

## Francophone preschoolers living in minority communities with greater exposure to their mother tongue show improved academic performance

**Ottawa, May 4, 2016.** An evaluation of the program *Readiness to Learn in Minority Francophone Communities* conducted by the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) reveals that Francophone preschoolers living in minority communities experience accelerated growth of their French-language and academic skills when they receive greater exposure to their mother tongue. Mr. Jean-Pierre Voyer, SRDC President, stated that “this study demonstrates that a quality preschool program, developed specifically to meet the needs of Francophone children living in minority communities, can help the latter start school on the right foot.”



Overall, the project aimed to foster school readiness and general childhood development using a preschool program that combined a childcare program and family workshops targeting the parents of these children. The project was part of the 2003–2008 Action Plan for Official Languages and was continued under the 2008–2013 Roadmap for Canada’s Linguistic Duality. It was carried out in six Canadian communities: Saint John and Edmundston, New Brunswick; Orléans, Cornwall and Durham, Ontario; and Edmonton, Alberta. Approximately 350 participating children and their parents were divided into three groups: a group of children attending a Francophone daycare offering the new preschool program, a comparison group composed of children attending a Francophone daycare not offering the new program, and a third group of children who stay at home during the day or attend a family daycare. The program’s evaluation spanned a period of four years. Specific training was provided to educators and family literacy practitioners.

The program had an impact on many levels. Compared to their peers in the comparison groups, **children** exposed to the program show significant gains in their development throughout the four years of the project. The nature of these gains depends, however, on the child’s exposure to French in the home at the project onset. Gains in French language skills are observed in children of the program group coming from households characterized by low exposure to French. Children from households characterized by high initial exposure to French exhibit accelerated growth in language skills in addition to skills associated with academic performance such as reading and numeracy.

The family workshops raised **parent** awareness regarding their role in their children’s development and the importance of exposing them to French in minority Francophone settings. Following their involvement in the program, parents stated acquiring new knowledge of child development, adopting new parental behaviours, and increasing their use of French during literacy activities with their children.

For their part, **educators** noted that, thanks to some of the program's key components, children were better behaved, were calmer and more independent, and felt more secure. Moreover, the program fostered school readiness and the development of French-language and reading skills. Furthermore, educators claimed their knowledge of child development was bolstered through the training offered under the program. This training led to changes in some of their daycare practices, notably in terms of placing a stronger emphasis on the needs of the children and encouraging them to develop their creativity.

Lastly, **communities** seized the opportunity the project offered to promote the significant contributions of early childhood services to fostering child development and supporting young families, in addition to being an asset for the preservation and even the revitalization of the Francophone minority community.

It should be noted that the program's effects became less pronounced over time, which suggests the importance of continuity in the approach and strategies adopted by parents and educators in order to continue to build on the achievements observed in children, rather than watching them fade over time.

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**Links:**

- [Background article](#)
- [Program implementation findings \(Summary\)](#)
- [Program effects on the communities \(Summary\)](#)
- [Program effects on children and their parents \(Summary\)](#)
- [Full reports](#)