



fronquêtes

ENQUÊTES SUR L'ÉDUCATION EN MILIEU MINORITAIRE FRANCOPHONE

Behind the Scenes: Analysis and Summary of Survey on Relations Between French-Language Schools in Minority Settings and Professional French-Language Theatre Companies

par Michèle Matteau

In a way, the world of education and the world of theatre are twins. Both ask their audience to become spectators of the human condition, to become aware of the world around them, to question it and find their place in it. Under the circumstances, it would seem logical that relations between the two communities should develop naturally. But is that the case? How do things really stand in Canada's minority French-speaking communities where the mission of theatre, like that of education, often has another dimension to it, which is to strengthen Francophone cultural identity?

These are the questions that the Canadian Teachers' Federation wanted to explore in a recent survey, the results of which came out in June 2017. It involved two questionnaires designed to gather the views of the education community and those of the theatre community on the same topics at the same time. In all, seven theatre companies and 79 people from the same number of schools (i.e., 12% of the French-language schools in minority settings across Canada) responded to the questionnaires.

An analysis of the survey responses revealed a number of trends.

COOPERATION

A majority of respondents from both communities acknowledged and often regretted the lack of cooperation between the two. There appear to be a number of obstacles to such cooperation.

To begin with, on the education side, the school representatives that theatre companies deal with can vary enormously in terms of their duties. Sometimes it's someone in charge of cultural activities at the school board,

other times a school administrator or teacher. This variation places a greater burden on theatre companies, which continually have to change their way of working. The farther the decision maker is from the classroom, the greater the risk that the teacher will feel uninvolved in the process or left out, and the harder it will be for the theatre company to respond appropriately to the needs of the class.

Theatre companies often produce guides for teachers to help them prepare their students. While teachers appreciate the guides, they think that with a little more collaboration, it should be possible to adapt them to suit the curriculum better, as well as their own and their students' needs. Moreover, a lack of time means that they can't always make full use of the guides.

In some regards, the educational community and the theatre community like to pass the buck. Schools would like to know well in advance what play or show is being put on, or to be able to change their plans along the way. Theatre companies note that they, too, have obligations that do not leave them much room to manoeuvre. They sometimes arrive at schools and get the feeling that they simply aren't expected.

Possible Solutions

For collaboration between a school and a theatre company to be a success that serves the interests of the students, a good working relationship between the theatre troupe's representative and the school's is essential. At the school, the assigned liaison officer could greet the theatre company on the day of the show. Closer collaboration with the guide developers would help make the guides more useful and the theatre experience a success. Suggested improvements

include indicating the level of language of the play, organizing a visit of the theatre, attending a rehearsal and meeting the actors to give the students an idea of what goes on behind the scenes.

COST

Not all school boards attach the same value to artistic activities. But overall, in both the education and theatre communities, there is dissatisfaction that so little money is spent on arts and culture, and theatre in particular. Generally speaking, people in education are not very aware of how theatre prices have changed over the last 20 years. Among the few people who voiced an opinion on this topic, about half said they had seen a normal increase in prices, while the other half thought that prices were too high. People on the theatre side said that prices have risen very little, which is what the Association des théâtres francophones du Canada has observed. The reality of a lack of funding is even more glaring in rural schools, where transportation costs soon make outside activities prohibitively expensive.

Possible Solution

Clearly, the solution would appear to lie in recognizing theatre's added cultural and educational value in comparison with that of other purely fun activities, and in increasing the budgets allocated to it accordingly.

RECOGNIZING THE VALUE OF THEATRE

According to theatre companies, the educational community does not necessarily recognize the full value of what the arts in general and theatre in particular bring to the education of young people and to the building of their linguistic and cultural identity. The latter aspect is a core component of the mission of French-language schools in minority settings. Over half of the teachers who responded to the survey said they recognized the considerable impact

that theatre productions have on the development of their students' Francophone identity and the importance of having schools expose their students to this kind of experience. In the same vein, both teaching staff and theatre company members said they preferred plays put on in real theatres, in other words, outside schools, where the better lighting, visibility and sound mean there is a greater chance of winning over students and instilling in them a love of theatre.

Possible Solutions

Here again, recognition depends on schools having a better understanding of the theatrical community. Theatre companies would benefit from establishing the basis of a real partnership with schools well before the actual show. "There has to be a real meeting" that, following initial contact, would seek to "determine the expectations of all parties, set common objectives, define the school's area of expertise and that of the theatre company, recognize how they complement each other with respect to arts education, and last, explore each community's possibilities for action, always with the idea of helping young people to open up to the world and to knowledge."

In both communities, it is essential to emphasize the idea of offering "real theatre," put on by professionals in a real performance space, focusing on topics appropriate to the interests of young people and the curricula, and "regionalized" as much as possible in order to strengthen students' ties to their community. Respondents also thought that schools need more of these "cultural transmitters," people who champion French-language cultural and artistic activities and who provide a bridge between the world of education and that of Francophone arts.

Michèle Matteau est née au Québec; elle a vécu en France, en Colombie Britannique, en Nouvelle-Écosse et habite l'Ontario depuis 1985. Elle détient un baccalauréat en pédagogie et un baccalauréat ès Arts de l'université de Montréal; elle a étudié la psychologie à Strasbourg et obtenu une maîtrise en Educational Psychology de l'Université Mount Saint.Vincent d'Halifax. Femme aux opinions franches, elle cumule un bagage de riches expériences en psychopédagogie, en enseignement et en journalisme ce qui l'a menée à des fonctions de coordonnatrice des éditions Jeunesse pour l'Agence canadienne de développement international (ACDI), de chercheuse, de scénariste et de rédactrice de textes documentaires et d'activités pédagogiques. Écrivaine, Michèle Matteau a publié sept romans, un recueil de nouvelles, deux recueils de poésie, deux pièces de théâtre. Ses œuvres se sont toutes distinguées comme finalistes à divers prix littéraires; elle a été lauréate du Prix du livre d'Ottawa 2001, du Prix Trillium de l'Ontario (2002 et 2010), et du Prix Christine Dumitriu van Saanen du Salon du livre de Toronto (2005). Cette éducatrice d'expérience passionnée de théâtre analyse ici les relations écoles/théâtres professionnels dans la francophonie en milieu minoritaire, telles que révélées par un récent sondage, et livre sans détour ses suggestions.

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



Fédération canadienne des enseignantes et des enseignants
Canadian Teachers' Federation