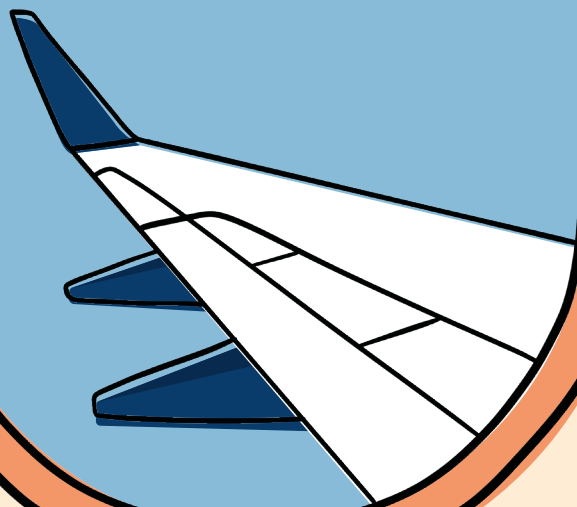


EXCHANGE SUPPORT GUIDE

FOR PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR FAMILIES



Part B - Going on Exchange

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Conseil Jeunesse office is located on the unceded, traditional and ancestral territories of the x̱məθkʷəy̱əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples.

Unceded means that these lands were never surrendered, relinquished, or handed over in any way, and as such, we are currently situated on occupied territories. The places where we gather, work, and play remain sovereign Indigenous lands.

We therefore reaffirm our commitment to reconciliation, as it is our moral responsibility—as settlers, visitors, or residents on these lands—to ensure that our meetings and actions align with Indigenous values and priorities as we walk together on the path of reconciliation.

LE CONSEIL JEUNESSE FRANCOPHONE DE LA COLOMBIE-BRITANNIQUE

The Conseil jeunesse francophone de la Colombie-Britannique (CJFCB) is a non-profit organization created to promote, develop, and represent the interests of French-speaking youth in British Columbia. The members of the CJFCB are youth aged 14 to 25 who live in British Columbia and gather around the same goal: to speak, have fun and get involved in French.

In 2018, the CJFCB received the mandate from the Ministry of Education and Child Care of British Columbia to administer the BC-Québec Exchange Program. For information on the program, please see: <https://cjfcb.com/programmation/exchange>

GOING ON EXCHANGE TO QUÉBEC

After having welcomed your partner last fall, it is now your turn to travel to their community, attend their school and live with them and their family for two months, all of this in French. How exciting!

Such excitement can also come with a bit of stress. **This guide includes some advice and tips for a successful experience away in Québec!** Make sure that you read and discuss it with your parents or guardians before you leave, and keep it as a reference during the exchange.

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A GUIDE INFORMED BY RESEARCH

Hi!

My name is Carl. I teach in the Language and Literacy Education Department at the University of British Columbia.

This guide is informed by a study that I conducted with participants of the Canadian Interprovincial Linguistic Student Exchange in the years just before the exchange was stopped by COVID-19. Thirty-eight students participated in this study and the strategies shared in this guide are based on their experiences.

To illustrate the participants' experiences, I used quotations from thirteen of them in this guide.



The quotes that are included in this guide are taken either from journals that the participants completed during their exchange or interviews I had with them. The participants gave their consent to take part in the study and agreed that any data they reported could be published. Names used are pseudonyms.

ABIGAIL

Gender: F
Age: 16
Province: BC
Exchange province: Québec
Hometown: Non-urban
Exchange town: Non-urban



CARTER

Gender: F
Age: 15
Province: Manitoba
Exchange province: Québec
Hometown: Non-urban
Exchange town: Non-urban



JAMES

Gender: M
Age: 16
Province: BC
Exchange province: Québec
Hometown: Non-urban
Exchange town: Non-urban



LAURIE

Gender: F
Age: 15
Province: Québec
Exchange province: Saskatchewan
Hometown: Non-urban
Exchange town: Non-urban



ANDREW

Gender: M
Age: 15
Province: BC
Exchange province: Québec
Hometown: Non-urban
Exchange town: Urban



FRÉDÉRIC

Gender: M
Age: 16
Province: Québec
Exchange province: BC
Hometown: Non-urban
Exchange town: Non-urban



