

Strategies for “coaching” your child: part 2

This is the second in a series of articles about learning difficulties in French immersion contributed by Joanne Boissonneault, MA, French immersion and special education specialist and consultant. Part one of “Strategies...” can be found in the “For parents” section at www.cpfalta.ab.ca.

Children experiencing learning difficulties in French immersion is not a new phenomenon. However, research and experience have shown that even students with serious challenges can succeed in an immersion setting, especially if they are committed to the language. In the past 20 or 30 years, we have seen many such students move on to careers using their French successfully in the work force. These young adults have become fluent in their second language.

As I noted in the previous article, “Regardless of the program, children learn differently and need confidence to work effectively in their learning environment. ... Many factors—physical, intellectual, educational, cultural, emotional, social—influence a child’s ability to learn.”

As parents, teachers, educators, educational psychologists, we need to look beyond the language of the classroom to the strengths and needs of the particular child and how he or she can best be supported—in any program.

Last time we suggested ways for parents (even those with absolutely no knowledge of French) to help their children with reading, writing, mathematics and general learning. This article will focus on coaching them with learning and memorization skills.

First, though, it’s important to note that you should only use those strategies that are useful to you and your child. Remember that one strategy may work for one child in one instance but may not work for another child or in another situation.

Learning skills

Coach your child to **pay attention**:

- ✓ Whether in the classroom, at home or in extracurricular activities/lessons, help your child develop the habit of focusing on the person talking:
 - eyes on the speaker
 - ears open
 - mouth closed.
- ✓ As often as possible, have your child explain or re-explain what has been said. This will reinforce the need to pay attention.
- ✓ While he’s working on an assignment, ask him to remain truly quiet—that is, not saying one word. You might start

with 10 minutes, timing him using the microwave or the clock on the stove. As he progresses, gradually extend the length of the quiet period.

- ✓ Read a text to your child and have her focus on what she is hearing with eyes closed, mouth closed, ears opened. Then have her restate the events within the passage she has just heard. You might also have her write them down.
- ✓ To help your child with concentration, have him sit quietly or lie down, close his eyes, and try to visualize/ imagine/ see in his head a picture, a word, a scene, etc.

Have your child **predict**. For example, “What do you think will happen next from the following:”

- ✓ from the title of the book, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*?
Harry will discover a secret chamber and explore it to find out who is the evil sorcerer.
- ✓ from the cover of the book?
Harry Potter will become evil and kill the sorcerer.
- ✓ the first sentence in chapter one: “*Harry Potter is leaving his aunt and uncle’s home to go to college.*”
I believe Harry Potter will drop out of college and go to Hogwarts.
- ✓ the end of chapter one?
I believe Harry will die in the end.

“So, let’s find out!”

Encourage your child to **preview and summarize**:

- ✓ Preview = review the text until able to repeat it aloud without looking.
- ✓ Summarize = shorten the information down to brief study notes. For example: “Chile is a country on the southwest coast of South America. The capital is Santiago.”
Chile = South America / SW / Santiago

Assist your child in **brainstorming** information. For instance, what comes to mind about animals? She might say:

cats dog birds horses barns farms scary friendly lions loving company birds allergies pet bear cougar

Memorization skills

Teach your child **associating** techniques such as:

planet Mars *to* Mars chocolate bar
planet Pluto *to* Pluto from Disney

Teach your child to **remember the image** in his head, close his eyes and visualize it, then describe it aloud. For example:



With his eyes closed, your child might say:

A white man is driving a car in the clouds.

He is afraid.

He is wearing a green shirt and a yellow tie.

Have your child **remember a series** of numbers or a telephone number, close her eyes and visualize the series, then repeat it aloud. For example, show her:

5-8-3-1-6 or 582-6915

She would close her eyes and repeat:

5-8-3-1-6 or 582-6915

With more practice, she can repeat backwards:

6-1-3-8-5 or 5196-285

Have your child **use visuals** to make it easier to remember:

✓ Charts, such as

Animals

Dogs

Dalmation

BullDog

Border Collie

Poodle

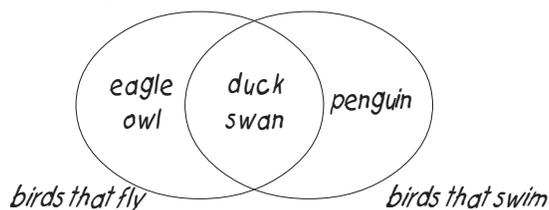
Bears

Brown

Polar

Grizzly

✓ Venn Diagrams



Teach your child to **follow directions** in a game-like situation. Begin with just two commands before he's to follow through with the actions, then increase to three and then four. For example:

"Get the book and put it in the cupboard."

"Roll the dice, count the number of dots, write the number."

"Take the paper, put it in the garbage can, then go to the door and open the door."

Encourage your child to **repeat, repeat, repeat**. Practice isn't just for playing the piano! Repetition and visualization are two keys to memorization.

A word of encouragement

French immersion works. It has been a Canadian success story since 1965, and a number of other countries around the world have adopted this method of teaching a second language.

Help your child to appreciate learning another language. Believe in it. Most of all, never give up: "success is failure turned inside out!"

Watch for more "coaching" ideas in a future edition of this newsletter.

