



Brief Submitted for the Government of Canada Consultations on Linguistic Duality and Official Languages

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Canadian Teachers' Federation
Fédération canadienne des enseignantes et des enseignants

BACKGROUND

The Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) represents approximately 220,000 teachers through its Member organizations. Of these, over 10,000 work in minority French-language schools and approximately 8,000 in English-language schools in Quebec. The CTF has for a long time defended the rights of its Members and advocated for a just and equitable public education system in Canada and throughout the world.

The CTF believes that it is important to add its voice to all other voices concerned specifically about education in minority-setting schools in the consultation that the Government of Canada has just launched on linguistic duality and official languages. The Francophone community in particular has been undergoing a revival in a number of regions that have not always promoted its vitality, whether in education or community life.

In 2005, the CTF espoused the *Action Plan – Section 23* that arose out of the Education Summit, which put forward areas for intervention in French-language education: infrastructures, culture and identity, promotion of French-language schools, early childhood, human resources and pedagogy. These six areas and the collaborative mechanisms associated with them continue to guide the actions of the education partners. More recently, all Francophone and Acadian communities gathered at the June 2007 Summit to coordinate their actions and identify some approaches that would allow the Francophonie to fully develop wherever it might be in Canada.

The CTF believes that these important initiatives are indicative of the determination and ability of Francophone communities to map out their future while also contributing to Canada's linguistic duality. We believe that the next Government of Canada action plan for official languages will have to take into account the priorities of Canada's minority communities and promote the implementation of these priorities through practical, flexible and equitable means.

The CTF's values are based on the universality of education, professionalism, the power of solidarity and social justice. These are the foundations that we will draw upon in answering the questions asked in the discussion paper that supports the consultation process.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

Opportunities and Impact

Urbanization

Francophone minority communities have for a long time been concerned about the demographic issues raised by the Canadian government's discussion document. On the one hand, rural depopulation is an area of concern because it weakens those regions where the concentration of Francophones is highest; the growing number of Francophones living in urban settings is also having a direct impact on their assimilation.

In 2004, the CTF published a study entitled *Teachers and the Challenge of Teaching in Francophone Minority Settings*.¹ A high percentage of teachers reported the dominance of English in their communities as one of the main challenges they were facing. This finding is particularly relevant to urban settings.

Several studies by research centres interested in minority communities also pointed to the importance of being able to live a full and rich family and community life in French to support the efforts of French-language schools. Indeed, these communities expect a great deal of teachers in terms of community engagement, which contributes to the ongoing problem encountered in recruiting and retaining the required staff.

The fact is that living in French on an everyday basis in most urban settings is not easy. Even though family and community support for school efforts is advocated, such support is virtually nonexistent because the structures are too fragile. A dynamic French-language cultural environment would support the educational mission, and also make it worthwhile to want to learn French in a predominantly Anglophone setting. This is an area where support is lamentable and where it would benefit greatly from being given consideration in a coherent plan for the promotion of the official languages.

The CTF thus concludes that teachers in French-language schools located in predominantly English-speaking settings are those most affected by changing demographics. The next action plan for official languages should give due regard to their needs.

¹ GILBERT, Anne, Sophie LE TOUZÉ, Joseph Yvon THÉRIAULT and Rodrigue LANDRY. *Teachers and the Challenge of Teaching in Francophone Minority Settings*, A Research Report, *Le personnel enseignant face aux défis de l'enseignement en milieu minoritaire francophone – A Research Report*, Ottawa, Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Citizenship and Minorities, University of Ottawa, Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities and Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2004.

Attendance and Retention Targets

Teachers in French-language schools fully support the efforts being made by all of the stakeholders to welcome the largest possible number of those entitled to a French-language education in their schools. The goals of the Action Plan for Official Languages, as it now exists, was to significantly increase these numbers in minority institutions, as well as double the number of bilingual young Canadians by 2013.

Increasing the number of students in schools is one thing; maintaining quality of education is something else again. With the increased number of students comes a greater diversity in family backgrounds and an urgent need for more intake and coaching efforts if the inclusion of these new students into the French schools is to be successful.

The CTF believes that substantial support for early childhood development is the solution most likely to be able to support recruitment efforts in French-language schools. Such support needs to be part of a broader effort to assist families and communities in their promotion of French in every sphere of activity.

Newcomers

There are now significant efforts to make Canada a welcoming country for newcomers. Several organizations have strategies that encourage this trend, and Francophone minority communities quickly saw these as a way of maintaining or increasing their numbers.

Many of these new families, from a variety of linguistic and religious backgrounds, have decided to enrol their children in French-language schools. They do so for various reasons: some believe in multilingualism, and others do not speak English.

In the summer of 2007, the CTF commissioned a study on the intake of immigrant families into French-language schools.² The research, which was largely based on initiatives by the Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens (AEFO), a CTF Member organization, demonstrated just how poorly prepared are minority communities for welcoming newcomers, whether into the school system or in the community.

² EMOND, Geneviève. *Vivre ensemble dans les écoles de langue française — L'accueil des jeunes immigrantes et immigrants à l'école de la francophonie canadienne*, Ottawa, Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2007.

However, some experiences were both positive and convincing, and these have enabled the CTF to underscore just how important it is to make intake measures a top priority, at both the school and community levels, in the next action plan for official languages.