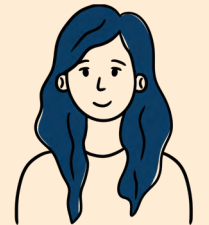
JESS

Gender: F
Age: 15
Province: Québec
Exchange province: BC
Hometown: Non-urban
Exchange town: Non-urban



LILLY

Gender: F
Age: 16
Province: BC
Exchange province: Québec
Hometown: Non-urban
Exchange town: Non-urban



MARILOU

Gender: F
Age: 15
Province: Québec
Exchange province: BC
Hometown: Non-urban
Exchange town: Urban



ROSALIE

Gender: F
Age: 16
Province: Québec
Exchange province: Alberta
Hometown: Non-urban
Exchange town: Non-urban



SARA

Gender: F
Age: 16
Province: Québec
Exchange province: BC
Hometown: Non-urban
Exchange town: Non-urban



TAYLOR

Gender: F
Age: 15
Province: BC
Exchange province: Québec
Hometown: Urban
Exchange town: Non-urban



ZINNIA

Gender: F
Age: 15
Province: BC
Exchange province: Québec
Hometown: Non-urban
Exchange town: Urban



PREPARE FOR A LINGUISTIC IMMERSION

Most participants reported to various degrees difficulties adjusting to the language.

For example, Carter was discouraged that a waiter would switch to English; Andrew sometimes nodded without understanding; Rosalie was disappointed when she was told she had a strong accent. In Abigail's case, she found listening to French difficult:

*It was hard
to understand at first,
it sounded like gurgling.*



Taylor identified the language as a problem to fully participating:

It was really difficult at first because the French, the Québécois French is completely different than the French that we learn at school. It's more like France French and it's obviously slower 'cause the teachers aren't Québécois. Hmm, so it was really hard to understand everyone and just like... start thinking in French. But after like the first month, I started to catch on and it was well.



One way to support your future-self is by helping attune your ear to different accents. You can try to prepare by watching TV shows or videos, or by listening to podcasts or songs from Québec.

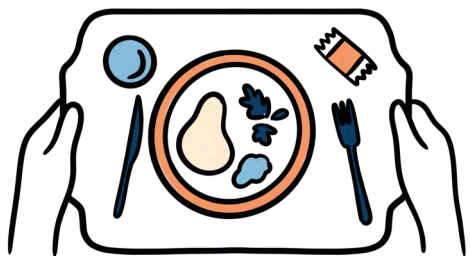
If possible, do like James, and select courses in Québec that will allow for more spoken interaction, like Physical Education or Art classes, so that you have more opportunities to listen and speak.

EXPECT VARIOUS REACTIONS FROM LOCAL PEOPLE

People from bigger cities are used to visitors. It might be less the case if you are traveling to a smaller town.

In her small exchange town, Taylor described how she felt the first week at school:

It was like in the movies when the new kid walks in and everybody stares. Not even an exaggeration, this happened during the first day and throughout the week when I would walk in the cafeteria area and on the bus after school. I would get weird stares, and no one tried to be subtle about it either. I have never been in this situation before and back at home I am confident in who I am, but this made me feel like even I was a stranger in my own body.



Moreover, there exist some political tensions in Canada, mostly between Québec and other provinces. Rosalie was surprised to experience the following:

Les gens qui font la remarque que j'ai un accent français, en plus avec un ton méprisant ce qui contribue à me demander si je suis accepté ici ou non. Ils entendent beaucoup de choses à propos des gens du Québec mais ne savent pas la vérité et ne veulent pas prendre la chance de la savoir.¹



In Alberta, political tensions stood in the way of her full integration, and she admitted:

Ça m'a dérangé de devoir porter ce fardeau lors d'un échange scolaire.²

If you find yourself in such situations, you must remember that you are not responsible for people's behaviours.

Find people with whom you connect and do not hesitate to share your experiences and feelings to your exchange partner, host parents, or other trusted people.

¹ People point out that I have a French accent, with a scornful tone which makes me wonder if I'm accepted here or not. They hear a lot of things about the people of Québec but don't know the truth and don't want to take the chance to find out.

² It bothered me to have to carry this burden on a school exchange.

BE MINDFUL THAT YOUR PARTNER MAY CHANGE THEIR ATTITUDE

Many participants had a great relationship with their partner during their stay in Québec, but you should be aware that it was not the case for everybody.

