**The Synergy of Language, Culture and Identity: Understanding and Developing Identity in French Immersion Students with Dr. Sylvie Roy, Professor and Researcher at the Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary**

On May 3, 2017, AMDI invited school teams (school leaders, student services staff and teachers) and divisional teams (superintendents, curriculum consultants and trustees) to attend this conference with Dr. Sylvie Roy in association with its AGM. As it was open to all FI partners, English was the language of presentation. The goal of the conference was twofold: understanding the dynamics of supporting and developing the identity of a French Immersion student, and the participant’s role to facilitate the development of this identity and to support your school community. The day included:

Sandra Drzystek, Agente de liaison, Bureau de l'éducation française, and Huguette Gérardy, Conseillère, Bureau de l'éducation française, presented the Renewed Vision of the French Immersion Program in Manitoba and Priorities stemming from the results of the French Language Education Review , and student identity as a French language learner and speaker as defined by the new curriculum.

Dr. Sylvie Roy, Professor and Researcher at the Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary, then presented research and led discussion with a focus on the identity of a French Immersion student. Dr. Sylvie Royis a faculty member at the Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary. She has worked in the fields of second language learning and teaching and sociolinguistics for change for more than 15 years. The contexts of her studies have been in French immersion and bilingual schools. She teaches in the Faculty of Education preparing French teachers for FSL, French immersion and francophone schools. She also teaches courses in the Graduate program such as Language and Power and Discovering Bilingual Identity. She is the past Chair of the Language and Literacy Educational Area in her faculty.

Discussions focused on questions such as the following:

* How does one define the identity of a FI student?
* How do FI students define themselves? What does it mean to be a bilingual/multilingual student?
* How do we support students in the development of confidence and pride in French language competency?
* How does one “create” a school culture to support a FI student’s identity? What does this look like in a single/dual track school?
* What is the role of the teacher? The school administrator? The student service team? The student?
* How do you know you have successfully implemented a school culture that celebrates the identity of a FI student?

Out of this, we met in tables to focus our attention on the following …

* Name 3 actions that need to be done and recognize the importance of those actions.
* Who is involved of changing the culture? Identify the stakeholders.
* How will you know that it worked?

With my apologies for any errors that may have occurred in the reporting of ideas from the table discussions to this format, here are the results of those discussions:

**TABLE 1:**

**Context**: Beausejour FI Dual track school (3/4 of the population is in the FI Program; ¼ of the population is in the English Program, which also includes a high number of EAL students).

**Plurilinguism:** All students can identify the positive power of language and culture.

**Where does the French Immersion Program fit in?** Dialogue with students

**School Culture:** What is it?

* We are a dual track school. We work jointly as a team, primarily in English.
* Actions: Move the French Language beyond the classroom.
  + Bilingual bulletin boards, announcements, assemblies.
  + More French cultural activities such as plays, music, artist-in-the-schools, speakers.
  + French speaking adults be better models for students, and each other.

**Action Plan:**

1. Presence of French language in various activities and throughout the school

* Collaboration between ÉBEYS and ÉESS (the two schools)
* School Tea
* Assembly, concerts: more encouragement, always thinking of French
* Sharing of Activities

1. Visibility and signage

* Newsletter, posters, information sharing with parents
* CPF
* PD and Resources

1. Staff members AND students ALL have understanding of F.I. and its philosophy.

**TABLE 2:**

**Actions:**

1. Find out what interests students. What do they need/want/like?
2. Give teachers opportunities to enrich their own cultural experiences, allowing them to share/pass cultural references on to students. Professional development on francophone culture is an expectation.
3. Collaboration with immersion teachers from other schools: sharing experiences, strategies, what worked, etc.

**Who is responsible?**

1. Class - Teachers/Students
2. School - Administration/Committees
3. Division - Superintendent, Trustees, School Board
4. Community - Parents/Family

**How will it succeed?**

1. Students, teachers and school administrators find what interests them, and engage without pressure.
2. Evidence gathered supports the idea that French Culture is strong, present, appreciated and engaging.
3. French Culture is sustainable and natural
4. Teachers visit other teachers: collaboration is valued, resources and ideas are shared.
5. Une école où:
   1. Chaque enseignant se voit comme un enseignant de langue.
   2. On fait vivre la langue et on engage la communauté francophone! (Les arts actuels, la vie sociale actuelle, les citoyens francophones and bilingues actuels.)
   3. On crée des ressources pédagogiques au lieu de les traduire.

