Early Childhood: Gateway to French-language Schools

A National Vision

Final Research Report
by Anne Gilbert

Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Citizenship and Minorities (CIRCEM)

The University of Ottawa

in partnership with the
Canadian Teachers’ Federation (CTF)

with the financial support of Canadian Heritage

March 2003
# Table of Contents

**FOREWORD**  
1

**INTRODUCTION**  
3  
Project objectives  
3  
The methodology in brief  
4  
Research team  
5  
Organization of the report  
6

**PART 1: FINDINGS**  
7  
Internationally  
7  
In Canada  
9  
For Canadian Francophones  
12  
In the communities  
14  
The leaders’ viewpoint in the fields of education and early childhood  
21  
Lessons to be drawn from studies on learning French in a minority setting  
23

**PART 2: THE/issues**  
25  
Rationale  
25  
Issues  
28

**PART 3: THE VISION**  
33  
A model for service delivery  
33  
Policies and programs supporting the implementation of the vision  
39

**CONCLUSION**  
45  
High parental motivation  
45  
Highly fragile services  
46  
Institutionalization must be ensured  
46  
With government support  
47  
A better understanding of the nature of relationships between early childhood services and community vitality  
47

**REFERENCES**  
49
FOREWORD

“The survival and the flourishing of English-speaking and French-speaking communities in Canada, and their protection against assimilation, is a right which all Canadian authorities should safeguard, respect and promote.” This is how the Canadian Teachers’ Federation, the national voice of 240,000 elementary and secondary teachers in the public education system, views the bilingual character of our country. For decades, therefore, CTF has steadfastly defended the right of Francophones to quality education in their language and to the governance of their schools.

The action-research plan, *The School at the Heart of a Thriving Francophonie*, is in line with this view. Its title echoes one of CTF’s policy statements that recognizes the school as “an instrument of major importance in maintaining the existence of a functioning linguistic community”. The aims of CTF’s plan are to provide a comprehensive picture of the status of French-language education in minority settings, to analyze the issues involved and to identify the best conditions for successful teaching and learning. The breakdown of the work into three phases is based on the child’s development, that is, his or her preparation for full integration into the French-language school environment; the care, guidance and instruction provided by teaching staff; and the range of French-language educational services available.

In October 2001, thanks to a grant from Canadian Heritage, CTF undertook the first phase: *Early Childhood: Gateway to French-language Schools*. This initiative is based on a partnership with the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Citizenship and Minorities (CIRCEM) of the University of Ottawa. Essentially, two concerns for French-language schools and, consequently, for the teachers in them drive this project: barely half of eligible children attend the schools established for them, and many who do enrol have not received the required preparation to develop their full potential in a French-language learning environment. Every day in classrooms, the linguistic and cultural experience of young children before they even enter school has a strong influence on their ability to learn and develop in French. Aren’t early childhood services the natural route to French-language schools? Doesn’t the future of these schools depend on the provision of such services? Isn’t the school vital for the survival and flourishing of Francophone communities in Canada?
These concerns led CTF to undertake an in-depth study of early childhood care and education services in minority Francophone communities. By doing so, it hopes to contribute to the advancement of this cause, in tandem with other stakeholders, by ensuring that French-language schools become the institution they are expected to be for the development of Francophone minorities in Canada. More specifically, CTF hopes not only to see eligible Francophones choose first and foremost French-language schools, but also to increase their chances of being well prepared for full integration into the Francophone school environment.

The project combines theoretical insights, documentary research, analysis of field practices, consultations with key players and joint action. This document presents the major findings of the research and an analytical description of the issues. Finally, it describes the national vision based on data and opinions gathered that highlights the best conditions for the development of successful early childhood services as a “gateway to French-language schools”.

Lise Routhier Boudreau
Chairperson, CTF Advisory Committee
on French as a First Language
INTRODUCTION

Recent studies have confirmed the importance of the first five years of life in the development of a child’s abilities, health and well-being. As a result, governments, community organizations and school authorities have taken an increasing interest in early childhood. This interest is especially strong within Francophone and Acadian minorities in Canada, because the studies have also shown that early childhood services¹ build cultural identity. Furthermore, they reputedly help children master their language and integrate into school. Could French-language early childhood services be the solution to several of the problems encountered by French-language schools? Indeed, there is an ever-growing consensus among Canadian Francophones that the future of French-language schools lies in preschool programs.

Project objectives

That said, several questions remain to be addressed. What kind of early childhood services need to be established in Canada’s various Francophone communities so that they fulfill their expected role in integrating the diverse clientele into French-language schools? What teaching approaches must be favoured to achieve this particular goal? Who should deliver these services and what kind of training should they receive? What should be the parents’ and community organizations’ involvement? And what should be the relation of these services to the school system?

Built on a partnership between the Canadian Teachers’ Federation (CTF) and the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Citizenship and Minorities (CIRCEM) of the University of Ottawa, and with the financial support of Canadian Heritage, the project attempts to shed light on these questions and, more particularly, on the connection between early childhood services and the French-language school in a minority setting. That question has largely been ignored until now, which is all the more astonishing given that everybody agrees early childhood services should be viewed as the gateway to French-language schools. Hence, we studied current early childhood practices in various Francophone communities across the country. The review of early childhood community practices was at the centre of our study, which thus aims to draw from field experiences the knowledge needed to design strategies for the development of services. More specifically, the project is intended to complement existing studies by identifying, through the review of current initiatives, the early childhood

¹ “early childhood services” include a wide variety of services and learning programs for children who have not yet reached the age of compulsory education. They include day care services, junior kindergarten and kindergarten programs, preschool resource centres, play groups, etc.
mechanisms most likely to promote the vitality of Francophones, that is those that will most effectively help young children learn the French language and develop a sense of belonging to the Francophone community. It also seeks to identify organization models that will guarantee the desired sustainability of services. Above all, in view of CTF’s mandate, the objective of the study is to highlight the best avenues for Francophone communities to pursue in order to fashion preschool education into the expected means of integrating students into French-language schools.

The methodology in brief
At the beginning, two literature reviews were carried out. The description of international experiences in early childhood care and education provided an inventory of the models used elsewhere and identified the factors which encouraged communities, similar in some ways to ours, to take responsibility for their minority young children's education. The literature review of language acquisition in minority Francophone communities in Canada stressed the primary importance of instruction in the first language, while underlining the school's key role in the development of additive bilingualism in young children, notably where the socio-demographic environment does not promote the use of French.

On the basis of the findings of these two studies, and taking into account the status of early childhood care and education services in the different areas of the country, the project team undertook to collect information on early childhood community practices in five selected Francophone communities: Orléans, Ontario; Timmins, Ontario; Chaleur Region, New Brunswick; St. Mary's Bay, Nova Scotia; Calgary and Edmonton, Alberta. Unpublished data on early childhood services available locally were thus gathered, focussing primarily on service establishment, role, programs, clientele and staff. A survey of educators in these services and of parents of children involved, as well as round-table discussions with kindergarten and first-grade teachers from schools accommodating these children, completed the picture. A series of conclusions were drawn regarding the integration of children's services into the dynamics of the communities studied and concerning their relation to the school system, the place given to the French language, their effects on attendance at French-language schools and the ability of young Francophones to make the transition to these schools.
Three **regional forums** were then organized to further discussions, on the basis of field observations, on models to be implemented to ensure that communities receive the desired range of services having the widest scope possible. The role to be played by the school environment in this matter was central to the discussion.

From this process, combining literature reviews, field studies and consultations with Canadian Francophone leaders involved in the area, will emerge a national vision for the development of early childhood services, which is the focus of this final research report.

**Research team**

The CTF Advisory Committee on French as a First Language initiated the project and is responsible for its execution. The Director of Services to Francophones, Liliane Vincent, manages the project for CTF. The Committee entrusted the study to the University of Ottawa’s CIRCEM, a newly created research centre at the Faculty of Social Sciences. CIRCEM’s objective is to promote research on citizenship and minority groups. The Canadian Francophonie is at the heart of its concerns.

Anne Gilbert, CIRCEM’s Director of Research, and Joseph Yvon Thériault, Director, jointly manage the project’s university team. Sophie LeTouzé handles the coordination. She was responsible for carrying out the studies in Orléans and St. Mary’s Bay. The other project team members are: Nicole Gallant, postdoctoral researcher, who developed the survey material; Natalie Riendeau who conducted the study of community practices in Timmins; and Marie-Anick Maillé and Vickie Coghlan who helped with the literature reviews. Louis-Gabriel Bordeleau acted as advisor during the project development.