The federal government's new official languages strategy should:

- ***invest in all areas of everyday life, particularly culture, to support schools in a comprehensive educational plan***
- ***address intake and coaching needs for those generations wishing to renew their ties with French or for immigrant families that want to enrol their children in French-language schools***
- ***promote the creation of French-language early childhood centres across the country to prepare children for their active participation in French-language schools and in the Francophone community generally***
- ***support the demographic growth in Francophone regions through initiatives that will ensure that immigration succeeds***

THE ECONOMY AND NEW TECHNOLOGY

Growth and Competitiveness

Education in French in Canadian minority settings makes sense only in an economic framework that gives it an equitable place. Parents who choose to send their children to French-language schools do so in part because of their attachment to the language, but also in the hope that the next generation will be provided with more opportunities to live in French in every sphere of human endeavour. The driving force behind young people's decision to continue their education in French-language public and postsecondary schools is the opportunity to work in their language or to benefit from their bilingual skills.

Canada is a country in which two official languages prevail. For minority-setting Francophone communities, economic development is directly related to technological advancement. For one thing, it is often technology that makes opportunities for training in various specific fields possible, and also technology that provides access to attractive markets when one wishes to use both official languages in a given economic sector.

Technology and Community Vitality

The CTF is concerned about how little attention is being paid to technology in terms not only of its potential, but also of the disturbing consequences that can occur if there is a lack of structure for its use.

CTF commissioned an overview of the current state of technology in French-language schools. *Les TIC à l'école de langue française en milieu minoritaire*³ [ITCs in minority community French-language schools] presents a disquieting picture of the situation: the problems involved in adjusting systems to keep pace with rapid technological changes and the lack of French-language content make navigation hazardous in a minority-setting French-language learning environment. The research also took stock of several projects that had been initiated as a result of support from various programs such as Franccommunautés virtuelles, which helped to develop a number of promising initiatives. However, it identified a shortage of human resources to continue to provide content on a regular basis for these sources of information in French.

The federal government's new official languages strategy should:

- ***invest to ensure the full participation of Francophones in overall economic development, both urban and rural, and by giving concrete support to youth entrepreneurship***
- ***promote increased French-language content on the Web and infrastructures that monitor, update and renew information***
- ***invest in economic development initiatives that could contribute to reducing the isolation of Francophones, particularly in rural communities or in regions where English is strongly predominant***
- ***support innovative initiatives for the use of technology in areas like distance education, second-language learning and the dissemination of cultural content***

GOVERNMENT MODERNIZATION

The latest language demographics data are not reassuring for Francophones with respect to their future as a minority community in several regions of the country.

Although alarming, this news nevertheless forces us to respond and draw useful conclusions. A decline in Francophone populations in minority settings is nothing new, but we need to acknowledge that introducing French-language school governance may be one of the best available options to help reverse the trend. Indeed, for the past 15 years, children are being educated in French in communities where several generations before them would never have dreamed of the possibility.

The empowerment of the Francophone community in education has yielded sound results. It is contributing to the progress of bilingualism and to respect for cultural diversity across the country. The Government of Canada needs to learn lessons from this experience and to try to apply it in other areas.

³ MANZEROLLE, Bernard. *Les TIC à l'école de langue française en milieu minoritaire*, Ottawa, Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2007.

□ Official Languages and Modernization

The Sommet des communautés francophones et acadiennes (Summit of Francophone and Acadian Communities of Canada) held in June 2007 laid the foundations for strategic planning by minority Francophone community partners, including CTF.

Just as school governance was able to breathe new life into the Francophonie, the Summit participants agreed that increased empowerment in other spheres of human activity would also be desirable. In order to keep pace with modernization, participative management that provides a role for the Francophonie in a shared form of governance would provide opportunities for successful endeavours in several key areas such as early childhood, education, health, justice, adult literacy, immigration, and arts and culture.

□ Government Practices

The CTF is one of the national organizations to have followed the lead of the Canadian government with respect to bilingualism and the modernization of its structure. Our federation defines itself as bilingual in its operations and publications, and serves organizations whose membership reflects Canada's linguistic duality.

Major changes have occurred in the past 30 years and there is no doubt that the federal public service is much more bilingual now than it used to be. The creation of immersion programs and the strengthening of measures for second-language learning supported the efforts of the federal government. The Court Challenges Program was essential in providing the Francophone communities with ways to challenge the status quo so that they could achieve a degree of equity in terms of school governance.

Much remains to be done, particularly in a context in which the public service will have to renew itself. In connection with the current consultation exercise, the Government of Canada should give special consideration to the strategic community plan that grew out of the June 2007 Summit, and involve in a special manner those stakeholders who are there to speak on behalf of their members and to encourage the development of structures that would strengthen the autonomy of minority communities.

The federal government's new official languages strategy should:

- ***include structured participation by Francophones at various levels of governance in key areas like early childhood, education, health, justice, adult literacy, immigration, and the arts and culture***
- ***provide more opportunities for Francophone institutions to increase their empowerment in essential spheres of human endeavour***
- ***pursue its efforts to hire federal bilingual public servants in each province and territory in order to increase opportunities for people to receive services in the language of their choice***
- ***support research and the dissemination of knowledge with a view to basing decisions and investments on reliable data that would be likely to yield results***