Zinnia recalled:

When she came and was living in my house, it was really good, we were like best friends, you know, we did everything together, hm... we get along so well, so I was really excited. And then she went back home and she was—we kept in touch. And like a few days before I was flying out to live with her, she was like: 'Oh my Gosh! Everybody keeps telling me to stop talking about how excited I am to see you, like I can't wait for you to get here.' Then, pretty much when I got there, she didn't really interact with me. Like I got to the airport, she gave me a hug and then didn't really say much.



Similarly, Taylor described her relationship with her partner as “like having a sister” while they were in BC, a situation that changed when she got to Québec:

I feel like it was quite different when I was there than when she was here. When she was here [in BC], we got along really well, we were doing everything together, we were pretty inseparable. But when we got there, it feels like her personality changed. She was more like... She got back into the swing of things with her friends, with her culture, that kind of thing.



Different reasons may lead to this change of behaviour. When I asked Taylor's partner, Marilou, she simply mentioned:

J'aime moins ça avoir du monde dans mes affaires.³



If you find yourself in such a situation, you must remember that you are not responsible for this change of behaviour.

As you might not be able to change your exchange partner's attitude, you may have to make connections with other people (see the *Actively Make Connections* section). Moreover, if the situation distresses you, do not hesitate to reach out for support.



³ I don't like having people in my things.

REACH OUT FOR SUPPORT

In situations that you find difficult, uneasy, uncomfortable, or challenging, do not hesitate to reach out for support.

For many participants, the host mother represented a source of support and advice. Abigail felt that she could be honest with her host mother regarding what she experienced and her feelings:



She really got me through, I think. Hm, cause she really—she became like this second mother figure. And she was like an adult mature presence, who was always open and warm and approachable. So, I was free to be vulnerable there...

It was also the case for Taylor:



She was important cause she was like kind of my mother figure when I was there. So, hm... It was nice because she knows Marilou pretty well and so if—I could go and talk to her about it, she would understand and she would be able to give me advice about it.

In addition to her host mother, Taylor found support in her partner's sister; Taylor felt comfortable talking with her as she showed interest in her from the first time they had met. Taylor was also supported by one of her partner's best friends, Zoé, who helped her meet new people at school.

Whether it is a host parent, your exchange partner, a trusted teacher, or anyone else you feel comfortable with, do not hesitate to seek support from someone. They can help you get through difficult situations.

ENJOY EVEN THE SIMPLE THINGS

Sometimes, your best memories will come from the simplest things. Take time to appreciate these moments.

For example, Lilly remembered:



I think the best experience was when I was with my twin, and we were in the car, listening to music, like uh—musical album and so, we were in the back of the car, singing really loud and it was really nice outside. So, that was fun.

Lilly's best experience was a rather anecdotal event during which she spent an enjoyable moment with her partner. When asked about what made it special and how she felt, Lilly said that "it was kind of like having a sister" and that she "belong[ed] with them."

Lilly also said that mealtimes were an occasion to talk and make jokes and that she felt like she'd "been there forever."



Unfortunately, Zinnia's mealtimes were different. She felt that, during the family dinners, no one would really talk to her unless she herself would say something. Zinnia adapted to this situation:

So, I was like, ok, so, family's not going that well, so focus on friends, and school, and kickboxing and things that you like to do.



In Zinnia's case, she was able to enjoy the simple things in different areas of her life, by making connections outside her host family. A topic we see in the next section.

ACTIVELY MAKE CONNECTIONS

One of the best ways for you to have a great exchange experience (and to improve your French abilities) is to maximize the interaction that you have with people from your host community.

For some participants, like Marilou, connections were made easily:

Le monde là-bas, il était vraiment gentil. Il venait vers moi, il venait me poser des questions.⁴



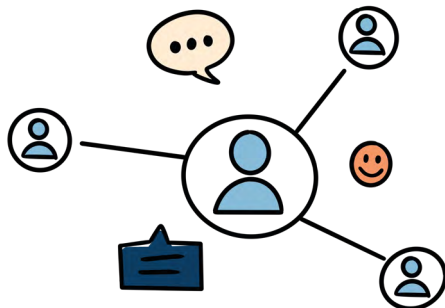
Your partner can help you meet people by introducing you to their circles of friends and people they know. But, if this is not working, you may also reach out to others on your own; this is what Abigail did. When I asked her how she approached new people, she said:

Oh, that's a good question. Hmm. You had to be pretty outgoing I think and brave (laughs) to make that leap of faith. Yeah, people they—yea, no, they're not reaching out to you, you have to go 'Hi...'. It's scary. Hm, let's see... I guess, you just have to be open-minded.