The team joined forces with education experts from other universities to develop the conceptual framework and conduct the field research. Sylvie Blain, professor at the Université de Moncton, led the study of community practices in Bathurst, New Brunswick; Yvonne Hébert, professor at the University of Calgary, was responsible for the field research in Alberta. Yvonne Hébert, Monika Heller (CREFO, University of Toronto) and Rodrigue Landry (Université de Moncton) were actively involved in developing the theoretical and methodological approach to the research.

Numerous community stakeholders also cooperated at various stages of the project. At the beginning, more than twenty of them participated in a round-table discussion on research strategy. The case studies introduced many others in the deliberation process. Finally, over 50 people representing the education and early childhood areas in all parts of the country participated in the regional forums.
It should be emphasized that discussions regularly took place between the project’s university team and CTF: primarily with Liliane Vincent, but also with the members of the CTF Advisory Committee on French as a First language as well as with the Francophone liaison officers from provincial and territorial teacher organizations.

**Organization of the report**

This report outlines the research results. It is divided into three parts.

The first part gives an overview of the major **findings** of various stages of the project. After a brief review of existing early childhood care and education services in other minority contexts, it presents some highlights of the early childhood issue development across Canada, the major conclusions drawn from the national study of early childhood services in Francophone minority settings, and the most significant results of our case studies. The discussions held during the three forums are then summarized, as well as the documented conclusions about the challenges of learning the French language in a minority context. By casting new light on the experiences of Francophone communities, these findings will illustrate the complete relevance of the following proposals regarding the strategies to be implemented to reinforce the development of the early childhood services needed to give the school its expected scope.

The second part deals with the main **issues** arising from the development of care and education services for young Francophones at the community level. While restating some of the findings of other studies on this question, it underlines the necessity to organize early childhood services within solid structures. Upon completion of our research, this seems to be the only way to ensure their quality, their permanence and the fulfilment of their role in integrating children into French-language schools.

The third part describes the national **vision** emerging from the research. It introduces the service organization model that seems most suited to the needs of the communities, and where the school is the hub around which services must be developed. The participation of parents and other community players is thoroughly discussed, as well as the role that governments must play in this matter.
There is great interest in the early childhood issue within Francophone communities across the country. Since early childhood care and education services prepare young Francophones for learning and for better integration into the French-language school, they are henceforth considered part of a comprehensive vision for French-language education in minority settings. However, our study revealed the instability of the services, including those for five-year-olds (kindergarten), for three- and four-year-olds (junior kindergarten) and for younger children and their families. Francophone communities are certainly not the only ones lagging behind in that respect in the country, but the effects on them are worse given that their progressive minorization lessens the young children's ability to master their language and reduces cultural benchmarks. The review of existing services in contexts other than ours, particularly in some European minorities, also suggests that these communities should not be satisfied with them.

**Internationally**

The early childhood care and education services in OECD\(^2\) countries were recently the focus of an extensive review, which we documented as part of the first stage of our research\(^3\). The objective was to gather information on policies relating to early childhood in various societal contexts, goals of existing programs, management methods, services available, clientele, staff and training, and issues arising from the development of these services. In this literature review, we also looked at European minorities' experiences, as described in a series of reports produced by Mercator Education. Here is what we discovered:

1. **Two years of free services before compulsory school age**

   In several OECD countries, access to early childhood care and education services is a statutory right as of the age of three. There is a tendency elsewhere to offer three- to six-year-olds at least two years of subsidized free services before they reach compulsory school age. A universal access approach characterizes the vast majority of European countries. Until now, a more market-oriented approach has dictated the development of services in the United States, Australia and the

---


United Kingdom. However, these countries are heading for fair, if not universal, access to their services in order to level the playing field among socio-economically, culturally or otherwise disadvantaged populations.

Services for children aged three and under are less developed and fall far short of demand. They are very closely related to parental leaves and other social programs. In most countries, current policies are driven by the view that the care and education of children younger than three are a family responsibility. However, OECD has noted signs of greater recognition of the educational role of these services.

2. Bringing services together under the same administration promotes consistency
The degree of consistency in early childhood services depends greatly on the way responsibilities are assigned. Two models were observed: in the first, the most widely spread, the early childhood care and education services come under education (for children three years of age and older) and social assistance (for younger children); in the second model, services for all children are the responsibility of one administration, whether it be education, social affairs or family affairs. According to OECD, the management of services by the same administration promotes consistency. The organization also insists on the need for coordination between early childhood services and the education sector to facilitate the transition to school.

3. Instructional frameworks and staff training
Most of the countries studied have developed national instructional frameworks in order to promote equal quality. The efforts up to now have mostly targeted children between three and six years of age, but many countries are preparing to implement instructional frameworks for children under three. Particular attention is paid to continuity of learning from preschool services to the regular school. The training issue has been dealt with thoroughly in the report. Two approaches exist: a dual one, whereby teachers work with children older than three and less-trained workers are assigned to the younger children; and one in which teachers are responsible for all children. The OECD has noted a transnational trend towards at least a three-year university diploma requirement.
4. **The effect of the political status of minorities on the development of services**
   The early childhood issue is receiving a lot of attention in all of the minorities we observed. Indeed, efforts have been made on all fronts to give young children care and education services in their language and with their cultural heritage as a backdrop. However, we noted significant disparities in the development of these services. The autonomy given to the minority appears to be an important factor in accounting for the differences we observed. Catalonia, Helgoade (Spanish Basque country), Galicia or even Wales or Corsica enjoy a level of autonomy that has allowed them to make their own language the language of instruction, even at the preschool level. In Finland, the Swedish minority, which boasts control over its schooling, has access to a day care system that operates, like the education system, on a language model, even if it comes under another administration. Sweden's Sami people have also taken advantage of their parallel school system to introduce distinct early childhood education services.

5. **The impact of language status**
   Language status also weighs heavily in the balance. Having or not official language status has a huge impact. But what needs to be emphasized is the effect of the more hidden status of a minority language, from which stem the efforts to preserve it in young children. A clear case in point is that of Galicia, where Spanish has come to dominate everyday conversation. The tenuous presence of Galician in early childhood care and education structures bears witness to the situation.

6. **The role of the state**
   Everywhere, the development of services depends directly on community commitment. Parents, supported by teachers, have often been the initiators. Yet, this did not stop the state from playing a key role in consolidating care and education structures for minority children.

**In Canada**
Except for Quebec, the development of early childhood care and education services is far from being as advanced in Canada. Different studies confirm this, including those of Campaign 2000 which we closely examined. The National Children's Agenda has nonetheless generated a great deal of hope, particularly among Francophone communities across the country. A review of the following few contextual elements will clarify the issues at stake for Francophones.
1. Child care services in Canada

In 2001, in Canada, 82% of children under the age of six did not have access to regulated child care services (kindergarten, day care centre, family home child care). In the four provinces studied by Campaign 2000 (Newfoundland, Ontario, Saskatchewan and British Columbia), the situation is equally tragic. In Ontario, for example, only 17% of all children can be accommodated in a regulated setting, whereas 60% of children under the age of six have mothers in the labour force. Although the number of children is decreasing and the number of day care spaces is increasing, the shortfall continues to be appalling.

The majority of regulated child care services for preschool children are funded through user fees. However, in all provinces, this cost takes a big bite out of the family budget. The difference between the maximum available subsidy and child care costs is yet another factor limiting access for many low-income families.

Table 1. Cost of child care services as a percentage of average annual earnings, selected provinces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Newfoundland and Labrador</th>
<th>Saskatchewan</th>
<th>British Columbia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average annual cost</td>
<td>$8,800</td>
<td>$9,648</td>
<td>$13,872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– 2001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time regulated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>centre 2 children, 2 years and 4 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average annual earnings</td>
<td>$31,945</td>
<td>$31,498</td>
<td>$34,805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– 2001 before taxes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of earnings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-average-income family</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-average-income family</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


---


5 Campaign 2000 was unable to determine the number of places in kindergartens and junior kindergartens due to a lack of comparative data.
2. **Quebec policy**

The Government of Quebec created its own provincial early childhood care and education program. Since 1997, educational child care services for which a reduced contribution is required ($5 per day) have been in place for children from zero to four years of age. The Quebec Ministère du Revenu grants a refundable tax credit for child care expenses incurred by families for whom there is no space available in these services or who chose another form of child care. There are currently about 150,000 spaces available at $5 per day, the goal being 200,000 spaces by 2005 — a number deemed adequate to meet the needs of the entire Quebec population.

