



# fronquêtes

ENQUÊTES SUR L'ÉDUCATION EN MILIEU MINORITAIRE FRANCOPHONE

## **Community-School Partnerships In Support of Learning and French-Language Minority Communities**

by Maurice Chiasson

Partnerships between school players and community members that commit long-term resources and involve actions supporting student learning have a positive impact not only on communities facing challenges relating to their vitality and to the next generations, but also on the Francophonie as a whole. Community-school partnerships promote student learning and contribute meaningfully to broadening the Francophone space.

### **COMMUNITY-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS**

There are three types of community-school relationships: partnerships, collaborations and contributions. *Partnerships* involve ongoing and stable commitment by two or more organizations and are established to carry out a common mission that results in material, intellectual, human or financial benefits to all parties. In a successful partnership, all parties are identified, common objectives are set and agreed upon, the roles and responsibilities of each party are clearly and fairly defined and the resources to be contributed by all players are laid out. *Collaborations* bring parties together to work towards a goal. Collaborations can be physical, intellectual or financial. As with partnerships, the community and school players are identified. However, the roles, responsibilities and outcomes are not necessarily as precisely defined since the relationship is for a limited time. *Contributions* involve participation—the community gets involved in the school or the school gets involved in the community—for a specific time period and for a particular event or activity. A fundraiser is one such example. Contributions are outreach activities that can provide excellent learning experiences for students.

### **SCHOOL AND ARTS**

In the arts, community-school relationships usually take the form of collaborations or contributions. For example, artists may come into a school or students may attend performances in cultural venues. Sometimes these relationships evolve into true partnerships. One example is the partnership between the Notre-Dame de l'Annonciation (NDA) school and the Conseil des Arts de Chéticamp (CAC) in Nova Scotia. CAC is an arts organization that puts on a variety of performances and cultural activities, including festivals, dinner theatre and art camps for children. The NDA is a school with students

from kindergarten to Grade 12 that had a number of rooms not being used to their full potential. A proposal to create a 350 seat performance hall was presented to CAC. The project was approved, and CAC and the NDA signed an agreement to jointly manage the hall. The benefits reaped by both partners were clear—children learned about different arts disciplines, summer jobs were created for youth and a permanent location for artistic and cultural programming was secured, which helped create a stronger sense of community and increase tourism in the area.

### **SCHOOL, MUNICIPALITY AND BUSINESS COMMUNITY**

It is essential, particularly in minority situations, for youth to become interested in politics. The Government of Ontario's Accent on Youth strategy, announced by the Francophone Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AFMO) and Ontario's Office of Francophone Affairs (OFA), was designed to meet this need by encouraging youth to take part in the democratic life of their communities. Three municipal councils and four school boards developed a pilot project whereby students from the École secondaire catholique Embrun, the École publique l'Académie de la Seigneurie, the École secondaire publique Écho du Nord and the École secondaire catholique Cité des Jeunes, in Kapuskasing, were able to participate in mentoring and to observe city councillors and employees at work. It is also critical for Francophone and Acadian communities to take charge of their economy in order to thrive. An example of communities taking action is the Youth Achievement (YA) initiative. YA is an international non-profit organization dedicated to increasing young people's awareness and knowledge of economic and business issues by encouraging them to develop their leadership and entrepreneurial skills. Through a network of 17 partner organizations, YA has brought together more than 2.5 million young Canadians from 400 different communities. YA tools are currently being used in a number of schools. The YA initiative is an example of contributions by the community to a school. But it is important to keep in mind that the vitality of minority communities is measured also by the number of jobs and business opportunities they provide to young people and by the way they assist the next generation. Since September 2009, the Collège Louis-Riel in St. Boniface has been offering a financial management course. Students

at the school established a banking co-operative, the Caisse Riel, which is managed and administered by the students and supervised by a teacher at the school and an employee of the Caisse populaire Saint-Boniface. The ongoing and stable nature of this co-operative has made this a true partnership.

