



fronquêtes

ENQUÊTES SUR L'ÉDUCATION EN MILIEU MINORITAIRE FRANCOPHONE

Francisation in full bloom

by Liliane Vincent

Let us go back to the 80s and 90s. In French-language minority communities, fully 50% of rights holders opt for either French-immersion or English-language schools, many of the children registered in French-language schools have little or no knowledge of French itself, and young Francophones are scoring poorly on standardized tests. The mood is one of dismay.

FRANCISATION IN THE BEGINNING

In 2001, the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) launched the Pan Canadian French as a First Language Project. The following year, it published *Francisation: Taking Stock*. The document observed that during the 80s, initiatives in the area were essentially the work of parent groups, usually outside the school setting: daycare services, summer camps, oral-French classes for parents, info kits, workshops and so on. In the early 90s, a few ministries of education began to design and implement policies and programs that included specific objectives, intervention models, assessment and placement strategies and instructional approaches. Still, other measures were needed not only to help students develop at the linguistic, cognitive, social and emotional levels, but also to build a Francophone identity that would ultimately benefit the whole community

FRANCISATION TODAY

In the wake of CMEC's overview of the situation, many initiatives have been launched. Approaches differ and development has varied, but a current of ideas and strategies has appeared, with five characteristic features:

Tapping into the very first years of learning

To help strengthen the linguistic foundation of children who register in French-language schools without the necessary knowledge of French, national organizations have put forward a number of initiatives. For example, the Francisation Training Kit, introduced by CMEC in 2003, provides instructional guidance to pre-kindergarten to Grade 2 teachers. The Association canadienne d'éducation de langue française (ACELF) has promoted this resource extensively in its regular professional development workshops. The federal government's *Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality* makes francisation an objective under the *Minority-Language Education* strategy whose goal is to attract and retain more students in minority-language schools. Finally, six Francophone communities have been taking part in *Partir en grand*, an enriched educational daycare program funded by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

In 2004, the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones (FNCSF) stated that francisation programs are considered essential to the mission of French-language schools.

Research in the area is conclusive : the best way for children to build their language skills is through continual interaction on the emotional level, especially with their parents. Support programs of all kinds and even an array of resource centres have been launched by parent associations and by school boards, including welcome kits in both the Yukon and North West Territories, a policy titled *L'admission, l'accueil et l'accompagnement des élèves dans les écoles de langue française de l'Ontario*, the guide *I'm with you: Exogamous families' guide to the world of Francophone education* and family francisation programs in Labrador and Newfoundland, in Prince Edward Island and in British Columbia.

Still, support and guidance for parents remains fragmented and inconsistent. In response to this dilemma, the CNPF is working to mobilize school boards and the partners involved in the *Table nationale en développement de la petite enfance francophone* (national forum on early childhood development in French).

Building a language learning continuum

Given the nature of language development in children and the sociocultural context of Francophone communities, language acquisition and identity building must follow a continuum that stretches right until the end of high school. We have to make it so that youth truly want to communicate in French with those around them. Activities must therefore not only mesh with their social and emotional development and their intellectual maturity, but also take their minority status into account. These principles provide the foundation for the *Trousses de formation en communication orale et sur les stratégies en lecture et en écriture* published by CMEC in 2008.

In the wake of its 2004 *Aménagement Linguistique Policy* (PAL), the Ontario Ministry of Education has updated the two components of its *Programme-cadre d'actualisation linguistique* (language upgrading). The cornerstones of the model are a) instructional differentiation (the reliance on different approaches to teaching), b) the integration of cultural referents and c) the special care to be taken in guiding the transition from elementary to secondary school.

Since 2005, in British Columbia, francisation has been on the ministerial agenda: the province has a guide for teachers from pre-kindergarten to Grade 12, and pupils are assessed and rated according to their actual ability and not their age.

In Manitoba, authorities are producing a document on language construction that covers even the high school years. In New Brunswick and Alberta, efforts at the secondary school level are targeted according to needs. And in all of these settings, CMEC's kits have come just at the right time.