3. **Federal-provincial-territorial early childhood development initiative**

In September 2000, first ministers throughout Canada, with the exception of the Premier of Quebec, reached an agreement on early childhood development. Under this agreement, the Government of Canada is transferring $2.2 billion over five years to the provinces and territories, a contribution which will reach $500 million starting in 2003-04. Four areas for action were identified: pregnancy, birth and early intervention; support services for parents and families; early childhood development, educational services and care; and community supports. In addition, in the 2002 Throne Speech, the Government of Canada announced its commitment to increase support for child care programs and services targeted by the National Children's Agenda. In recent months, a strategy was developed, in cooperation with the provinces and territories, to increase the number of child care and preschool spaces, to reduce service costs for low- and modest-income families and to improve service quality. The Government will provide $900 million over the next five years[^6] to provincial and territorial governments.

The National Children's Agenda triggered a host of initiatives in the provinces. However, it has been criticized for not specifying how priorities must be set, what services are included in each area for action, and how to ensure accountability. Many believe that investments are clearly insufficient given the needs.

According to consultations carried out by Égérie Conseils with players in early childhood services in minority settings, the National Children's Agenda is not well known in Canada's Francophone communities.

**For Canadian Francophones**

In the winter of 2002, Odette Langlais produced a profile of the status of early childhood services in Canadian Francophone communities. This part of the research was based on a similar study she had done two years earlier for the Commission nationale des parents francophones (CNPF) to identify existing services and the issues related to their development. The update confirms that the needs are just as pressing in all Canadian minority communities and that resources allocated to meet them are clearly insufficient. We are not the first ones to state this fact. The report brings to light lesser-known issues in early childhood development services, including:

1. **The absence of policies for early childhood services in French**
   No province has adopted policies for young Francophones, and no program deals expressly with the development of early childhood initiatives by Francophone communities. No envelope has been established to this end, except in Ontario where the Franco-Ontarian community has succeeded in securing part of the provincial Early Years Challenge Fund, based on its share of the province population (5%).

---


10 The description given by Égérie Conseils clearly corroborates our findings. *Grandir en français, utopie ou réalité? L’accessibilité des services à la jeunesse dans les communautés francophones en situation minoritaire*. Report on a preliminary study and on an effort to raise awareness of the National Children’s Agenda, prepared for the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada (FCFA), 2000.
2. **Ad hoc initiatives, unstable everywhere**
   Nowhere have structured and complete services been organized, the trend being towards the development of ad hoc initiatives that remain unstable everywhere. The Franco-Ontarian community is the exception, as it offers its four- and five-year-old children French-language education services integrated into the school system. A great deal of creativity was required to fund these services until now, which raises concerns for their sustainability.

3. **Major disparities in the availability of services:**
   **provinces/territories, metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas**
   Even if services are available in all provinces and territories, they are not well developed. The study showed that their availability varies considerably from one province/territory to another and even within a province/territory. Full-time kindergarten is far from being accessible to all five-year-olds throughout Canada. There are no junior kindergarten services in some regions and full-time day care centres are rare outside of the large metropolitan areas.

   The issue of francization of young children does not get the same attention everywhere.

4. **Towards a closer connection with schools**
   Two types of initiatives commonly exist in the area of early childhood services: those carried out under the leadership of the school system and those initiated by parents, generally under the direction of their local and provincial federations. Even if most services set up by parents are located in schools, the links are sometimes tenuous and the sharing of resources limited.

   There is a tendency everywhere to bring care and education services, which do not fall under the school system, closer to the schools and to establish partnerships with them. Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Newfoundland and Labrador provide interesting examples of this approach.
In the communities

We examined early childhood services in five Francophone communities across the country: Orléans, Ontario; Timmins, Ontario; Chaleur Region, New Brunswick; St. Mary’s Bay, Nova Scotia; and Calgary and Edmonton, Alberta. Through interviews with their directors, we collected a whole range of information on the implementation of early childhood care and education services in these communities and on their ongoing connection with other community forces, particularly with the school system. We analyzed their mission, curriculum and activity programs for children from a linguistic and cultural perspective. By conducting a survey of their staff and of the parents of children involved, we were able to measure how seriously they view the learning of French and a sense of belonging to the Francophone community. This survey provided new information on the satisfaction of staff and parents with the place given to French in existing services. Discussions with groups of kindergarten and first-grade teachers from schools accommodating the clientele who used these services also helped determine the effect of access of young children to care and education services on their transition to school. Even if these five cases are not representative of all situations, they provide a sufficiently varied picture of existing early childhood services in Canada’s Francophone communities to lead us to fairly solid conclusions regarding the integration of early childhood services into the dynamics of these communities and their relation to the school system, the place French holds within them, their effects on attendance at French-language schools and the young Francophones’ ability to fully integrate into these schools.

Table 2. Share of Francophones in the areas studied, by type of area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>20% Francophones or less</th>
<th>20-40% Francophones</th>
<th>40-60% Francophones</th>
<th>Over 60% Francophones</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calgary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Orléans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edmonton</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-metropolitan areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timmins</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bathurst</td>
<td>St. Mary’s Bay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These five studies were carried out between April and December 2002. A separate report was produced for each one, available in printed version from CIRCEM and CTF as well as on their Web sites. CIRCEM also produced a summary of these studies, in a document prepared by Sophie Letouzé and entitled *Pratiques communautaires en petite enfance. Synthèse des études de cas*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa, CIRCEM, March 2003.
Table 3. Participation in the case studies in Orléans, Timmins, St. Mary’s Bay, Bathurst, Calgary and Edmonton

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Orléans</th>
<th>Timmins</th>
<th>St. Mary’s Bay</th>
<th>Bathurst</th>
<th>Calgary</th>
<th>Edmonton</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of services who participated</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of educators who filled in the questionnaire</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of parents who filled in the questionnaire</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of teachers who took part in discussion groups</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These studies helped us better understand the issues relating to the development of care and education services for young Francophones at the community level, including the need to support them with solid structures to ensure their expected sustainability. They showed the primary role played by parents in setting up services and the extent of the support they received from other community stakeholders in consolidating them. Our research illustrated how much value these stakeholders place on the use of French as the language of communication in these services. It highlighted the fact that poorer families are usually excluded. It confirmed the great instability of the services, both financially and in terms of human resources, and thus proved to be a very useful complement to the positions taken to that effect by other organizations involved in the issue. Finally, it revealed the impact of participation in the services on attendance at French-language schools and on the ability of young children to make the transition.

1. An initiative that depends mostly on parents

Interestingly, our case studies markedly demonstrated the key role played by parents in setting up and consolidating French-language services for young children at the local level. For the most part, existing services are the result of their efforts, often unstructured and minimally supported. The best example of this is the « Prématernelle de Clare », in St. Mary’s Bay, initiated by a mother who wanted to better

---

12 See in particular the work carried out under the leadership of the Commission nationale des parents francophones: Langlais, Odette. Revenir aux sources, a study paper and draft action plan for preschool service development in minority settings, March 2000, and Le Plan national d’appui à la petite enfance, March 2002; as well as the study commissioned by the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada (FCFA) from Égéria Conseils, cited above.
prepare her child for school and who made her neighbours and friends aware of the importance of this preparation. The problems that she and numerous other mothers who undertook similar initiatives encountered, notably in terms of funding, did not stop them. It is due to their determination that we find today such a broad range of services in some communities.

Everywhere, the support that these parents received from community organizations contributed to the consolidation of services. Partnerships established with school boards, in particular, have played a critical role in their long-term maintenance. An excellent case in point is that of Orléans, where the purchase of services from community agencies by the school boards has greatly contributed to the sustainability of early childhood programs. Even the simple sharing of premises with schools was in some cases an asset.

While parents initiated most services, some owe their existence to community organizations. The Association canadienne-française de l’Ontario (ACFO) and the Association canadienne-française de l’Alberta (ACFA) sponsored some projects that led to the creation of services we studied. They played a significant role in their development by taking direct measures to make parents aware of the benefits of preschool education.

2. The importance attached to the French language

Our review of community practices highlighted the fact that parents consider extremely important the use of French as the language of communication within services for their young children. It showed that, for some 180 parents we interviewed, the choice of services was mainly dictated by the language used, more so than proximity to work or home, the availability of spaces or the fact of knowing someone in these services.

Their motives for choosing this factor are diverse. The learning of French, in their view, has a utility value, as it may improve their child's career opportunities. But it also carries a profound identity-building value, being the language of one or both parents, of their ancestors, or of the community to which they belong. The study revealed that the identity-building dimension dominates in contexts where Francophones are most minoritarian, such as in Alberta’s metropolitan areas. Parents
living in economically weaker areas base their choice more on economic reasons. However, they are the ones who tend to advocate more strongly the learning of both French and English at a young age.

“The day care center has good policies regarding the use of the French language. The children are always spoken to in proper French. They are encouraged to speak the language correctly and are educated accordingly. The groups, routines and daily activities are all in French. I am proud that my children can attend this Francophone institution.”

