



fronquêtes

ENQUÊTES SUR L'ÉDUCATION EN MILIEU MINORITAIRE FRANCOPHONE

Cultural Development – A National Profile, Findings and Courses of Action

by Judith Charest

CONTEXT

In 2009, the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) published a study on how Francophone high-school students in minority settings took ownership of their culture. The research, which showed that cultural development (animation culturelle) could strongly impact how students built their identity, allowed CTF to take stock of current practices and implementation models, as well as identify limits and challenges, with the ultimate hope of laying the foundation for a collective action plan.

INITIAL OVERVIEW

Little research has been done on cultural development and how it affects students' cultural ownership.

What's the best way to assess the impact of cultural development on students and on communities? How do you define "intervention" and measure its impact? What criteria should intervention strategies have to meet? How is cultural development linked to identity building?

This article highlights trends throughout Canada and puts forward several courses of action that could form part of a cross-country project or initiative.

METHOD

As we scanned websites, we observed that French school boards in minority settings' vision, mission and value statements give precedence to language, culture, identity and, often, community ties. The boards assert that their role extends beyond teaching academic subjects to include personal growth and development, as well as cooperation with the community.

Next, we asked ten cultural development specialists from across Canada to answer questions on the following topics: their board's definition of cultural development; how their board distinguishes between that and identity building or community ties; the profile, qualifications and areas of expertise of cultural development specialists; the training offered; the skills to be developed; and the planning and assessment tools available.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Most school boards and schools offer cultural development, but the definition of the services offered varies widely from one place to the next. One school might have teachers integrate culture and arts programming into their regular duties. At another, a designated specialist might tend to such programming, which can cover arts, culture, sports and social events. Though many boards provide a range of activities along with statistics, very few have planning, assessment and accountability tools.

It is accepted that cultural development does benefit schools and communities. Everyone also recognizes that initiatives in cultural development and community growth, partnership building and youth leadership help generate a greater sense of belonging in Francophone communities and thus help sustain these communities. Yet, we have no tools to measure the exact impact and relevance of any such initiatives.

The research conducted by the Association canadienne d'éducation de langue française (ACELF) has helped educational communities across Canada standardize and enrich the language of cultural development. However, this common vocabulary does not seem to have changed how things are actually done.

WHO PLAYS A ROLE IN CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT?

- Cultural development coordinator : non-teacher, full-time or part-time
- Community liaison or development officer : non-teacher, full-time or part-time
- Agent ou agente en construction identitaire : generally non-teacher, full-time or part-time
- Cultural and community development officer : non-teacher, full-time or part-time
- Cultural development coordinator, or school board identity-building officer : generally non-teacher, full-time

¹ BOUDREAU, Ronald, Christine DALLAIRE et Kenneth DEVEAU. *L'appropriation culturelle des jeunes à l'école secondaire de langue française — Synthèse de l'enquête*, Fédération canadienne des enseignants et des enseignantes (FCE), Ottawa, 2009 (http://www.ctf-fce.ca/Documents/ADOS_Publication_3_Complet_WEB.pdf).

In elementary schools, these specialists support teachers, and they organize and promote concerts, as well as sports, recreational, cultural and artistic events. In high schools, they play a smaller role in the classroom but help student councils coordinate these types of activities.

Often, the duties performed, the activities held and the success achieved depend on the person holding the position. Many of the stakeholders involved said that standard guidelines and in-service training would prove useful.

The study also found similarities in the objectives sought: expand the French-language environment, heighten students' level of responsibility, raise awareness of parents, help schools be more visible in the community, consolidate partnerships and develop a positive report to language.

THE NEED FOR GUIDANCE

A number of conditions have to be met if communities want to make real progress on the cultural development front; for instance, they must:

1. understand the role and mission of those responsible for cultural development, identity building and community liaison and development;
2. assess the experience and heightened responsibility acquired by students, not just the quality of a given activity;
3. ensure objectives are met thanks to guidance and follow-up by principals;
4. increase the credibility of cultural development staff among teaching professionals thanks to support and awareness-raising by principals;
5. set clear targets and acquire effective planning and assessment tools that lead to objective quantitative and qualitative evaluations;
6. help cultural development specialists by providing them with coaching and guidance grounded in training and experimentation.

TRAINING

Training cultural development specialists in minority settings is not easy.

Some in-service training programs provided by school boards deal with technical and practical aspects like how to use music and entertainment software for student radio stations. The ACELF has summer internships, but they do not necessarily cater to cultural development needs.

In Ontario, the Ministry of Education's Direction des politiques et programmes d'éducation en langue française (French-language education policy and programs branch) offers a two-day course for the province's cultural development specialists.

COURSES OF ACTION

To further strengthen cultural development, we need to focus our efforts on two areas: 1) greater student leadership and responsibility and 2) community projects and partnerships.

We must also design planning tools that meet board and Ministry criteria, along with a reference framework that will help identity-building, community-liaison and community/cultural development specialists enhance their skills in these areas:

- developing student leadership and responsibility
- taking stock of minority-setting realities
- managing projects
- conducting evaluations
- crafting win-win partnerships.

CONCLUSION

Cultural development is designed to add effervescence to school life and to expand the francophone environment in communities, especially among our youth. Though French-language schools play a critical role in the growth and vitality of Francophone communities, students see French itself as the language of schooling, not socializing.

For the past 20 years, we have managed to mesh teaching and cultural development, the latter now being accepted as an academic activity. But how can teaching activities foster cultural development? How can curricula transform French into a language for social interaction?

School is where young people make friends, where they laugh and cry, where they tackle challenges and learn to deal with setbacks. They shape their identity there and make decisions that ultimately set the course for their future.

How can we guarantee that every student in our French-language schools will fully benefit from cultural development?

An inspiring facilitator and leader, Judith Charest was Executive Director of the Fédération de la jeunesse franco-ontarienne, an organization she was involved in for 15 years. From 2003 to 2007, she co-directed the Ontario Ministry of Education's cultural pedagogy project. From 2007 to 2011, she was the Director of the cultural and community component of the Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique. In September 2012, she became Assistant Director of Communications and responsible for Community Liaison within the Conseil des écoles fransaskoises. As a trainer and facilitator, Judith provides support to groups and individuals in the areas of leadership, inclusion and system improvement. Her sense of innovation, research and engagement with the Francophone community in minority settings make her stand out as a leader in academic, cultural and community leadership.

to read the full survey (in French) : www.ctf-fce.ca/frenquetes



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Canadian Teachers' Federation