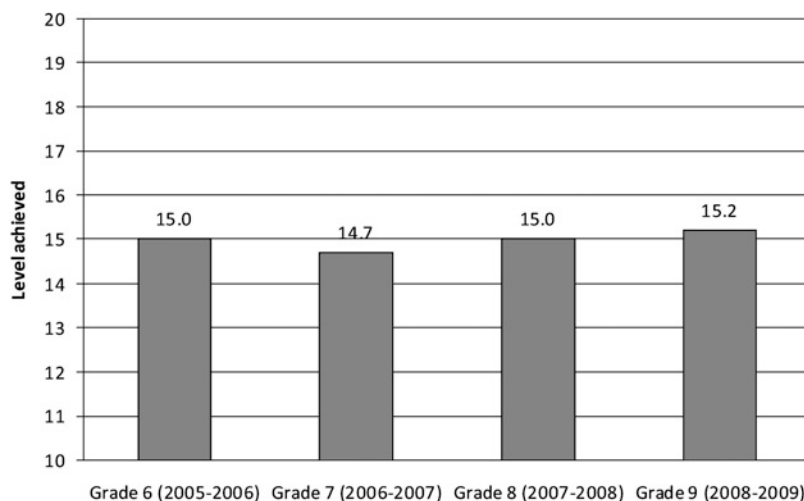
reaching spontaneous communication (basic low or above) increased to 94% (50 out of 53).

These findings tend to confirm our fourth hypothesis: students in post-IF are able to build on the level of spontaneous communication developed in IF and not only maintain but also increase their oral competence.

However, such positive results of post-IF will depend on a supply of teachers who are able to use the teaching strategies of the program effectively. As Figure 4 shows, IF students in Grade 6 in 2005–2006, with a teacher who understood and implemented the teaching strategies effectively, as observed by the researchers in the classroom, reached a particularly high level of achievement, basic mid (15.0). In their first year of post-IF, when the students were in a class with a first-year teacher who had received only a two-day introduction to the teaching strategies of IF, there was a slight regression in their oral competence, to 14.7. In 2007–2008, with a teacher who had participated in a regular teacher preparation session, the students regained their former level of 15.0. In 2008–2009 in Grade 9, after the third year of post-IF, they were beginning to advance beyond basic mid level.<sup>12</sup>

These findings tend to underscore the importance of adequate teacher preparation and support when programs, based on new teaching strategies, are being introduced. It is interesting to note that by the

FIGURE 4  
Intensive French and Post-intensive French: Post-test Scores, 2005–2009.



end of Grade 9, students were at least four levels higher than their peers in the same grade who had participated only in core French. As indicated in Figure 1, whatever the number of years of instruction in core French, students are still in the novice category.

## Discussion

### *Core French*

In the light of the results from IF, it may be suggested that three major factors contribute to the lack of success of core French. The first is lack of sufficient time and intensity. The importance of intensity has been brought into prominence only since the late 1980s and thus its full significance was not available while the NCFS was underway. Before the Lightbown and Spada studies (1989, 1994), attention was directed to the total amount of time devoted to the study of French (Carroll, 1967). The Gillin report (1974), which has influenced time allotments for French in all jurisdictions, indicated that in order to attain a minimal ability in French, a total number of 1,200 hours of instruction was required. However, the grade at which this instruction began and the way in which the hours were distributed across the grades were not major considerations. Although some attempts have been made to apply the concept of intensity to core French, particularly through experiments with blocked scheduling, results have been limited as the total number of instructional hours was not increased and the teaching strategies were not changed (Lapkin, Hart, & Harley, 1998). In general, core French lessons across Canada still vary from 20 to 40 minutes in length (Turnbull, 2000). The participation of students in authentic conversational exchanges and the development of important literacy skills are simply not possible in this time frame.