*Comment by a parent from Timmins.* (translation)

**Table 4. Main reasons influencing the parents’ choice of services**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Orléans</th>
<th>Timmins</th>
<th>St. Mary’s Bay</th>
<th>Bathurst</th>
<th>Calgary</th>
<th>Edmonton</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Availability of places</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French as the language of service</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proximity to work or home</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing someone who works there</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing someone who sends their children there</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13 Respondents were asked to put these factors in order of priority. An index was calculated for each one of them, representing the sum of the percentages of responses in cases where the factor was among the first four choices. This percentage was weighted in the following manner: 1st choice x 4, 2nd choice x 3, 3rd choice x 2, and 4th choice x 1. The maximum value of the index is 400 (100% of respondents selected the factor as their 1st choice), while the minimum value is 0.
We noted with interest that parents are generally very satisfied with linguistic and cultural services provided. In fact, our study revealed that, almost everywhere, French is generally the language of communication in accordance with the parents' wishes. The policies in that regard are very clear, even if they are not always explicit in the documentation parents receive. A review of the situation in a bilingual day care centre in Bathurst suggests that the state of French could be more problematic in this kind of service, as some Anglophone parents use it for immersion training for their young children. These groups are far less homogenous and English is used a lot more. The presence of numerous children who know very little French in some services in Edmonton and Calgary confirms that we have to pay particular attention to mechanisms designed to help their linguistic integration. The hiring of English-speaking educators and other staff presents an additional challenge in some services.

3. The low participation level of disadvantaged families
Research revealed that services in place do not really reach children from socio-economically deprived families. One look at the profile of the parents who participated in the survey confirms this fact. They were in the upper income category, regardless of where they lived, and most were highly educated. This comes as no surprise when one considers the high cost, no matter where, for using the services. This research finding will have to be taken into account in drafting any strategy on early childhood care and education services in Francophone settings.

4. The lack and precariousness of services
Based on our case studies, we must reiterate the finding concerning the lack of services. In Ontario, four- and five-year-olds attend school on a full-time basis; elsewhere, programs are significantly more limited with kindergarten often being offered only on a half-time basis and junior kindergarten services available a few half-days a week. Full-time French day care services available, year round, are becoming scarce and their ability for providing care is, in general, fairly limited.

Existing services remain fragile everywhere, especially on the financial level. Government subsidies are either insignificant or completely non-existent. Such is the situation that activity financing is nearly wholly accomplished through fees paid by the parents or through fundraising activities. Staff salaries are often paid by employment assistance programs, which we know only apply for a limited time and, therefore, do little for personnel retention. Educators and directors are often laid off during the summer. Even in Orléans, where early childhood
care and education services enjoy a degree of stability since they started operating under service contracts with school boards, their future is in doubt. Because school boards are finding it difficult to finance the activities of the « Centre préscolaire Coccinelle » or « Le Centre éducatif Petits Pinceaux » in Orléans' schools, they cannot vouch for the survival of the partnership on a long-term basis.

In an extremely difficult financial context, the issue of premises is crucial. Unable to meet the cost of rent, most of the services must resort to the community to provide them a place for their activities. Many have moved a number of times, bouncing from one place to another, when space is made available because of the unoccupied areas that their school or community partners offer for a certain period of time.

5. The issue of human resources
Personnel recruitment represents a major issue for the development of early childhood care and education services in minority settings. Recruitment constitutes an everyday challenge in the communities we studied. All services have to deal with this, because there are very few trained Francophone early childhood workers.

Therefore, directors of existing services are generally faced with the extremely difficult task of having to choose between language and training. If language skills are favoured in certain areas, in others, Anglophone personnel has to be hired to meet government requirements for licensed services.

The low salaries paid to educators is another side of the issue. Little valued and poorly paid, work with young children is hardly attractive. We noted a high turnover rate of personnel in the services we studied, as more than half of the 45 educators who participated in our survey had been there for less than two years. This problem is particularly acute in large cities.

6. The challenge of programming and the lack of instructional material
All the early childhood care and education services examined advocate learning through play. The activity program is generally not very structured, and is split between periods of free time and periods of more organized activities. The program preparation is often carried out by the educators themselves, who develop activities individually or collectively. In some cases, the activity must be approved by the director of the service.
Considering the central role they play in the programming, one must take delight in the importance that the early childhood workers always give to French-language training and the transmission of French culture and its values. Opinions are much more divided as to the place of the Catholic faith, which is deemed to be of little importance in the learning process, except in Ontario.

Some workers highlighted the difficulties connected with teaching French to young children. They also insist, notably in St. Mary's Bay, on the passing on of the culture in their community which is undergoing transformations. Several of them deplored the lack of instructional material at their disposal to accomplish their tasks.

7. **A definite impact on recruitment and adapting to school**

Finally, our research confirmed the impact of access to French-language preschool services on enrolments in French-language schools. The path is the same, in every community. The vast majority of parents whose children participate in early childhood care and education services in French, plan on sending them to French-language schools. Many factors explain this situation, including the fact that services to young children play an important role in the consciousness-raising and mobilization of parents as to the importance of education in French. In communities with very small minorities, these services also function as a meeting place and serve to develop a sense of loyalty to community institutions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chart 1. Percentage of parents who plan to enrol their child in a French-language school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orléans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timmins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Mary's Bay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bathurst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calgary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edmonton</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Diagram showing percentage of parents who plan to enrol their child in a French-language school]
French-language early childhood services ease integration into schools, as demonstrated by our case studies. The testimonies heard in the discussion groups carried out with kindergarten and first-grade teachers from schools serving clienteles who used the services studied are unanimous: young children who benefited from a preschool experience in French are those who adapt the best. First, they acquire social skills and abilities which help them get a good start in school and, especially, they develop a better knowledge of the language while creating a sense of belonging to the Francophone community. Children who had gone to French-language services had greater confidence in themselves on the linguistic and cultural levels. The 47 participants in the discussion groups emphasized, however, the primary role played by the family in this regard.

The leaders' viewpoint in the fields of education and early childhood

Based on these conclusions regarding the needs and aspirations of Canadian Francophones in the area of local early childhood services, three regional forums were organized in order to collect the communities’ views as to how to respond. Some fifty people from the fields of education and early childhood participated in these forums, which were held in November and December 2002 and January 2003 in Ottawa (Ontario region), Moncton (Atlantic region) and Winnipeg (Western and Northern regions). Very open exchanges took place during these forums regarding the main issues related to the development of Francophone early childhood care and education services given the current status of the structures. These issues will be examined in the next part of the document. Consequently, the forums have greatly contributed to promoting discussion on the early childhood services model to be set up in the country’s Francophone communities in order to ensure the full integration of eligible children into French-language schools. We will briefly present the proposals dealing with the structures to be put in place to ensure the development of early childhood services. These proposals were mentioned during the forums and are at the very heart of the vision that will be put forward later.

14 The reports of these forums are available upon request from CTF.
1. **A consensus as to the need for institutionalization**
   In the opinion of the leaders gathered at the forums, the issue of the development of early childhood care and education services is of great concern. The communities only have access to a limited range of services, which are poorly funded and whose future is far from being assured. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that the situation can change unless there is a much stronger institutionalization of services.

   From this perspective, they indicated that initiatives aimed at early childhood that have been carried out through the school system or with its close co-operation are those that have been the most lasting. Hence, the consensus that emerged from each of the three forums is the need to integrate these services into the school system in order to ensure that they are available to as many Francophones as possible, controlled by Francophones and tailored to their own realities, while maximizing the potential for continuity among services offered at the various educational levels.

2. **The full participation of parents in the structures**
   The forums’ participants underlined the leading role of the community sector, especially that of parents, in setting up the services that communities enjoy today. In their opinion, the model advocated must enable them to keep up their work and give them the resources to do so. This is how the implementation of a structure that would give them responsibility for managing the services offered through the school system was presented. This structure was seen as the approach most likely to blend community expertise with the assurance of sustainable and accessible services.

3. **A distinction to be made between kindergarten, junior kindergarten and early childhood services**
   We recalled the desirability to make a distinction between the services intended for five-year-olds (kindergarten) which are already provided in most of the provinces through the school system and thereby under the responsibility of the Department of Education; those that are intended for three- and four-year-olds (junior kindergarten), more or less integrated into the school system, depending on the community; and those that are aimed for babies and toddlers (0-3 years) and their families, generally provided within community structures. Questions arose as to the relevance of different approaches, depending on the level. Finally, we discussed the need to establish priorities regarding the development of these various services, bearing in mind the communities’ limited resources.
4. A necessary commitment by government authorities
The development of early childhood services implies the commitment of all the stakeholders within a community. Everybody agrees and stresses that it is from their commitment that the existing services were created. Although Francophone communities bear a large share of the responsibility for the development and consolidation of French preschool services, they are nonetheless not the only ones accountable for progress in this matter. Preschool education in a Francophone minority setting is also the responsibility of governments, who must support and adequately finance initiatives taken. The forums' participants insisted on this point, mentioning the need for policy supporting the development of these services and for programs to implement them.

