

Open Letter – FSL Programming in NB – Nov. 1, 2022

The Second Language Research Institute of Canada (L₂RIC) in the Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick (UNB) is directly involved in research and teaching in the area of second and additional language teaching and learning. We are committed to the promotion of research and teaching that uphold effective and evidence-based second/additional language pedagogy.

On April 12th L₂RIC sent a letter to the New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) as a response to the *2021 Review of the Official Languages Act of New Brunswick: Report on Second Language Learning* as well as the March 30th announcement regarding the proposed “FSL Framework.” In light of the most recent announcement, we feel it is important to make L₂RIC’s stance public. The following summarizes key messages communicated in our recent letter to the Minister of Education.

Although we supported a number of the recommendations in the *Commissioners’ Report*, we had concerns about the enactment of recommendation 18: “That EECD create an authentic, immersive, language-rich FSL learning program for all students.” (p. 35). Our concerns relate to the degree that such a program will be successful in meeting the needs of a broad range of students. We also assumed that any new “FSL framework” would be based on the “six pillars” of effective second language programs— frequency, intensity of time, extensiveness of time, meaningful communication, motivation, teacher effectiveness, Dicks, 2021— in essence, some form of immersion.

To build a new FSL program from scratch is a monumental undertaking, even if one were to follow the Commissioners’ caution for “well-established and reasonable timelines that minimize disruptions and instability” (p. 39). The recent announcement of the full implementation in 2023 seems not only difficult to envision, but entirely unreasonable. This would once again be very disruptive to the education system, especially on the heels of the pandemic and its ongoing challenges for educators. Additionally, uprooting and reinventing established FSL programs like French immersion is a risky, challenging, and unnecessary endeavour. The assumption that another program already exists (e.g., dual-language immersion models from the US) and that it could be easily redesigned for our system demands critical consideration. We know that there are inherent dangers in implementing unknown or unresearched programs or programs designed for different second language contexts and/or purposes.

As researchers at L₂RIC and as teacher educators in the Faculty of Education at UNB, we promote innovative evidence-based approaches to FSL teaching and learning. We support well-researched and thoughtful initiatives that enhance FSL learning and promote bilingualism and multilingualism in our province. However, we are deeply troubled with the most recent announcement to implement one new FSL program for all in 2023. Our concerns relate not only to the compressed timeline, which makes the development of any sound program practically impossible, but also to the potential elimination French immersion, which is the only FSL program that has proven results with respect to FSL learning.