Abigail admitted it is not an easy thing to do, one has to be vulnerable. But it paid off for Abigail; she became friends with two students who were pretty new at school.

Making connections can be facilitated by participating in activities and trying new things, as we will discuss in the next sections.



⁴ The people there were really nice. They would come to me, ask me questions.

PUSH YOURSELF TO PARTICIPATE IN ACTIVITIES

Participation in extracurricular activities represented occasions for making new connections and trying new things.

For example, Sara was introduced to rugby, a sport she did not know:

Elles (ses coéquipières) m'ont inclus tout de suite, elles étaient patientes envers moi quand tsé j'étais un petit peu plus mêlée. Sinon mes coachs aussi. Je pense à, entre autres, mon premier tournoi de rugby, c'était à Kamloops. Et puis... J'étais vraiment une des leurs.⁵



As for James, he joined his school's volleyball team. James shared his most cherished experience:

Easily, the best experience was when we won the gold medal for volleyball. [...] I'd definitely say that was the high point because it was—it was a lot of fun. It definitely bonded me more with the volleyball kids, and—Yeah, it was—it was a really great experience.



⁵ They (her teammates) included me right away, they were patient with me when I was a little confused. Otherwise, my coaches too. I am thinking of, among other things, my first rugby tournament, it was in Kamloops. And then... I was really one of them. We got along well.

Jess participated in a school choir sleepover. Usually a reserved person, Jess tried something different during a sharing activity:

J'me suis dit ben tant qu'à faire je vais dire de quoi que- que- Parce que c'tait plus comme dire de quoi qu'y'avait sur not' cœur, faque. Pis j'suis pas vraiment comme ça. Faque j'ai dit ben tant qu'à faire, je vais en parler. Pis, ben, y'ont bien reçu ça. Pis j'trouve ça l'fun.⁶



That was something that Jess would not have done at home:

Ben, j'pense pas parce que justement là-bas ils me connaissent pas vraiment. Faque j'avais l'impression que j'pouvais faire quelque chose de différent que je fais d'habitude.⁷

The bonds she had created that night constituted peer support for the rest of the exchange.

Building stronger relationships is sometimes possible through new experiences, as we discuss next.

⁶ I figured, well, I'm gonna say something that- that- Because it was more like saying whatever was on our hearts, so. And I'm not really like that. So, I said, well, while I'm at it, I'm going to talk about it. And, well, they reacted well. And I think it's nice.

⁷ Well, I don't think so because they didn't really know me there. So, I felt like I could do something different than I usually do.

TRY NEW THINGS WHILE STAYING TRUE TO YOURSELF

Just like Jess, who opened up during her choir sleepover, do not hesitate to try new things while you are away!

Abigail did too! Abigail was invited to a sharing circle with women from local First Nation communities. In a yurt in the woods during a full moon evening, the women shared experiences, passing a talking stick amongst themselves.

Abigail reported that it was the first time she had participated in this type of experience, that she really liked it and that it increased her curiosity. Following this experience, back in BC, the following summer, she decided to participate in a First Nation summer camp.



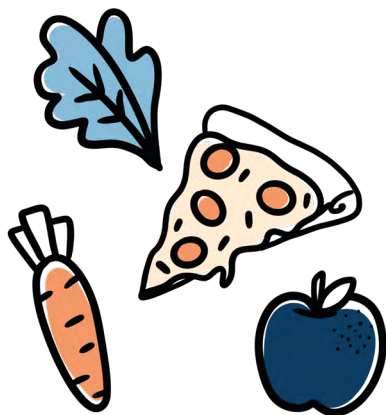
Abigail also adjusted to the vegan diet of her host family, something she'd been wanting to try, but never did at home:

I was super excited about it!



On the other hand, Carter was resistant to adjusting because of the quality of the new eating habits she faced.