Lessons to be drawn from studies on learning French in a minority setting
Without examining in depth the learning strategies recommended for early childhood care and education services in order that they can play the expected role in the integration of children into French-language schools — our interest being more related to sociology and politics rather than pedagogy as such — our project, however, has pointed to some aspects to reflect on. We will end this overview of the main research findings by examining the conclusions which emanated from our second literature review, which aimed at identifying, from studies dealing with the learning of a first language in a minority Francophone setting in Canada, the issues it raises, notably among young children.

1. The need for solid schooling in French
The studies that were compiled remind us that the attraction of the majority language and community is largely responsible for the development of a subtractive bilingualism among Francophone minorities in Canada. Living in a socio-institutional environment strongly dominated by English, Francophones must be able to depend on the school or the family, if not both, to develop their French language skills. According to the compensation balance model proposed by Rodrigue Landry and Réal Allard, the weaker the ethnolinguistic vitality of the minority Francophone community is, the more essential it is for the family unit and the preschool or school environment to promote the use of French to compensate for the scarce French resources in the individual network of linguistic contacts.

Therefore, we can infer from this model that, in a Francophone minority setting, additive bilingualism is fostered by solid schooling in French. A unilingual French learning environment (the compensation balance) will allow minority Francophones to develop skills in French that can be transferred to English, along with a strong subjective ethnolinguistic vitality to counterbalance the lack of socio-institutional vitality.

2. Pedagogy anchored in the community
All the studies that we reviewed generally call for a pedagogy specifically adapted to a minority setting and its diversity. Inspired in great part by the work of Benoît Cazabon, the Alliance canadienne des responsables et des enseignantes et des enseignants en français langue maternelle (ACREF) presented a model based on the holistic and communicative vision of language. Rodrique Landry and Réal Allard, meanwhile, propose an approach referred to as socio-centric pedagogy, that increases awareness in very young children of their minority situation. The educational aspects per se of these concepts go beyond this study’s framework, which limits itself to defining some issues related to learning a first language in a minority setting. We should remember, however, that these models both promote an educational mission firmly anchored in the child’s immediate community. In fact, whether it be Cazabon’s holistic vision or Landry’s socio-centric pedagogy, both approaches insist that the teaching of French in a minority situation must be better anchored in the student’s life experience (holistic approach) and even at the moment he or she becomes aware of his or her immediate identity (socio-centric pedagogy).

3. Measures to implement
What can preschool institutions do to promote the development of French skills and subjective ethnolinguistic vitality? Our literature review suggests concrete measures likely to promote the development of an additive bilingualism in minority Francophone children and, thus, protect the future of their ethnolinguistic community, including: immersion in an environment saturated with written French to counterbalance the constant exposure to English on posters, signs, etc.; decontextualized use of oral language, which promotes a greater command of abstract concepts; awareness of the various language codes in order to develop, in the child, better communication skills in a variety of situations, including the one that will dominate at school; and pedagogy adapted to linguistically heterogeneous classes, an important vector of social equality.
THE ISSUES

The need for early childhood services in Francophone minority communities is indeed pressing; these services range from direct support for parents to a network of universally accessible day care centres and ready access to the gamut of other programs designed for the very young. Again, the diversity of needs calls for an extensive array of services. Several reasons justify this need, and first and foremost, is the survival of French-language schools. The research sheds some light on the important issues raised by their development.

Rationale

Access to early childhood care and education services has an undeniable impact on their development, a statement that everyone agrees with because of the ever increasing evidence that is more and more difficult to refute. Education received in the early years makes it possible to help children live experiences which form the first link of their education, and what they learn at this stage of their lives will greatly influence the outcomes of future learning, their personal development and their involvement in society. There is no need to revisit these arguments, which Odette Langlais has very skilfully summarized in the working paper which she prepared in March 2000 for the Commission nationale des parents francophones. We will however reiterate the particular importance of preschool education in minority settings. Whether it be with regard to young children themselves and more particularly from the point of view of their integration into French-language schools, or with respect to the development of the communities to which they belong, early childhood services have become a requirement for the institutional development of the Canadian Francophonie. This is confirmed by our work.

1. Cultural and linguistic integration

With the exception of a few communities, we note that Francophone families live in communities where English is the dominant language. The number of exogamous couples is growing and most of them speak English at home. In this context, a larger proportion of children entering French-language school do not have the necessary skills to become properly integrated. As shown in Table 5, over 37% of Francophones belong to communities where they make up less than 5% of the total population. This is to say that most Francophones live in areas strongly dominated by the majority language and culture.

Early childhood services in French would go a long way towards changing this situation. They would allow children to develop French skills at a crucial point in their life. They would acquire the linguistic knowledge necessary to start French-language school with confidence, while familiarizing themselves with French culture. The fact that they can socialize in French will also contribute to their sense of belonging to the community.

Table 5. Canadian Francophonie by community in 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ratio of Francophones according to the census division</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-5%</td>
<td>374,449</td>
<td>37.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10%</td>
<td>45,041</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-20%</td>
<td>131,301</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-40%</td>
<td>136,504</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-60%</td>
<td>101,381</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ 60%</td>
<td>198,218</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>986,894</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Equality of opportunity for young Francophones

Young Francophones from minority settings must have the same opportunities to succeed in school as majority children. However, a significant number of them do not benefit from such opportunities at the moment, and they are heavily burdened by the fact that they are not adequately prepared for school. Preschool education is one way of allowing them to have the same opportunities as young Anglophones, by giving them the background needed to achieve the results expected in school. This is another reason for taking strong action on this issue.

3. Equivalence of outcomes

Many assessments show that the performance of Francophone students is inferior to that of their Anglophone peers in mathematics, science, reading and writing, and communications. Their lack of skills in French, as stated above, combined with the linguistic inability of parents to reinforce their children’s education even if they decide to send them to a French-language school, is one of the factors referred to most often to explain the weaker performance of Francophones.

---

17 Table prepared by Anne Gilbert, based on data on French as a mother tongue distributed on December 10, 2002.
By helping to better prepare children for school, early childhood care and education services are one of the best ways to address the problem of poor performance. By fostering among children greater proficiency in the language and by encouraging them to take hold of their cultural identity, the services will develop their ability to benefit from the learning they will acquire at school and they will achieve better results. Preschool education in French appears to be one of the avenues most likely to ensure equivalence of outcomes between minority and majority students.

“An Ottawa-Carleton study conducted in the context of French-language education in a minority setting examined the impact of full-day kindergarten on the development of specific aspects of competence in French. After a year, the children in full-day programs showed significantly greater gains in the language development than those comparable children not in the program.” For the Love of Learning, Report of the Royal Commission on Learning, Government of Ontario, 1994, volume 2, p. 19.

4. Recruiting eligible students
In the context we just mentioned, where life often goes on in English, both at home and outside the home, the young Francophone of preschool age has little chance of developing strong French-language skills. This often causes parents to hesitate to send their children to French-language school. Currently, registration in French-language schools has plateaued at half the eligible enrolments.

The development of early childhood services in French in the country’s Francophone communities represents the best way to reverse this trend. Enhancing the francization of eligible children, while fostering among parents the habit of supporting minority institutions will promote enrolments in French-language schools.
Table 6. Enrolment in French-language schools in 1996, Canada except for Quebec

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of French-language schools</th>
<th>545</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enrolment in French-language schools</td>
<td>126,718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target enrolment of students</td>
<td>232,942</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual enrolment/target enrolment</td>
<td>54.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


5. Strengthening the vitality of Francophone communities

Early childhood care and education services in the minority language play an invaluable role in passing on French language and culture from one generation to another, the first requirement for the survival of French-language schools. This is also a primary factor of the success they will achieve, without which the parents’ support will definitely be lost. Where the school constitutes the pillar of community development, one cannot overly emphasize the role preschool education will ultimately play in the sustaining and vitality of Francophone communities.

Establishing early childhood services, maintaining schools and strengthening the vitality of Francophone communities constitute three interrelated dimensions of their development. All three must be part of the strategies that communities will put forward to ensure their vitality.