The second factor is the conditions for learning created by the assumptions underlying the resources used. Stern (1982, 1983), in his model for improving the core French program, recommended the inclusion of a strong, independent experiential, or language use, syllabus, based on his perception of the reasons for the success of immersion programs. Paradis' neurological foundations for bilingualism (Paradis, 1994, 2004) give empirical support to Stern's intuitions. This evidence was not available to the architects of the NCFS. The paradigm underlying the NCFS is that students must acquire explicit knowledge, which, with practice, will eventually become spontaneous communication (Painchaud & Boyko, 1990). Curriculum resources are still

based on this assumption. However, Paradis' theory of the development of implicit competence raises questions about the efficacy of this approach (Paradis, 1994, 2004). Although such an approach proposes communicative activities, such activities generally make reference to or have embedded in them particular structures or grammar, with the assumption that it is necessary to know the structure or rule in order to participate successfully in the activity. This type of presentation tends to distract the teacher from engaging in real communication in order to teach the explicit knowledge that must be practised through the activity. Redefining language teaching as a 'communicative approach' has been primarily a cosmetic change; French remains an object of study. While LeBlanc (1990) spoke of literacy and links between languages, the operationalization of these ideas into teaching strategies for the classroom has been limited. It was as if the process of developing literacy in French would happen by osmosis.

The third factor is the effects of teacher supply, and more importantly, of preparation. The insufficient supply of teachers with appropriate linguistic ability is a problem in some parts of Canada (Carr, 2007). There is also the question of whether teachers receive adequate preparation to teach the programs, and the weight of their adherence to a model of language acquisition based on the need for explicit knowledge about the language in order to communicate orally. Studies have shown that even though the recommendations of the NCFS were met with enthusiasm, teaching practice in the classrooms was slow to respond (Calman & Daniel, 1998; Turnbull, 1999; Turnbull, Bell, & Lapkin, 2002). Limited in-service and classroom support negatively affected the implementation of the new resources.

A further factor contributing to the lack of success of core French programs must also be mentioned. Core French is not the program of choice in many jurisdictions. Therefore, some believe that the number of students in core French classrooms who do not want to be present has a negative effect on the success of the program. Also, in some jurisdictions, it is not necessary for students to pass core French in order to advance to the next grade. Certainly, practices of this nature do not enhance the program.

### *Intensive French*

The highly successful results of IF stem from three major factors that contribute to the development of the ability to communicate spontaneously in French. Each is a necessary but not a sufficient condition

for a program that teaches students how to communicate in a second language.

The first factor is increased time, and specifically the intensity of instruction at the beginning stages of learning French. It is our contention that intensity is particularly important at the beginning of second language instruction in order to allow students to reach a minimal level of spontaneous communication, which increases their self-esteem and gives them a sense of accomplishment and the desire to continue their progress (Germain & Netten, 2004a). Paradis' research also supports the need for intensity; implicit competence, or language habits, can be formed only by the consistent use of the language in a condensed period (Paradis, 2004).

The second factor is the pedagogy used in the classroom. Our research has shown that intensity alone does not lead to spontaneous communication. Intensity allowed students to advance only 1.5 to 2 levels on the MSS; the use of the recommended teaching strategies was also essential to reaching the goals of the program (Netten & Germain, 2007a). A case study reported earlier demonstrated that use of appropriate teaching strategies enabled students to achieve gains of two to three or more levels on the MSS (Netten & Germain, 2005). The use of teaching strategies that encourage the development of implicit competence before explicit competence and literacy-based strategies that link speaking, reading, and writing are crucial to the success of the program (Germain & Netten, 2005; Netten & Germain, 2004a, 2007a). Two theses undertaken in two jurisdictions studied the relative importance of the teaching strategies as compared to the activities proposed by the curriculum resources. Both theses concluded that the teaching strategies had a more direct effect on the level of student achievement attained than did the choice of activities (Groulx, 2005; Goguillon, 2006). These strategies also reinforce the perception of language as a means of communication.

The third factor is the attention given to adequate teacher preparation. Teachers were prepared both psychologically and pedagogically to undertake the program through specific training in both the theoretical foundations and the teaching strategies of the program before embarking on teaching IF. Once in the classroom, they received further support from their district FSL specialist, who also was thoroughly familiar with the program.

The positive effect of these factors on the learning of FSL has been demonstrated by the first year of implementation of IF as the obligatory program for all children in Grade 5 not participating in immersion in New Brunswick. Nearly 60% of the stratified random sample of more

than 900 students assessed after five months attained basic low, the beginning of spontaneous communication, or above (Netten & Germain, 2009). All anglophone school districts were represented in the sample, and all but four teachers were first-year teachers of the program. This result is particularly interesting given that for the past 15 years, about 25% of the small number of students who chose to be tested have been able to attain spontaneous communication by Grade 10 (Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2000).

