



CPF *Canadian Parents for French*
New Brunswick

Homework in French? How do I help if I don't speak French?

by Pat Thibodeau

French Immersion parents can help with homework, too. The difference in language can be daunting, but the purpose of the homework is the same: independent work to practice skills already learned, to do research for a writing assignment or to study for a test. How can a parent help with these?

The attitude of the child to homework is influenced by the parents. If homework is only seen as an arduous task, a punishment for not finishing in class, it becomes a negative experience. The parents' responsibility is to encourage a positive attitude to homework.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO...

- Discuss with the teacher and the child the reason for homework. Most teachers will have an information session at the beginning of the year. Ask what to expect and how much. Many major assignments are planned for a specific time of the year.
- Provide a quiet, well-lighted place to work, away from distractions.
- Treat homework as the child's responsibility, with yourself as advisor or consultant, not an answer machine or proof-reader. Try to learn to direct the child to a dictionary or other reference instead of just providing the answers yourself.
- Discuss with your child, lay down and **STICK TO** rules and consequences for poorly done or undone work. Know the teacher's rules and help to reinforce them.
- Set a regular period of homework time.
- Have your child show you, regularly, materials like notebooks, worksheets, etc. and **ESPECIALLY** quizzes and tests. Develop with the child a system for remembering

assignments and test dates so you can both know what is in the future.

BE POSITIVE. Let your child know that your role is not to police homework, but to help him or her complete assignments on time and done according to directions.

For a more detailed outline of how to deal with homework, contact the CPF office for Pat's "French Immersion Parents Can Do Homework, Too!" 1992

Parents with children in French Immersion who are concerned about the development and maintenance of their English language skills can be reassured on two points: students in Manitoba learn to read first in their first language, then in their second; studies on students in Winnipeg have shown that French Immersion students have better English language skills, on the average, than their peers in the English/Basic French programs (tests of students in Winnipeg School Division in 1989). These results are matched by studies conducted in Alberta and Saskatchewan schools. "Students who wrote both English and French language arts tests consistently obtained higher scores on the English language arts tests than the students who received instruction in English only." Recent national tests of reading and writing skills showed that those in second-language programs had a higher level of comprehension and expression than those in English-only programs. In Immersion schools, English language skills are taught intensively in blocks comprising approximately 25% of the school day. During this time, reading, writing, grammar, and spelling figure largely in the curriculum, due to the concern of parents for their children's English language skills .

What can parents do? Read, read, and then read some more, is the advice of the immersion teachers. Parents who read to their children at home enrich their children's vocabulary, as well as improve their comprehension skills. They are also giving their children the clear message that reading is an important part of their lives.

Why are parents so concerned about English language arts? In part, (a minority) they may be unsure of the future of the program and wish their children to have the "right stuff" to change into an English program. By far the majority are those who want their children's education in their first language to be of high calibre, as well as wanting them to have the advantage of learning English and French in their school program of studies.