Issues

The major challenge for Francophone communities in minority situations is to ensure that they have the necessary institutions in place to live in French, wherever these communities are found. Various strategies have been developed for that purpose. Preschool education receives particular attention, not only because it is an essential element in the development of the child but also because it is a necessary condition for the very survival of French-language schools. The setting up of early childhood Francophone services across the country and their consolidation raise several important issues. Francophone organizations involved in this area have identified several of them in the course of their work. Our literature reviews of early childhood experiences in European minorities and of the challenges surrounding the teaching of French in minority settings

---

in Canada, the national profile of existing services, as well as the studies of current practices in various Francophone communities across the country to meet the needs of their young children, have shown that these issues are still very relevant today.

1. Providing French-speaking communities with the range of early childhood services required

Many initiatives have been taken with respect to services to young Francophone children at various stages of their development, and new services are forthcoming in several Francophone communities. But these services all fall short of the demand in quantity, quality and diversity of services. Whatever the needs may be at the local level, the principle remains the same: everything possible must be done to ensure that all Francophone communities receive the range of services they need. No region of the country must be neglected to ensure the greatest possible equity among communities, be they urban or rural, regardless of the size of their population.

2. Providing French services, the best means of maintaining the French language and culture and ensuring full control

The need for early childhood services is glaring, in all Francophone communities across the country, whether it be the direct support to parents or the implementation of a system of day care centres, accessible to all. Families who use these services must be able to rely on services in French, the best guarantee for maintaining the French language and culture. These services must be managed by Francophones, for Francophones.

“It is very important for us that our children be able to live and develop in French. The service supports our feelings by passing on to our children the importance of the French language and culture.”

Comment by a parent from Orléans. (translation)
3. Supporting the services with solid structures to guarantee permanency

These services, existing and future, will remain very fragile, unless solid structures are established to provide them with the desired permanency. Experience has shown this, regardless of the environment. So, the institutionalization of services seems to be an objective for which there is a broad consensus, in terms of their sustainability.

“By establishing the guidelines that will guide their intervention at the early childhood level, participants in the Estates General clearly had the memory of a recent event in mind – but what a determining event – for its development: the accession to school management. It is only through the exercise of this right and this fundamental responsibility that a community can hope to set the foundation of an institutional network which will ensure its development.” Assurer l’avenir par un départ solide, États généraux sur la petite enfance, April 2000, p. 7.

4. Ensuring a high profile

In areas such as the West and the North, where the Francophone communities, especially in urban and metropolitan settings, is geographically scattered and not as solidly anchored as elsewhere in Canada, it is essential that French-language early childhood care and education services be given the highest profile, in order that everyone recognize their importance in the preschool education of minority children.

5. Guaranteeing access to services for all members of the community

It is essential that all those who are eligible have access to services, regardless of where they live and of their socio-economic status, religion or culture. The development of services must provide for the integration of all Francophones, with specific attention to the disadvantaged, Francophone immigrants, those living in exogamous households, etc.
6. **Ensuring sustainable public funding**
Funding of services is a major concern. Almost all initiatives are financed on an ad hoc basis, most often by parents whose ability to pay is limited. This naturally inhibits the development of the services. Everyone agrees that securing permanent public funding is crucial.

7. **Developing a framework program to enhance the quality of services**
There are currently numerous early childhood care and education services, many of which are forced to develop their own programming with limited resources. Some are nevertheless managing quite well. Others are forced to offer a range of activities not always in accordance with desired objectives, not to mention the fact that there is no continuity between programs designed for various age groups and stages of language acquisition, for example. In brief, there are significant gaps and disparities that the development of a framework program, which service providers could use as a model, would help to resolve. Faculties of education and community colleges could be involved in such an undertaking.

8. **Ensuring the training and recruitment of qualified staff**
The shortage of qualified staff for services not covered by classroom teaching is of great concern and calls for strategies on several fronts. Training is of primary importance. There is a need to develop training programs, in French, throughout the country. These programs must include a major awareness-training component for early childhood workers on the challenges unique to early childhood education in minority communities. Major work will also be required to raise the profile of early childhood workers; otherwise, it will remain very difficult to recruit staff. Low pay and job instability are also significant factors.

9. **Making this matter a priority for community organizations, at every level**
Given the importance of this matter, everyone agrees on the need for it to become a priority for all Francophone community organizations, at the national, provincial/territorial and local levels. This will require strong action in order to convince their leaders and members of the advantages for all of developing
early childhood services, in accordance with the perspective underlying this document. Educational organizations will be instrumental, and it is expected that they will play a leadership role in various communities.

10. Ensuring the involvement of parents in the structures to be established
Research confirms the need for parents to be highly involved in the structures to be established. This is crucial in order to maximize continuity and coherence between the home and day care, junior kindergarten (3-4 years of age), kindergarten (5 years) and school services. The commitment of both parents in exogamous couples is a major challenge. Preschool services must facilitate and support the participation of the Anglophone parent and accommodate him or her, while ensuring that French remain the working language.

“Our centre works hard to fight the assimilation of our little Acadians into the Anglophone majority that surrounds us. We give parents a significant role. Their involvement in the centre’s daily activities allows them to be a part of their children’s French-language education.” Comment by a service director in St. Mary’s Bay. (translation)

11. Properly anchoring services to the school, to increase their impact
Finally, because minority situations require specific action in linguistic and cultural matters for children and youth, and efforts made at the preschool level have direct consequences at the school level, it seems imperative to develop close ties between services provided at the two levels. Integration must involve activity programming and resource-sharing as well as work with parents and other partners in the education of young children.

“We maintain close links with the French-language schools in the community, including sharing of facilities. It is important for parents to know that our day care is the school’s day care.” Comment by a service director in Orléans. (translation)
THE VISION

Which care and education services must be developed to meet the diverse needs of young children in minority Francophone settings? Who should manage them? How will they be funded? Research has made it possible to identify a vision for early childhood services required in Francophone communities across the country to ensure the complete integration of eligible children in French schools. The research has also revealed that it will be difficult to implement this model nationally without a clear policy and a set of programs providing Francophone communities with the conditions needed for their empowerment on this issue.

A model for service delivery

Early childhood service models have been the subject of strategic thinking within the Canadian Francophonie over the past few years. In several areas of the country, initiatives have been carried out to develop a vision of required services, based on a co-operative approach among involved organizations. For example, the Association des parents fransaskois, the Official Language Minority Office and the Conseil général des écoles fransaskoises, now the Division scolaire fransaskoise, formed a fact-finding committee in June 1998, which proposed a particularly thorough development plan19 for preschool services in the province. In January 2000, the Estates General on Early Childhood met in Toronto, bringing together more than 250 people working in the Franco-Ontarian school community and in the province's childhood services, with the goal of developing, in the wake of the Mustard Report20, a strategic vision for providing a complete range of services, and of contemplating models for service delivery. The resulting report presented conclusions on how to ensure the delivery of services needed by the Franco-Ontarian community for its young children21. In February 2001, the Franco-Manitoban School Division and the Fédération provinciale des comités de parents du Manitoba revealed their project for establishing early childhood centres


in all of the province’s Francophone communities. In December of the same year, the Fédération des parents francophones de Terre-Neuve et du Labrador tabled and presented its report, *Growing up in Newfoundland and Labrador, Utopia or Reality?*, to the province’s Department of Health and Community Services. The document proposes not only a strategic plan with recommendations, but also a list of initiatives to achieve the community’s objectives in this area.

Last March, the Commission nationale des parents francophones released the *Plan national d’appui à la petite enfance*, which provides a global vision of required programs at the local, provincial/territorial and national levels to ensure that families and young children of Francophone communities receive the support they need.

There are several common threads in all these visions, no doubt a reflection of the consensus that exists within the Canadian Francophonie regarding the most appropriate model to meet the needs of the community. The study we carried out on community practices related to early childhood in a range of Francophone communities across the country confirms that this must be our basis for action. We have expanded proposals concerning the role to be played by the educational community in implementing and consolidating services for young children and ways of ensuring continuity between the home and day care, junior kindergarten, kindergarten and school services. Otherwise, initiatives may not have the desired effect on maintaining schools and reinforcing community vitality. The regional forums we held over the past few months suggest that, today, the Canadian Francophonie is poised to go forward with a model that views the school as the hub for the development of childhood services.

1. **A model that includes all types of early childhood services**

The model for the development of early childhood services emerging from research encompasses all types of services intended for young children, i.e. services to help parents with the preschool education process at home, as well as community structures — play groups, resource centres, day cares, junior kindergarten, kindergarten — set up to support them.