**Table 3:**

**What is working?**

1. Inner core - What we are now: Focus on relationships, acceptance, embracing diversity (UDL in all programs), welcoming, active university focus (four times more than DSFM = 20,000 plus who speak French.
2. Secondary circle - What is working: Big Picture philosophy with shared leadership, the right people “on the bus” (accountability, shared passion)
3. Embraced by –
   1. Pride and joy,
   2. spirit that is collaborative, creative, critical, communicative
   3. fostering passionate and confident learners. Where we want to go/be.
4. Foundation of …
   1. Giving: Student voice … celebrating and supporting social justice, providing tools and language opportunities in authentic and meaningful ways.
   2. Modeling shared leadership: sharing the voice – students and staff are heard.
   3. Partnerships with parents – inviting parents to “celebrate”with us/shared videos in French, being vulnerable enough to share your language story, French centres.

**Table 4:**

**Action Plan:**

1. School leadership

* Shared responsibility – admin, teachers, students
* Valuing language and program

1. Develop and explore our individual sense of identity or identities.

* How do students see themselves
* Shared responsibility for language learning – student voice and reflection
* Collaboration – understanding, knowing, accepting strengths/challenges and working together

1. Understand the continuum of language development – not the expectation of speaking like a native speaker – validation through positive reinforcement.

**Table 5:**

1. Open conversation with staff and community
2. Establish SMART Goals
3. Break down division of tasks
4. Little things make a difference:

* Announcements (students)
* National anthem
* Welcome/Bienvenue
* Emails
* Consistency
* Posters
* Clubs
* Coaching Staff

**Table 6:**

1. Créer des occasions pour permettre aux élèves de communiquer en français. (i.e. échange culturel)
2. Créer des espaces où les enfants peuvent socialiser en français. (visuels aux murs, musique française, etc.).
3. Créer une liste de ressources communautaires disponibles dans nos communautés où la langue française est utilisée.
4. Les enfants vont s’amuser grâce à la langue française. **Actions spécifiques:**
5. Une sortie culturelle
6. Visual
7. Improvisation/drame
8. Chansons
9. Livres francophones
10. La joie
11. Première année
12. Ensemble: chanson d’école
13. Rayonner
14. Découvrir: référent, culture, langue
15. Parler/partager, encourager, explorer réfléchir
16. Vision: embrasser/opportunité avec passion, une découverte personnelle continue, le monde est notre classe, passion pour la langue et la culture

**Table 7:**

**L’école est au centre et est entourée de la culture qui …**

1. Est inclusive
   1. Occasion de promotion
   2. Discussions with students, successes, concerns, goals, actions plans to realize goals (next steps)
2. A des clubs, comités (inclusifs) : Varied activities to provide authentic learning experiences in the language and immersed in culture
3. Comprend ces célébrations de la diversité : Occasions de reconnaissance et de valorisation de l’expérience d’immersion
4. Évolue : Modèles de la langue; plus d’outils langagiers
5. A des visuels en français : Partnerships between language programs: “appreciation”, immersion, FCC, DSFM, etc.
6. Tient compte de son état comme école de double-voie, minorité immersion
   1. Teacher dialogue re: school goals
   2. Parent input: in school goals
   3. Création de context social ainsi qu’académique
7. Tient compte de son milieu urbain
   1. Nouvelles stratégies d’enseignement
   2. Présentations by former immersion graduates and teachers – lessons learned

**Table 8:**

**Action plan**

1. The French Immersion community needs opportunities to reflect on their identities.
2. Increase the number of activities to strengthen the links between the three FI schools.
3. Possibly a float in the Selkirk parade,
4. conversation-a-thon,
5. BBQ,
6. Théâtre
7. FI group on Outlook.
   1. Support collaboration on themes, etc.

On behalf of the Association manitobaine des directrices et directeurs des écoles d’immersion, I hope that the thoughts and ideas presented above may be combined, reassessed and extrapolated in order to further the discussions and to develop an action plan. We are extremely grateful for Dr. Sylvie Roy, her expertise and her ability to engage us in practical ideas with a research base.

Robert Campbell

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