EDUCATION IN FRANCOPHONE MINORITY SETTINGS
The existence of two official languages in Canada, French and English, is part of the very nature of our country. They are central to our national identity and the respect they enjoy is a reflection of our values rooted in social justice and equity.


- ensure respect for English and French and ensure equality of status and equal rights and privileges as to their use in federal institutions;
- support the development of English and French linguistic minority communities; and
- advance the equal status and use of English and French.

In an effort to ensure that these objectives are being met, the Canadian Teachers’ Federation (CTF) is focussing on three areas currently requiring important interventions to ensure equal development opportunities for families in Francophone minority communities in Canada: early childhood, technology and research.

**EARLY CHILDHOOD**

Studies have long confirmed the importance of the first five years of life in the development of a child’s abilities, health and general well-being. These crucial years capture even more the attention of Francophone and Acadian minorities in Canada because they also realize the importance of early childhood services in developing children’s language and in building their cultural identity.

In 2004, the CTF published a study entitled *Teachers and the Challenge of Teaching in Francophone Minority Settings*. A high percentage of teachers reported the dominance of English in their communities as one of the main challenges they were facing. This situation is greatly exacerbated by key demographic considerations: the rural depopulation weakens regions where the concentration of Francophones is highest; and the growing number of Francophones living in urban settings is also having a direct impact on their escalating assimilation. The same concerns were expressed in a recent CTF survey (to be published soon).

Teachers in French-language schools fully support the efforts being made by all stakeholders to welcome the largest possible number of children entitled to a French-language education in their schools. But, they are deeply concerned over the diversity in family backgrounds, especially when these children speak little or no French upon their enrolment in French-language schools for lack of appropriate early childhood services.

During the 2011 provincial elections, the Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens (AEFO) published a series of recommendations to improve early childhood services. In the document *At the heart of every issue: our youth*[^2], the AEFO emphasizes the importance of appropriate services to facilitate particularly “language acquisition skills in children living in a minority setting”.

In 2012, the Association des enseignantes et des enseignants francophones du Nouveau Brunswick (AEFNB) adopted policy statements dealing

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specifically with early childhood in minority settings, in which members call for a national policy on early childhood development that considers the distinctive characteristics of Francophone minority settings.

Professional teacher organizations that are concerned with the quality of French-language education in minority settings in Canada cannot overlook the paramount importance of early childhood services to ensure the success of the school’s educational project.

We should remember that early childhood intervention is the solution most likely to be able to support recruitment efforts in French-language schools.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES

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

The CTF is concerned about how little attention is being paid to technology in the measures to support official language communities. We released last year the results of a survey involving more than 1,600 French-language school students on technology and building a Francophone identity. Given our previous comments on public space and resulting concerns, we are disturbed by the lack of opportunities to communicate in French through technologies since they are the media most widely used by young people throughout the world.

4 Technologies et construction identitaire, Canadian Teachers’ Federation, 2011, 46 pages
RESEARCH SUPPORT

For the past 15 years, children have been educated in French in communities where several generations before them would never have dreamed of the possibility. Thus the advent of French-language school governance by the Francophone community, sometimes after a hard fought battle, marks an important turning point in the history of Canadian bilingualism.

The empowerment of the Francophone community in education has yielded sound results. It is contributing to the progress of bilingualism and to respect for cultural diversity across the country. The Government of Canada needs to learn lessons from this experience and to try to apply it in other areas. This empowerment of the community cannot take place without relevant information on the realities and challenges that are at the heart of the French-language schools’ mandate.

Therefore, we cannot overemphasize the importance of research for the advancement of language communities, particularly in minority settings. The numerous studies conducted by the CTF received solid support in the past from the federal government through the Department of Canadian Heritage. These studies and surveys enabled us to better understand the realities of communities and to intervene more coherently with young people on whom rests the future of Canadian bilingualism.

We are deeply concerned by the federal government’s disengagement in the research area and strongly believe that federal investments in minority communities must be based on reliable survey data that can guarantee results.

CONCLUSION

The CTF is one of the national organizations to have followed the lead of the Canadian government with respect to bilingualism and the modernization of its structure. Our federation defines itself as bilingual in its operations and publications, and serves organizations whose membership reflects Canada’s linguistic duality. We are proud to contribute in a significant manner to the development of our country and of the values that make it strong and unique, both at home and abroad.

Much remains to be done to give Canadian families all the elements they need to live in French on an everyday basis. This is what drives our actions as a Canadian federation, and we can only hope that this will equally be the driving force and ultimate goal of the Canadian government.