

## **Strength Together -- School Boards, A Public Library, A Regional Library System, A College: A Cooperative Venture into the World of French resources**

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How does a public library go from owning less than 5 French language books to owning more than 1500 in 3 years? How does a teaching of French language community go from having a scattered number of resources throughout the Peace district to gaining access to over 1500 titles in 3 years?

This project began in 2004 when several organizations got together to apply for a federal government grant to explore ways to improve language services for students in French as a second language. The organizations were successful in their grant application to Canadian Heritage for just under \$500,000 matching dollars and since that time the project has grown to include several other organizations. The result has been a successful collaboration in our community that includes the local college, the local public library and its regional headquarters plus 5 area school boards. The public library now houses a collection of over 2500 titles that assist teachers in their delivery of French as a second language (FSL), French immersion and Francophone education. For our French reading public our collection now numbers over 1500 items.

Like any project, there were several drivers at the start. First, the local community members involved with Francophones and the delivery of French teaching programs in the city saw a need to address resources in Grande Prairie. Second, the provincial government mandated the teaching of FSL for Grade 4 and up. Our schools were not prepared. These groups got together and submitted an application to the federal government for a grant. It was a lot of work but the application was successful and Grande Prairie received over half a million dollars over 3 years to deliver the program.

The school boards partnered with Grande Prairie Public Library and Peace Library System (PLS) to process, house and circulate the items, and contracted with a French teacher to do the selection of the materials. During the first year of the project, over \$70,000 was spent on resources.

During the second year of the project, a facilitator was hired to coordinate the project as it grew in scope enormously and went beyond the selection and ordering of resources; during that year, over \$90,000 worth of resources arrived. Also during the second year, French was withdrawn as a language that was supported by the International collection.

The library decided to use \$10,000 of the Public Library Initiative money to develop the French adult reading collection. The project matched that amount and the items were ordered.

Because this ordering was being done by the Library, PLS headquarters became involved because not only were they processing all of the French Resource Centre items, they now had to order and process all of the French adult reading materials.

## **Collection Development**

How does one order resources for 43 schools each offering a variety of French programs and each experiencing different challenges and strengths?

What steps were taken? The Centre...

- Contacted the consultants working with Alberta Education and Edmonton Public Schools. Both institutions have recommended resource lists for FSL.
- Met with principals in immersion and asked what they needed.
- Met with teachers and asked what they wanted to see.
- Talked to the librarians at the immersion schools, looked at their material and asked them for recommendations.
- Talked to the provincial French bookstores and became informed on what is good, well-liked literature that would be useful for teachers.
- Attended several conferences and asked many questions from publishers at the display tables.
- Attended many sessions where specific resources were highly recommended.

Through this process, the Centre was able to order a collection containing:

- All FLS recommended resources for grade 4 through grade 12.
- Several series of readers for FSL and Immersion for kindergarten through to grade 8.
- Copies of the same book for literary circles and guided reading.
- Additional recommended resources from other provinces for FSL (AIM, Manitoba resources, Tout Ados).
- Reproducible activities books for Immersion and FSL.
- Games.
- Accompanying teacher guides to everything ordered.
- Music CDs.
- Films in DVD format.
- An improved adolescent collection.
- An impressive selection of French comic books.
- Didactic pedagogical books to refine teaching skills.
- Science material from Edmonton Public.
- Several copies of DELF books (International French Diploma).
- Cultural videos with activity books.

## Cooperation with the College

In the framework of the collaboration, the Grande Prairie Regional College further developed their course offerings in order to:

- Allow teachers who are classroom generalists to improve their own knowledge of French, but to also include higher level courses, providing a *bain linguistique* to proficient teachers.
- Allow community members, as well as teachers, the opportunity to take courses at convenient times that fit their work schedule.
- Allow education students an opportunity to take the newly developed *French Language Education Certificate*. This certificate resembles a French minor from the University of Alberta. Its initial creation responded to the increasing need for FSL teachers province-wide and, more particularly, in our region, a need which had sprung from the proposed second language learning requirement.

A third of the consultant position is to teach a college French course, but also to:

- Promote advertising of the college courses through the monthly newsletters.
- Act as a liaison between the college and the French education community. The High School DELF exams take place at the college language lab. DELF training for teachers also takes place at the college.

## DELF

French International Diplomas (Diplômes d'études de langue française) have been brought to Grande Prairie. Currently, Grande Prairie is the ninth examination centre in all of Canada, following institutions such as McGill and Edmonton Public. Some important points are listed:

- The diplomas are officially recognized by the Ministry of Education in France and are provided to certify proficiency levels in French.
- The testing consists of six different levels and is now available in 160 countries.
- Each level is validated with a life-long diploma.
- Several novel and book purchases for the Centre are DELF approved and provide a CD for the listening component of the exam.
- The DELF is available to all French students regardless of program (immersion, francophone, FSL) and also college students and community members free of charge while funding is available.