It should be noted that after five months of IF, students who began IF in Grades 4 and 5 achieved the same level of oral proficiency, an average score of basic low, or beginning spontaneous communication, as students who began in Grade 6. This finding appears to be related to the nature of oral competence. Several researchers (for example, Genesee, 1987) have indicated that the development of oral ability is not related to IQ and that it can be achieved by students with a wide variety of ability levels. Therefore, it appears that IF can work successfully with students in the elementary grades for the development of spontaneous oral communication.

It is also interesting to note the higher percentage of students achieving basic low or above in Grade 5 compared with that in Grade 4 or 6, despite large numbers of students with learning difficulties in the Grade 5 classes. This result was probably due to the consistent use of the recommended teaching strategies. Classroom observations undertaken by the researchers support this conclusion (Netten & Germain, 2007a). Much more ongoing support to implement appropriate teaching strategies in the classroom was given to the teachers in the jurisdictions concerned than was the case in the other jurisdictions.

#### *Post-IF*

The results for post-IF indicate that the teaching strategies of IF can continue to be effective even without intensity *once spontaneous communication has been achieved*. Preliminary results indicate a high level of probability that students will be able to continue to develop oral competence through participation in post-IF. However, the findings also indicate that results are influenced by a number of factors, in particular the teaching strategies used. Results from testing in all participating jurisdictions in the next few years will assist in establishing appropriate expectations. In general, at this time it may be hypothesized that students may reach the basic high level by the end of Grade 9. Students who continue IF in secondary school might reach intermediate or above by the end of Grade 12. These predictions will

have to be verified by testing undertaken in the next few years and in light of the population that remains in the post-IF classes. The longitudinal example presented here indicates that teacher preparation and use of appropriate strategies will be important factors.

### Limitations of the study

There are limitations to the studies undertaken in the context of the implementation of IF in Canada. First, it was not always possible to administer pre-tests in all classrooms, due to the reluctance in some jurisdictions to permit testing of students. Second, the characteristics of the student population included in the sample, which was necessarily composed of real classrooms, was not controlled. Results reported here included classes with varying percentages of students who chose to enrol in the program and who were required to do so. Third, the proportion of children with learning challenges in each classroom also varied. Fourth, teachers received different levels of support, another factor that could not be controlled. Fifth was the perennial difficulty of ensuring reliable oral interviews. Due to the training of the evaluators and the development of precise criteria for each level, inter-rater reliability, as determined by the reliability studies undertaken, was not a problem. However, consistency in the administration of the interview was more difficult to attain. Some variation still exists in the way in which evaluators conducted the interviews, posing questions in such a way that some students had more opportunity to speak spontaneously.

### Further research

Continued research in several areas is warranted. Some areas that require further investigation are

- The importance of teaching strategies and the relationship between the use of the strategies and the need for intensity. In particular, the question of whether the teaching strategies without intensity can have positive results for core programs needs further study. Currently, classroom action research is underway in one jurisdiction to determine the effects of the strategies alone. Preliminary results have shown that use of the strategies without intensity improves attitudes but

contributes to only very modest gains in linguistic competence. A preliminary case study in another jurisdiction has indicated that the use of these strategies with some intensity but no increase in time may be more effective with students at the secondary level.

- The effects of post-IF on the continued development of oral proficiency. In particular, it will be important to establish whether it is possible to use the teaching strategies of IF without intensity to advance oral competence once students have reached a level of spontaneous communication (basic low or above).
- The results of FSL instruction on students with different types of learning challenges. Much more information is needed on appropriate interventions to assist students with learning difficulties. With the participation of all students in New Brunswick in either immersion or IF, there is now a real opportunity to determine which measures are most helpful to enable students with various types of learning challenges to develop communicative competence in French.
- The developmental progression of communicative competence in FSL. In particular, the question of whether second language oral and written competence develop in a linear fashion from grade to grade needs exploration. It appears that second language development is not linear and does not necessarily advance in regular increments as students progress through the grades (Mouddane, 2005; Netten, Noonan, O'Reilly, & Tapp, 1997). While explicit knowledge about a second language may develop in this fashion, it does not appear that communicative language ability develops in the same way.

