



Relationships are Key:

Engaging French-language learners and stakeholders through personal connections and positive environments



Synopsis

Discover what some researchers, teachers, students and administrators say about learning environments in which positive relationships strengthen student engagement. Find out how some educators nurture relationships with parents and other stakeholders.



Before Viewing

Reflecting on current practice

1. How do French-language learners in my class, school or district/board feel about their relationships with teachers and other school staff? How do I know?
 2. How have I created a learning environment that supports student engagement?
 3. What other relationships have I cultivated to enhance student engagement in learning French?
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During Viewing

Making connections

1. Are the research findings presented from *Qu'as-tu fait à l'école aujourd'hui? / What did you do in school today?* (2012) applicable to French-language learners in my class, school or district/board?
 2. Which of the strategies mentioned would I like to incorporate into my practice to increase student engagement?
 3. How do the practices shared regarding stakeholder engagement compare with my own?
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After Viewing

Moving forward

1. How could I help students develop a feeling of belonging to a community of French-language learners within the school? And also beyond the school?
2. How might I strengthen my relationships with students?
3. How might I strengthen relationships between students?



Going Deeper

“Students who perceive their relationship with their teacher as positive, warm and close are motivated to be more engaged in school and to improve their academic achievement.” (Hughes, Cavell, & Jackson, 1999)

– Gallagher (2013)

“As soon as students are able to communicate, they understand the value of learning another language, develop a sense of identity, have a sense of belonging and see themselves as plurilingual individuals.” [loose translation] (Manitoba Education, n.d.-c)

– Bureau de l'Éducation et Enseignement supérieur Manitoba (2014)

Research indicates that a sense of belonging is a fundamental human need (Deci and Ryan).

Participants in this project create supportive learning environments by making an effort to really get to know their students, to take time to listen attentively, and to share personal stories so students get to know them. They use their tone of voice, sense of humour, caring facial expressions and welcoming body language to convey to students that they care about each one. A feeling of mutual respect between students and their French teacher, and students and their peers, enables learning to take place. Participants also emphasized that being passionate about learning French and communicating this passion helps engage students in learning.

Engaging learning environments are responsive to students' varying needs for structure or independence. Teachers' strategic use of routines and clear criteria for tasks can be combined with student choices (such as activity, grouping and mode of communication). Teaching and learning opportunities are organized in a way that ensures smooth transitions and ease of access to required materials. Educators also help students feel a sense of belonging to a community of French-language learners within the school and beyond. Participants shared how opportunities for students to use French in authentic situations, such as discussing books with the librarian, or interacting with community group members in French, helped students develop confidence and enhanced their engagement.

Through the use of technology, students are able to connect with other French-language learners and Francophones anywhere in the world. Real or virtual excursions help students understand that learning French enables them to develop relationships and to participate actively in Francophone cultures.

By involving families in planning and carrying out special cultural events for French-language learners, educators develop positive relationships beyond the classroom. Participants communicate regularly with parents in order to share ways in which families can support engagement in French, and to inform them about what students are learning in French class and about extra-curricular opportunities that exist to support engagement in French. Social activities in French, such as film screenings, provide opportunities to strengthen relationships between families and educators. Knowing their parents value learning French and have positive relationships with their French teachers enhances engagement for students.

Several participants discussed the benefits of cultivating partnerships with post-secondary institutions. Developing relationships between staff and students in secondary and post-secondary institutions facilitates professional learning, curriculum development, and meaningful, authentic interactions in French between students at both levels.

Students commented that they enjoyed learning French when their teachers encouraged them to work with their classmates, provided opportunities to interact with Francophones, and made them feel that it is acceptable to make errors.

“Au niveau du conseil scolaire, on organise des événements en partenariat avec Canadian Parents for French.”

– Julie Bertrand, Teacher and District French Facilitator, British Columbia

“Dans cette classe, on est plus à l’aise et on parle français plus facilement. Quand je suis dans ce cours et dans cette atmosphère je suis vraiment encouragé de continuer avec le français.”

– Élèves du niveau secondaire en immersion

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