## Professional Development for Educators

Providing professional development opportunities in French and about French has been an ongoing objective of the Centre. Some of the projects undertaken have been:

- Working closely with the Northwest Learning Consortium (NRLC), the director of the French Immersion and the Francophone Consortia. the NRLC engages in all the organizational aspects of having speakers come to Northwestern Alberta.

They also survey and determine curriculum needs and coordinate closely with Alberta Education.

- Once every six weeks throughout the year, excluding June and December, the Centre has brought in a variety of excellent specialists on all subjects related to French and for all age groups.
- A reimbursement plan of \$1400 per teacher has been set up by the Centre. We cover travel costs, hotels, registration fees and course fees for any professional development involving an immersive experience in French.
- The Centre coordinates all French presenters for the Annual Mighty Peace Teachers' Convention.
- Needs (suggested speakers, certain topics) are determined by asking the principals in immersion what their educational goals are for the year and then proceeding accordingly, but also by meeting with the consortium leaders as well as hearing from the teachers at the sessions.
- The Centre provides money for student and teacher travel through the Travel Policy to schools that initiate the DELF.

## Promotion of Resources and the Centre

- Creating a monthly newsletter that is distributed to all French teachers and administrators has been the focal communication point of the centre. The newsletter will mention newly ordered resources as well as new resources on the shelves at the library. At the beginning of each year, the letter explains how to access the resources, which is timely information for the new teachers. Upcoming conferences, courses, workshops, trips and exchanges are also mentioned.
- Developing a Website. Current and past newsletters can be downloaded from the Website as well as information on how to sign out the library resources. One can also download reimbursement forms and DELF registration forms.
- A number of open houses have taken place at the library after school to show the teachers the resources.
- Staff meetings and PLC (professional learning community) meetings have also been held at the library. Short tours have been provided along with snacks and beverages.
- Last year, the Centre hosted monthly casual French get-togethers called *Café français* at the library.
- Resources have been taken to individual teachers at their request and also transported to Spirit River to give those teachers a chance to peruse the resources without making the long trip.
- A convenient sign-out system has been established.
- The Centre has hired a part-time assistant to aid in maintaining the collection and process the resources that arrive at PLC in a convenient yet reusable and durable fashion for teachers. In addition, she does the Centre's translation. She also has extensive training in promotion and marketing and is currently setting up a promotional plan for the Centre and all that it offers.

- We have a significant number of teachers from outside our collaboration who are also benefiting from the Centre, receiving newsletters and accessing resources through the inter-library loan system.

## Challenges

As in any organization, there have been some challenges along the way. These are some we have had to date and may have in the future!

- Encouraging teachers to come to the library and access the resources.
- Encouraging teachers to attend the professional development opportunities available to them and to access the funding.
- Promoting and informing the teachers and administrative teams about the importance of second-language learning, minimum recommended minutes of instruction by Alberta Education and placing qualified, proficient educators into the language positions.
- Promoting and informing teachers about the DELF and its benefits.
- Promoting and informing teachers about the French college courses and new program in the aim to keep enrollment high.

Ultimately, the Grande Prairie Public Library now has a core French language reading collection that allows for normal collection growth in future years. In the new library (2009) both the FLRC resources and the French adult resources will be housed together so the library will have a Francophone reading and study area. We are accessing a clientele that we were never able to serve. Would we do it again? Absolutely!

## Facts:

**Funding agency:** Canadian Heritage under the Federal Action Plan- goal to double the number of French language graduates by 2013

## Partners in the project:

Grande Prairie Regional College  
Grande Prairie Public School District  
Grande Prairie and District Catholic Schools  
Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta  
Peace Wapiti School Division  
Canadian Parents For French  
Conseil scolaire du Nord-Ouest  
Peace Library System  
Grande Prairie Public Library

**Dollars:** about \$470,000 matching dollars

**FLRC collection:** 6,000 items \$150,000 to date; \$35,000 left

**Public Library benefit:**

\$15,000 resources - French Adult materials (2000+ items);

\$20,000 shelving

\$185,000 French Resources collection

**Ordering source for French adult materials:**

Renaud Bray- Quebec

**Grande Prairie population:**

76,667

**No. of students in the area studying French:**

FSL 4,047

Immersion 1200

Francophone 500

Total 4,429