### **SCHOOL AND RECREATIONAL CAMPS**

Until recently, the Tim Horton Children's Foundation had relatively few Francophone children in its summer camps, particularly in Ontario. However, a collaborative effort between some French-language school boards in Ontario and the administrators of Memorial Camp in Parry Sound, the Camp des Voyageurs in Quyon and the Cambridge Camp has improved this situation. The school boards made it possible for the Foundation to reach French-speaking students and hire French-speaking camp counsellors through La Cité collégiale and the Collège Boréal. Given the potentially stable and ongoing nature of this relationship, there is a high chance that it will evolve into a partnership. A similar relationship resulted in the creation of a summer day camp in Kingston for young Francophones and francophiles aged 7 to 14. During July and August 2009, youth at the camp were able to have fun in French, develop friendships, take music lessons and receive instruction in conversational French and in leadership, thanks to the organization La Route du Savoir. La Route is funded by groups, including the Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario and the Conseil des écoles catholiques de langue française du Centre-Est. Such summer camps meet needs in the community that were clearly not being met. If this relationship develops into one that is ongoing and stable, there is a strong chance that it will soon become a partnership.

### **SCHOOL PROGRAMMING AND COMMUNITY**

Relationships between schools and the community can also lead to innovative school programming. The following two examples bear witness to this.

- Many young Francophone students opt to attend an English school, citing greater choices or a wider range of academic and extracurricular activities. To counter this tendency, the Académie Parhélie was set up at the École Émilie-Tremblay in Whitehorse, Yukon. The concept at this high school is based on destreaming. Two branches are offered to all secondary students: sports-nature and fine arts.
- Students go on a variety of school excursions depending on the learning objectives of their program. This fosters relationships between the school and the world outside the classroom. Students must do volunteer work, use various artistic techniques, take part in exhibitions and meet with members of different groups such as the artistic and Aboriginal communities.

At the École Évangéline, in Prince Edward Island, students in grades 10, 11 and 12 can choose from three specialties. In the arts and culture option, students learn the basics of theatre, artistic direction and show production. The trades option offers carpentry, mechanic and welding courses, for example. The health and well-being option focuses on physical activity, sports, food and nutrition. Students are able to learn in a real work environment and gain valuable experience during supervised placements. In addition, a collaborative effort with the PEI Health Council resulted in the creation of a healthcare career fair. This relationship enables students to find out about the community's needs and helps ensure young workers are available locally. Another initiative between this school and a Mont Carmel seniors club, the Club de l'âge d'or de Mont-Carmel, gave students an opportunity to provide seniors with information on nutrition and physical exercises, while fostering intergenerational relationships.

### **BEING RESPONSIVE TO NEEDS**

Schools in minority settings must be aware of the needs of their community and remain proactive in order to ensure French is alive and well outside the classroom. We need only think of the difficulty parents often face in finding French-speaking sitters to care for their children after school, in the evening and on weekends. In Cochrane, thanks to the combined effort of the Conseil scolaire catholique de district des Grandes Rivières and the District Social Services Administration Board (DSSAB), such services are offered at the Nouveau Regard Catholic school. Creating a list of French-speaking students who have the necessary training and are willing to offer sitting services can be a contribution made by the school to the community. Relationships between a school and its community can take many forms depending on the particular needs of the community. These types of relationships allow youth to gain concrete and useful knowledge and skills and help them become aware of the Francophone space that surrounds them. The community, on the other hand, benefits from the dynamic contributions of these young people and the relationships thus created among members of the various groups that make up the community. Each type of relationship—whether we are talking about contributions, collaborations or partnerships—has its own merits and can meet particular needs. However, the vitality of these relationships is not necessarily measured by their number but rather by their effectiveness. Some one-time relationships may develop into ongoing and stable partnerships. But in order for this to happen, it is critical for goals to be clearly established, for roles and responsibilities of all partners involved to be defined and, most importantly, for each relationship to address the actual needs of one another. Partnerships will always have a place in a well-articulated pedagogical approach in minority Francophone settings.

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