Not used to the processed food her host family ate, Carter respected her needs for fresh food:



I just asked repeatedly for fruit to be bought. When it was finally bought, I made sure to say thank you and be appreciative of what they had bought me. Other times I just went to the store and bought it myself.



In short, while you should respect your own boundaries, the exchange is a great opportunity for you to explore new sides of yourself, try new things, and step out of your comfort zone.

DON'T JUDGE TOO QUICKLY, OBSERVE AND ASK QUESTIONS

During the exchange, you will certainly experience things you are unfamiliar with.

Don't jump to conclusions or judge too quickly. Observe and notice. Be curious. Politely ask around when you have questions.

In general, participants noticed differences related to eating habits, family dynamics, school organization, celebrations of statutory holidays, and teenagers' behaviour.

Frédéric, like some other participants, was surprised by the place religion occupied in his host family. He shared this experience:

C'est quand on s'est assis à table. Mais—moi, dans ma famille au Québec, on fait pas de prière. Mais là on s'est installés, pis y'ont commencé à prier. Faque là, j'savais pas trop com—comment faire. Faque, tsé, je les ai regardé faire, pis j'ai suivi là. Mais, ça, c'tait (rires) C'est sûr j'vas toujours m'en rappeler. C'tait— c'tait vraiment gênant c'te moment-là. C'tait la première fois que j'faisais ça. Mais sinon les fois d'après, ç'a super bien été là.⁸



Initially finding the situation awkward, Frédéric allowed himself to observe and take in the situation. This let him learn about his host family and broaden his perspective.

Just like Frédéric, keep an open mind when you experience unfamiliar situations!

⁸ That's when we sat down at the table. But—me, in my family in Québec, we don't pray. But then we settled down and started to pray. I didn't really know how to do it. So, y'know, I watched them do it, and I followed them. But that was it (laughs) I'm sure I'll always remember that. It was—it was really embarrassing at the time. It was the first time I did that. But otherwise, the next times I did it, it went really well.

PROCESS YOUR PERCEPTION OF THE WORLD: USE THE ETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNAL

Completing the ethnographic activities were helpful to many participants to help them make sense of some situations that happened during their exchange.

For example, by making hypotheses in the ethnographic journal, Frédéric (from the previous page) developed his perception of a given situation. He uncovered that what he initially thought was a joke, was actually showing the importance of religion in his host family.

As for Carter, she used the journal to talk through a situation that upset her:

One day we were in the car and my twin's sister kept kicking my leg. I asked her to stop once and she continued to do it, so I asked her to stop again. Then she looked at me and started to throw a tantrum. Her mom gave me a look of disappointment and proceeded to tell her daughter that she had done nothing wrong.



For the completion of the ethnographic activity, Carter discussed the situation with the host mother's sister and the host father. Discovering that these two people were both either disappointed or upset with the way the host mother reacted, Carter concluded that this permissive parenting style was not necessarily the one that everyone would adopt in her host community.

In both situations, the ethnographic journal helped the participants to broaden their perspectives.

The ethnographic journal also helped participants to adjust their behaviour, as was the case for Laurie. Laurie initially felt hurt when people made fun of her accent, but after working through her situation in the journal, she then found her confidence. When her host told her she mispronounced the word "three," she then reacted this way:

Cette fois-ci, je dirais que j'ai beaucoup mieux réagi. J'ai été moins blessée par la remarque, car je savais que ce n'était pas méchant. À la place, Spencer a plutôt tenté de me donner un petit cours de prononciation et c'était bien cocasse. Je me débrouillais même plutôt bien à la fin de mon séjour.⁹



In sum, the ethnographic journal allowed participants to reflect on unfamiliar and difficult situations, to broaden their perspectives, and to adjust their reactions and behaviours if needed.

You are invited to discover and use the Ethnographic Journal during your exchange experience.

⁹ This time, I would say that I reacted much better. I was less hurt by the remark because I knew it wasn't mean. Instead, Spencer tried to give me a little pronunciation lesson and it was really funny. I was even doing pretty well at the end of my stay.

REFERENCES

- Ruest, C. (2022). *Exploring adolescents' development of intercultural competence through the Canadian Interprovincial Student Exchange* [Doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia]. UBC Open Collections.

NOTES



A series of horizontal lines for taking notes, alternating between white and light gray background colors.



CARL RUEST

<https://lled.educ.ubc.ca/carl-ruest/>

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