---


2. The school as the hub in a community partnership

Various initiatives already exist in the field of early childhood, and they must be maintained and consolidated. Until now, those undertaken within the school or with its close involvement have been the most lasting. Integrating services in the school also ensures that they are accessible to the greatest number, controlled by Francophones and designed to reflect their unique realities, while maximizing the potential for continuity between services provided at the various educational levels. Economic arguments can also be invoked. Several reasons justify the model which views the school as the focus for the development of early childhood services:

**Sustainability**

Schools have constitutional protection that assures their stability and sustainability.

**Universality**

There are French-language schools in almost all Francophone communities. They are accessible to all their members who have a right to an education in French, regardless of their socio-economic status, their ethnic origin, and even their proficiency in the French language.

**Foothold for life in French**

Schools constitute the main, and in many cases, the only meeting place for Francophones and that is where life in French has its major foothold. They already accommodate parents who have chosen to exercise their right to educate their child in French, grandparents, etc.

**Control and accountability**

French-language schools are institutions functioning completely in French, that provide services in French and are managed by Francophones. They belong completely to Francophones and are accountable to them.

**Continuity between services**

The integration of services within the school promotes continuity between preschool and school services, both in terms of objectives and learning styles. It facilitates the transition to school and offers increased opportunities for early screening.
Resource-sharing

Because schools have considerable resources (facilities, libraries, staff, etc.), integrating early childhood services in them will increase their impact. This is highly significant given the current financial situation.

For all these reasons, schools seem to be the best structure to support the development of early childhood services.

In August of 2001, the Board of Directors of the FPFTNL (the provincial parent council) made “the integration of early childhood development programs in schools” one of the objectives of their work. Institute for the Advancement of Public Policy, Growing up in Newfoundland and Labrador, Utopia or Reality? 2001, p. 37.

3. Community-based management

Experience has confirmed the primary role played by the community, and specifically parents, in the development of existing services. The contemplated model is based on maintaining community involvement and providing adequate resources to this end. A structure that would give communities the responsibility for service management within the school environment would make it possible to combine community expertise with the assurance of sustainable, accessible services, managed by and for Francophones, in continuity with services offered at other educational levels.

Advantages of community-based management include:

Flexibility

Structures put in place by the community are generally more flexible. They adapt more readily to the changing needs of clients, because they know them better and have established greater ties with them.
Expertise

Communities possess broad-based expertise, which is more easily put to use in the community sector than in educational institutions.

Building community capacity

The involvement of parents and other community partners in setting up and managing early childhood services will build their capacity to take charge, which can only have beneficial effects on community vitality. It allows for the commitment of a greater number of stakeholders, while reducing the load on the already overburdened school system.

In most provinces, initiatives already exist in the area of early childhood services based on such a partnership between schools and parents. They should serve as our inspiration.

4. Involving all early childhood stakeholders

The contemplated model anticipates the active involvement of all early childhood stakeholders: health and social services providers at the community level, family support structures, etc.

Taking into account the significant level of poverty in several of the country’s Francophone communities, partnerships with anti-poverty organizations are highly important.

5. Distinguishing kindergarten, junior kindergarten and early childhood services

A distinction must be made between services aimed at 5-year-olds (kindergarten) already provided in almost all provinces through the school system and therefore under the responsibility of the Department of Education, those directed at three- to four-year olds (junior kindergarten), more or less integrated into schools depending on the community, and those intended for babies and toddlers (0-3 years of age) and their families, generally supplied within community structures. Various approaches could be used for service implementation and development, depending on which of these levels is involved. Required staff qualifications vary according to the level: certified teachers for junior kindergarten and kindergarten (4-5 years of age) and early childhood workers who successfully completed recognized programs for the youngest age group (0-3 years of age).
If choices had to be made, it is clear from the perspective of integrating children into schools that services to older children should be the priority in order to prepare them as well as possible for school life.

6. **A solid framework program**

It is imperative that the Francophonie have a solid pan-Canadian, objectives-based framework program for all early childhood services to ensure the integration of children into French-language schools. The quality of services would vary much less as a result. This framework, which would take into account the young child's expected profile upon entering school, could serve as a guide for the development of activity programs based on local needs.

Programs taking into account varying levels of linguistic proficiency among young children making use of these services must be designed. What is needed are programs that are responsive to the highly varying ability of children of a given age to participate in activities. A multi-age approach should be explored, in order to give each child the best opportunity to realize his or her potential.

“A network of child care services in Francophone minority communities must have two broad objectives: ensure that each child acquire the capacity to communicate in French, and promote the development of positive attitudes regarding the child’s ethnolinguistic background to give him or her a sense of pride and self-worth as a Francophone.” Théberge, R. *Le développement langagier et les garderies francophones en milieu minoritaire*, 1990, p. 66.

7. **True French-language services**

Canada’s Francophone families must be able to depend on French-language structures for early childhood care and education services. Our survey of parents reveals just how important this is to them and how determined they are in this regard. Even though it is not always easy, French must remain the working language because experience shows that there must be no compromise in this area.
8. Francization tools for parents

Difficulties experienced by a significant number of non-Francophone or anglicized parents in playing the role expected of them in service management or supporting their children are quite worrisome. The contemplated model must therefore provide for strategies facilitating their full involvement in existing structures, including francization tools for parents. The number of non-Francophone parents whose children use French-language services in the communities we studied has convinced us, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that this element will be central to any initiative.

Policies and programs supporting the implementation of the vision

The establishment of an early childhood care and education system in French, accessible to all, is a major challenge. It requires the commitment of all key players in the community — families, educational organizations and groups active in other areas of collective life, as well as other Francophone institutions — locally and at all levels concerned. Their work and commitment will ensure that the early childhood care and education services to which all Francophones aspire in every region of the country are developed, and will guarantee their role in the integration of young children into French-language schools. Although Francophone communities bear a large share of the responsibility for the development and consolidation of French preschool services, they are nonetheless not the only ones accountable for progress in this matter. Preschool education in minority Francophone communities is also the responsibility of governments, who must support and adequately finance initiatives taken.

The Commission nationale des parents francophones emphasizes the constitutional responsibility of governments in this matter. It invokes the principle of remedy which provides for the redress of past injustices against the Canadian Francophonie by giving it access to an environment favourable to its development25. According to the Commission, the need for community services is an integral part of this principle of remedy and includes preschool services. We completely share this point of view that the development of early childhood care and education services for young Francophone children in Canada requires specific strategies and that it is up to governments, federal as well as provincial/territorial, and their municipal and community partners to implement them.

“Section 23 of the Charter mandates that provincial governments do whatever is practically possible to preserve and promote minority language education. Its object is in part remedial, and it is not meant to reinforce the status quo by adopting a formal vision of equality that would focus on treating the majority and minority official language groups alike. A purposive interpretation of s. 23 rights is based on the true purpose of redressing past injustices and providing the official language minority with equal access to high quality education in its own language, in circumstances where community development will be enhanced… Substantive equality under s. 23 requires that official language minorities be treated differently, if necessary, according to their particular circumstances and needs, in order to provide a standard of education equivalent to that of the official language majority.”

*Supreme Court of Canada ruling in the Arsenault-Cameron case,*
January 13, 2000

1. **Establishing a national policy for early childhood services in minority settings**

To support initiatives that will be taken and maximize their impact, it is imperative that early childhood services in minority Francophone settings be covered by a national policy stipulating the objectives to be achieved and the means to reach them. This policy must be extended into programs in accordance with identified needs.

This policy could be designed by a national committee made up of representatives of federal and provincial departments concerned with this matter, minority institutions involved in its development such as school boards, colleges and universities (training), organizations providing early childhood services as well as the community, especially parents. This policy could be based on initiatives already taken for Francophones in the human resource, health or immigration sectors.
2. Broadening the Protocol for Agreements for Minority-Language Education and Second-Language Instruction
An existing mechanism, the Protocol for Agreements for Minority-Language Education and Second-Language Instruction, offers a relatively easy means to support the development of French-language preschool services. It would be necessary to expand the parameters of the Protocol, the upcoming renewal of which is quite timely, in order to include French-language preschool services as a critical element in the learning continuum in minority Francophone settings. This proposal was made by several people during our research.

3. An equitable share of existing programs
In September 2000, the first ministers of all of Canada’s jurisdictions except for Québec reached an agreement on early childhood development and committed to co-operate for the well-being of children under six years of age and their families. As a result of this agreement, significant monies are provided annually by the federal government to the provinces and territories, in addition to those funds already earmarked for early childhood programs. We must ensure that Francophone communities receive their fair share of this funding, and guarantees must be secured, as has been done in Ontario.