Culture and identity: staying true to the mission

In 2003, a survey conducted by the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) showed that teachers felt ill equipped to take on the challenge of teaching in French in a minority setting. Since then, policies, programs and strategies all incorporate the dimensions of culture and identity.

Ontario has a policy whose desired outcomes include oral communication as a tool for optimal learning and identity building. In 2009, the province adopted a cultural approach to teaching and, in 2010, it reviewed its curriculum guidelines. What's more, Ontario's French-language television network (TFO) has constantly supported the province's French-language community through an array of cultural and educational services and resources. In Prince Edward Island, culture-based pedagogy is spreading; and in New Brunswick, a cultural and linguistic development policy is being designed.

In 2006, ACELF published the *Cadre d'orientation en construction identitaire* (identity building orientation framework), which provides links to tools like the *Trousse du passeur culturel* (conveyors of culture kit) (2009) for school principals and features a site that gives access to the cultural and artistic resources of the provinces and territories.

Given the critical nature of school-home dynamics, in 2006, CTF published *An Invitation to Success in French-language Schools – Grade-one Entry Profile: Language and Culture in Minority Settings*; then, with ACELF and the CNPF in 2007, it released *Dream Big Little by Little (for parents of children aged between 0 and 5)*; finally, in 2009, it produced *Dream Big, It's Elementary! – A Simple Guide to Building a Francophone Identity at Home (for parents of 6- to 12-year-olds)*.

Making room for newcomers

Immigration into Francophone communities outside Quebec is increasing. This phenomenon does not appear in CMEC's 2002 overview. Each province keeps tabs as it sees fit, and work at this level is still in its infancy in some cases.

However, the Conseil des écoles francophones de la Saskatchewan provides welcome services to help these students integrate. In Manitoba, a special committee is attending to this

issue in relation to francisation efforts. In New Brunswick, schools are taking part in a program funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada. And in 2010, Ontario published the second edition of *Programme d'appui aux nouveaux arrivants (support program for newcomers)*. Along with the concept of language upgrading based on a child's language profile comes a focus on integrating the sociolinguistic context of both the province's and the entire country's Francophone communities. Meaningful cultural content is now part of the curriculum in all subjects, and a training program for teachers is in the making.

Learning the language: a realistic approach

For many students, French is in fact a second or an additional language. It's no use continuing to teach French as if it were immune to the forces of assimilation.

That's why instructional approaches and programs are now driven by a more realistic perspective. Research on bilingualism continues to make strides, and the mastery of both French and English is being promoted as one of the benefits afforded by French language schools. In addition, the French language is now recognized as having its own array of variants and registers, and each of these is seen as having its place and its value.

GENERATING IDEAS FOR MOVING FORWARD

- Build a greater awareness of what francisation involves in minority settings.
- Include a francisation component in both early childhood care and education programs, and provide related training for staff and parents alike.
- Incorporate the concepts of culture and identity in all curriculums.
- Provide continual professional development for teachers and make sure all of training fits together.
- Identify effective ways to teach students for whom French is an additional language.
- Design tools to track changes in students' language profiles.
- Consider the effects of francisation on student retention and academic success.
- Make it easier for stakeholders to join forces and for provinces and territories to exchange and cooperate.

CONCLUSION

In less than a decade, many francisation initiatives have taken shape in Canada. For a growing number of students, French is becoming either a second language or an added language. By increasing our understanding of minority settings and of language learning processes, we can design better targeted programs. The long-term vitality and the very survival of French-language communities and institutions depend on how these communities and institutions can adapt to change.

Liliane Vincent had a long national career at CTF. As Director of Services to Francophones, she worked to support teachers in Francophone schools in minority settings across Canada. Committed to ensuring the integrity of the French language in an increasingly diverse society, she also established and directed the Linguistic Services. She is pursuing as consultant her two passions, namely language and education in minority settings.

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



Fédération canadienne des enseignantes et des enseignants
Canadian Teachers' Federation