A larger question also requires attention. Recently in Canada, attention has been given to sensitizing teachers to the role of literacy strategies in FSL teaching (for example, Cogswell & Kristmanson, 2007). However, there is still much more research to be done on the development of literacy skills in a communicative context and the relationship between literacy skills in L1 and L2. Much of the literacy material available in FSL classrooms is adapted directly from French first language approaches; no adjustments for developing literacy in a second language have been made. In addition, there is little attempt to integrate the curriculum goals of English and French language arts for students who are studying both languages at the same time in the same grade. Much more attention needs to be paid to the pedagogical

implications of learning to read, write, and communicate in two languages in the school system.

A further issue not directly related to research but of considerable importance is the need for faculties of education to begin to include preparation for teaching IF classes in their courses.

### **The future of intensive French**

IF has been in the schools now for 11 years, as it was first implemented in Newfoundland and Labrador in 1998. It has grown steadily and is currently implemented in all jurisdictions, except Quebec. More than 22,000 students have been enrolled in IF since its inception. In Newfoundland and Labrador it is now an alternative program, while in New Brunswick it has become the program for all students not in immersion.

From the results of the research it can be expected that IF will be successful in increasing the oral competence of the great majority of students in Grades 4, 5, and 6. Jurisdictions are gradually showing a greater interest in the program, as it may realistically be predicted that, as teachers become more familiar with the strategies, 70% of participants will be able to communicate spontaneously in French. IF has also had positive effects on attitudes to, and motivation for, learning French, as well as increasing self-esteem with respect to learning French (Germain & Netten, 2004a; personal communication with principals, parents, teachers, and consultants in all jurisdictions, 2002–2008). Post-IF also appears to have the potential to enable students to maintain and increase that competence. In addition, IF is already having a positive impact on other programs. In many areas where IF has been implemented, there is a substantial increase in enrolments in late immersion programs. Enrolment in late immersion in Newfoundland and Labrador increased by 30% after the implementation of IF, the increase, each year, being proportional to the increase in the IF program. The innovative oral teaching strategies are also being used to improve the communication skills of students in both early and late immersion programs (Cogswell, 2008). Intensive English based on our model, which is different from intensive English in Quebec (Germain, Lightbown, Netten, & Spada, 2004), was introduced in 2006 with two classes. It expanded to 8 and then 18 classes, and in 2009 will be an alternative program for francophone school districts in New Brunswick where the achievement of spontaneous communication in English has not been possible. It may be concluded that IF will make a useful contribution to the attainment of linguistic duality.

The federal government has established as a goal for Canada that 50% of graduates from high school should be able to function effectively in their second language by 2013 (Government of Canada, 2003). In order to achieve this outcome for anglophone students, the federal action plan emphasizes the renewal of immersion and gives some impetus to the expansion of IF through recommendations for improvement of the core French program. However, these actions are not enough to enable us to meet the goal in the time frame given. The expectations of the plan were overly optimistic, as it was assumed that core French made a much more positive contribution to the development of bilingualism than is actually the case. As the NCFS did not evaluate the core program empirically and the effects of the NCFS were not sufficiently evaluated empirically, the real state of core French was seriously underestimated. Without a renewal of core French, the current plan, *Road map for Canada's linguistic duality 2008–2013: Acting for the future*, will not have any greater success for anglophones (Government of Canada, 2008). The actual situation is such that as long as the vast majority of students studying FSL are enrolled in the regular core French program as it currently exists, Canada must resign itself to never achieving widespread linguistic duality. Immersion responds to the needs of about 15% of the FSL student population, and enrolments are increasing. However, immersion does not respond well to the needs of all students; approximately 20% of students drop the program before Grade 5, and very few students with learning challenges participate (Government of New Brunswick, 2005). For the majority of students who wish to be able to communicate in French without learning their subject matter in a second language, a much more effective form of core French is required. The goal of linguistic duality cannot be achieved without a fundamental change in the school system.