4. Consolidating current project funding sources into a fund for the development of early childhood services in minority settings
Francophone communities, like majority groups, can draw on various sources of funding for the development of early childhood services. However, they are not making use of all the resources available to them because they are not aware of their existence and do not have the necessary means to use them properly. The consolidation of current funding sources into one fund established for the express purpose of developing services in French would facilitate access to these resources, while ensuring greater coherence in their use.
5. Recognition by provincial governments of the necessity, for Francophone communities, to integrate preschool programs into the education system

In most provinces, early childhood care and education programs are currently unstable in that they depend on funding that is not guaranteed, on the availability of appropriate facilities and on the goodwill of volunteers. Their integration into schools would grant them a greater degree of permanence, while meeting the community's quality requirements. This was demonstrated earlier.

Education is a provincial and territorial responsibility. It is therefore up to provinces and territories to develop policies in this area and to provide required services, and they do this through school boards which are duly elected for that purpose. Even though school boards recognize the role they have to play in the area of preschool services, they actually have very little capacity to act in this area. This situation must be reversed by ensuring that school boards are clearly mandated as being responsible for preschool education in minority communities, and that they receive from their respective governments the necessary funding. There is no doubt that the federal government can play an active role in this matter.

6. Recognition of the special needs of young Francophone children by provincial departments working in the areas of health, community and family services as well as their municipal and community partners in service delivery

The health system as well as social and family services are extremely complex and in several areas reactive. While attempts are being made to anticipate needs in certain areas, client interests have not all been identified. A lack of awareness of the issues that young Francophone children and their families face has resulted in few efforts being dedicated to establishing services to meet their needs. Services to young Francophone children have suffered considerably because of this.

Health and social programs are also under provincial jurisdiction. A strategy is therefore required that would lead to a recognition in provincial government policies of the special needs of young Francophone children and the development of a program actively offering health and social services in French to young Francophone children. This strategy must include a significant awareness-training component for health and social
service authorities on the specific realities of the Canadian Francophonie in departments of health, social and family services and municipal governments which, due to the devolution of powers, often act as service providers. This strategy must also include the federal government, which may be our most valuable ally given its spending power notably in the area of health.

7. Establishing a program for the development of Francophone community skills in the area of early childhood, with the support of Human Resources Development Canada

Francophone communities have accomplished a great deal in the area of early childhood services, particularly considering their limited resources. However, the development of services has been impeded in several communities by the lack of qualified staff in early childhood non-school services capable of working both in service implementation and management and directly with young children. Our research has demonstrated this.

The shortage of human resources in services intended for young children is closely tied to limited access to training programs. There are no programs available in French west of Ontario, neither at the college or university level. The fact that some provincial governments (in BC, for example) require early childhood workers to be accredited in the province seriously compromises recruitment in Francophone services. The establishment of a training program in early childhood services in the West must be considered. This could be carried out with the support of Human Resources Development Canada, in cooperation with colleges and universities serving Francophone communities.

A strategy to achieve this must include measures to raise the profile of the early childhood worker profession. Very low salaries and extremely difficult working conditions are currently the lot of these workers. It is therefore impossible to attract young adults into this profession and to meet the community’s need for human resources. This problem is all the more difficult to address because the solution will have major financial implications on services.
8. Implementing a strategy aimed specifically at Francophone families within government anti-poverty initiatives

A significant proportion of Francophone families live in economically depressed areas. This cannot help but affect their ability to take advantage of existing early childhood care and education services. It is unacceptable that young Francophones are excluded from these services. If we want to give all children the best possible start in life and ensure that each and every one of them, without exception, be successfully integrated into a French school, we must develop an action plan which guarantees that all children, regardless of the environment they come from, have access to the care and education services that they need, from a very early age.

On February 4, 1999, all provinces and territories (except Québec) signed the Social Union Framework Agreement and committed themselves to reinforcing the social security net. They also agreed to pay special attention to the plight of poor children. In the wake of this Agreement, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative was adopted on early childhood development, as referred to above. We should not forget it.

For Francophone communities, especially those in rural areas where the economy is often based on non-renewable resources, the issue of early childhood services and the struggle against poverty are closely connected. Therefore, anything they do to enhance the development of services for their young children will be inextricably linked to actions pursued to ensure that they will have their place in public anti-poverty initiatives.
CONCLUSION

To contribute to current initiatives within the Canadian Francophonie on early childhood services, CTF was a partner in a major research project carried out by CIRCEM. The research was designed to draw strategic teachings from actual experiences in order to develop early childhood care and education services in minority settings. More specifically, the project aimed to identify, based on present initiatives, those early childhood services most capable of promoting the vitality of the Francophonie as well as the organizational models likely to ensure the sustainability expected of them. But especially, bearing in mind CTF’s mandate, the study was designed to reveal the avenues that Francophone communities must pursue to make preschool education the expected avenue for the integration of students into French-language schools.

From this exercise, several elements were identified that will make it possible to guide the actions that CTF will undertake with other involved organizations. We will reiterate them briefly. We will then highlight some issues that should be further studied, if we want the initiatives that will be taken in the area of community early childhood services to have the desired effect on French-language education.

High parental motivation

Our findings revealed the very strong motivation of parents. In fact, their commitment led to the vast majority of initiatives taken locally to provide care and education services to young Francophone children in their own language, and the work of the organizations they belong to, primarily parent federations, was instrumental in consolidating all these services.

The conclusions we drew by reviewing their involvement suggest moreover that the commitment of parents at this level of the education system can have an effect on their participation in other community institutions. One thing is certain, they believe in the virtues of French-language education, as shown by their willingness, in almost all cases, to send their children to French-language schools.
**Highly fragile services**

Considering interest demonstrated by parents, the inadequacy in the supply of services is quite surprising. There is a lack everywhere, and at all levels. Despite progress made, the needs of children between four and five years of age are far from being met in the great majority of provinces and territories, as access is limited to a few half-days each week, often at prohibitive costs. Therefore, the impact of these services on the integration of children into schools is still generally limited. The youngest children receive even fewer services. Where day care services exist, the number of spaces is highly limited, while other services such as resource centres or play groups often depend for their existence solely on the commitment of parents and the meagre subsidies which they manage to secure. Rural areas are particularly affected.

Furthermore, all services are seriously understaffed, which often implies painful choices between language and training. This has considerable consequences for service development.

**Institutionalization must be ensured**

Often services are organized on an ad hoc basis, and their delivery becomes subject to the availability of funding, itself highly unstable. The issue of facilities is particularly problematic. The study has demonstrated that service development is almost always at a standstill.

The only avenue that seems to be available to the Canadian Francophonie is that of an even greater integration of early childhood services into schools. The school setting has several advantages: it has constitutional protection, which ensures its stability and its sustainability; there are French-language schools in almost all Francophone communities and they are accessible to all its members entitled to an education in French; French-language schools are institutions that operate completely in the French language, provide services in French and are managed by Francophones, and as such are institutions that belong entirely and are accountable to the Francophone community. The integration of early childhood services in schools would also ensure expected continuity with services offered at other education levels. In addition, it would help to achieve the fundamental objective of equity clearly stated during the forums, i.e. the equivalence of learning outcomes of Francophone students in minority settings with those of Anglophone students in majority communities.

Such an approach in no way reduces the significant involvement of parents, which is deemed necessary in the planning and management of services for young children.
With government support

The development of early childhood services implies the commitment of all stakeholders within a community — families, educational organizations and groups working in other areas of collective life, and other Francophone institutions — locally and at all other levels concerned. It also requires the commitment of governments, which must support and adequately fund initiatives. The review of practices in place in various Canadian Francophone communities has demonstrated that this is a necessary condition for their success.

A better understanding of the nature of the relationship between early childhood services and community vitality

Our research illustrates the fact that the problem of developing early childhood services goes way beyond their institutionalization. In fact, it is part of a much larger dynamic, which involves families and their ability to contribute to French-language acquisition in young children. Kindergarten and first-grade teachers whom we met aptly reminded us of this. Even if schools, and with them early childhood care and education services, make it possible to compensate for deficiencies in demographically and socially disadvantaged communities, as suggested by the theory of compensation balances, we cannot impose on them all the responsibility for maintaining and developing the French language and culture. A deeper understanding of the role of early childhood services would require that we have a better grasp of the nature of the complex relationship that unites families to them and to schools. We have noted, from this perspective, a certain community effect. Francophone communities differ as to the importance their members assign to the French language and culture and the meaning they give them. This must also be considered in the evaluation of the role played by services in the integration of children into French-language schools.

In addition, we must take into account the highly variable degrees of institutional completeness in communities. They do not all have the same capacity to stimulate Francophone participation in French life, independent of the access they provide to early childhood services in French. This is another factor that a more in-depth study of the relationship between early childhood services and community vitality would allow us to better understand.
REFERENCES


