



# Inclusion in French Immersion Kindergarten

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Traditionally, when many people think of the French Immersion program they tend to think of students with neurodiversity (i.e. ADHD, autism, Oppositional Defiance Disorder etc.) as not a good fit. This year I have the pleasure of teaching a French Immersion kindergarten class with a variety of students who have a wide range of needs. The students in kindergarten attend a full day at our school and spend half the time in the kindergarten class and the other half of the day in the Flight program with an Early Childhood Educator. In both classes, students are immersed in the French language with songs, daily interactions and activities that help them to learn the language. Teaching kindergarten in French Immersion is an extraordinary experience, in that the students often come into the class knowing no French at all and by the end of the year are able to listen, comprehend and produce French words independently.

**O**ur class has a vast range of students who have neurodiversity. Several students use AAC (Augmentative Alternative Communication) devices to communicate their thoughts and needs throughout the day. For some children this is their sole way to communicate with their peers and teachers. It is a true wonder to watch as students use these devices to communicate with their peers and also to learn a new language at the same time. As we are learning a new concept in our classroom (i.e. colour, days of the week, animals etc.) we are able to put new words in French on the AAC device so that the students who are using them have access to the new vocabulary in French.

Many of our students who are neurodiverse also have additional support in the classroom from either a TABT (Therapeutic Assistant for Behaviour Therapy) or an EA (Educational Assistant) who work with them throughout the day to aid in their learning. These educators are essential in the development of the French language with these students as they are able to offer additional practice of the target language, break down concepts into smaller chunks and provide one on one support during instructional time. These people are instrumental in assuring that the students are able to achieve their true potential.

Kindergarten students who attend school in Alberta have a curriculum that

is covered throughout the year. This includes: numeracy, literacy, science, social studies, physical education, art and physical education. The is designed to be delivered in French and offers the students many hands-on experiences and opportunities to learn new words, phrases and to develop their understanding of the language. It is essential when planning for our learning that we make the learning hands on, engaging and sensory friendly to help each student engage with the curriculum in a meaningful way.

When planning out the classroom, we employ a variety of strategies to aid all our students in their learning. By turning off the overhead fluorescent lights off, having soft lighting and soft quiet music playing throughout the day, we strive to lessen sensory overload and create a calm learning space. In our school we also have a sensory room that students have access to and can request if they are feeling that they need a break for the classroom. The sensory room has a variety of resources that help students to regulate their bodies and get ready for learning. There are standing stationary bikes, fidget toys,

puzzles, quiet music, calm lighting and much more. This room is an essential space for students with neurodiversity as the classroom can often be an active, busy and loud place and they need a place that gives them a moment of calm and then they are ready to head back to the classroom for their learning.

Through my career I have taught a variety of grades in the French immersion program and I am happy to see a shift in our perspective when looking at students who have neurodiversity. Instead of taking the stance that maybe students who have neurodiversity do not belong in the program, we are now asking ourselves "How can we accommodate the program to make it more accessible for all?" We know how beneficial it is for anyone to learn new languages and this includes students who may have a variety of needs. By asking ourselves some tough questions about our programming and how we deliver our program we can open doors that may have previously been closed to students who have exceptional needs and welcome them into a world of learning! ■

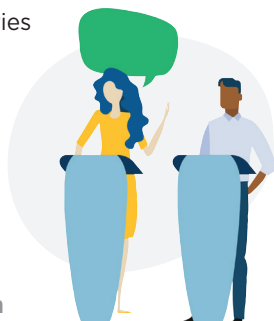
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