Attempting to introduce change into the school system is fraught with challenges. In addition to the pedagogical problems that confront any attempt to put new ideas into practice in the schools, obstacles surface from all stakeholders. FSL instruction is not a priority in most jurisdictions in the country. Geographically, there is greater support for the concept of English–French bilingualism in the Atlantic provinces than in the West, where a more plurilinguistic society is the norm. There is a limited interest on the part of some ministries and school districts in the achievement of communicative competence in French for the majority of anglophone students; English literacy is seen as deserving more emphasis. Little understanding exists in the school system of the concept of biliteracy and the complementarity of literacies that can be achieved through learning to

communicate effectively in two languages. Although scholars discuss the positive relationships between L1 and L2, many myths prevail in the thinking of parents, teachers, and administrators. There is also the considerable weight of the status quo. In some cases ministries, having already spent large sums, are hesitant to replace the resources purchased. There is also the heavy burden of a generation of Canadians who have been conditioned to think that to be effective FSL instruction must begin in the primary grades, or that only immersion can produce students who can function in French.

Just as attempting to change the school system is a formidable undertaking, attaining linguistic duality in Canada is a daunting enterprise. The crucial question is whether those responsible for FSL education have the conviction and the courage to proceed with the substantial changes necessary to improve the learning situation for the 85% of students who are in core French. The real future of IF lies in the response to this challenge.

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### Notes

- 1 Intensive French (1975) and intensive English (1976) were first introduced as an experiment in the Mille-Iles School District on the north shore of Montreal, based on the organization of the *classes d'accueil* for non-francophone immigrants. The experiment compared results from

Grades 1 and 6 and concluded that Grade 6 was the more propitious time for this type of instruction (Billy, 1980).

- 2 It is interesting to compare these results with Bulgaria, where intensive instruction in French is offered for a full year at Grade 8 before students enter a late immersion program (called DNL, *enseignement des disciplines non linguistiques*). This program has been in operation since 1950. Students catch up in all subjects in the following year and a half. Participation in the program is competitive. (R. Hitov, personal communication, October 2008.)
- 3 There are two major components of teaching: teaching activities and teaching strategies. Teaching activities and their sequence are related to the curriculum and reflect the goals of the program. They can be found in resources and form the content of a particular lesson (Pambianchi, 2003). However, the way in which the same activity unfolds in a classroom varies according to the teaching strategies used (Groulx, 2005). Strategies may be distinguished from activities by their dynamic nature; they constitute the way in which the teacher interacts with the students during the activities and form the instructional part of teaching.
- 4 Teaching guides that are used across Canada have been written for IF in Grade 5/6 and for post-IF from Grade 6/7 to Grade 11. A guide for pre-IF in Grade 4/5 is in preparation. In order to preserve the research integrity of the project, these guides are not sold but are distributed through departments of education.
- 5 When we began our research in Grade 5 with a greater number of students with learning challenges in the program, we established a minimum for the schools of 300 intensive hours to ensure that most students reach a level of spontaneous communication.
- 6 Evaluation of written production was also undertaken in all the classrooms where oral post-tests were given.
- 7 Direct comparisons cannot be made between the New Brunswick scale and the Newfoundland scale. The OPI was adapted by Newfoundland and Labrador to assess the oral proficiency of students in the province at the end of secondary school. Based on the percentage allotted to oral evaluation in school leaving examinations, numerical levels were assigned to each of the categories. These values, and the definitions of the categories, while similar, are not the same as those used in New Brunswick.
- 8 We do not identify provinces and territories in the results of testing with the exception of New Brunswick, which we have identified in certain cases with the authorization of the department. However, individual jurisdictions received their own results and discussed them with the researchers.
- 9 The number of years of French instruction before a specific grade varies among jurisdictions; a pre-test at Grade 6 could be preceded by one to

- five years of instruction, depending on whether students began in kindergarten, Grade 1, Grade 4, or Grade 5. Therefore, data are presented according to the number of years of instruction received prior to the pre-test.
- 10 No results are available for 2004–2005 because the evaluator accidentally used the OPI interview instead of the MSS.
  - 11 It is interesting to note that the results achieved at Grade 4, 5, and 6 for written production are significantly different. On average, students in Grade 4 are able to write a composition similar to that of Quebec francophones in Grade 1; those in Grade 5 are able to write a composition at a level similar to Quebec francophones between Grades 2 and 3; and those in Grade 6 are able to write a composition similar to the same comparison group between Grades 3 and 4.
  - 12 In this jurisdiction, the confidentiality protocol does not permit us to receive the names of the code numbers for students. Thus, no *t*-test can be performed.

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