

Brief to House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages

Re. Linguistic Duality during the 150th anniversary celebrations of Canadian Confederation in 2017

November 29, 2012

Good Morning Mr. Chair and respected committee members.

Thank you for inviting Canadian Parents for French to attend these hearings on linguistic duality during the 150th anniversary celebrations of Canadian Confederation in 2017. I am honored to have been provided this opportunity to speak to you.

I would like to start with the following quotation from Official Languages Commissioner Fraser:

“... the *Official Languages Act* is now into its fifth decade, it is still a challenge for someone to recognize linguistic duality as a Canadian value and as a key element in Canada’s identity. For that understanding to be broadened, it is important that the government do a better job of stressing the importance of Canada’s official languages, increasing the opportunities for second-language learning and strengthening the presence of both languages...”

I think that these words illustrate why there is a real and urgent need for using the 150th anniversary celebrations of Canadian Confederation as a means of highlighting the value of official languages to all Canadians. As a pan-Canadian network of parent volunteers with decades of experience in organizing socio-cultural events celebrating our linguistic duality, CPF is happy to share our best practices with you today. Canadian Parents for French hopes that it might help with the planning of the 150th anniversary celebrations of Canadian Confederation.

1. Canadian Parents For French and pan-Canadian Events supporting linguistic duality

CPF organizes hundreds of event every year in schools and communities across Canada. For brevity’s sake, I shall keep to a small number of these, run by our national office or by CPF Branches, omitting the many, many modest but no less important activities run by parent volunteers at the school district and individual school level.

- Our *Concours d’art oratoire* is a decades-old competition in which FSL students from across the country write and deliver a speech in French. Approximately 80,000 children take part in Concours, from the individual classroom to the national finals here in Ottawa. Many Francophones also compete in Concours, in the French First Language category of the competition.
- *Allons en France* is another CPF pan-Canadian competition. Organized in partnership with the Embassy of France, this writing competition requires students to incorporate words from a list of ten preselected words. The contest originally required students to write a 300-word text in

French on a specific theme. This year, we have modernized the competition by replacing the 300-word text with four Tweets which must incorporate at least two words from the list.

- CPF –BC & YK, later joined by CPF Alberta, ran two projects called *Bilingualism Rocks* and *Bilingualism Rocks Two*. For two years, francophone performers from Quebec, Yukon and Alberta toured two provinces and one territory, visiting dozens of communities, and playing to thousands of children. The aim of *Bilingualism Rocks* was to bring young Canadians together in cultural celebration, establishing and extending relationships between young Francophones and Francophiles.

As an aside, CPF national in partnership with a number of CPF branches and Canadian Youth for French, has applied for funding for a project called *O Canada*, which is Bilingualism Rocks writ large. If approved, *O Canada* will engage students in BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario by focussing on the historical, cultural and artistic legitimacy of the Francophone presence throughout Canada and its impact on Francophiles.

Two more projects I wish to bring to your attention come from our Nova Scotia branch:

- *Speak for Yourself/Parle, c'est l'idéal* is a bilingual play developed by the Resource Centre for Artists, Newfoundland, and Canadian Parents for French. The play has a strong interactive component which invites audience members, to come on the stage and represent themselves. In other words, they become *spect-actors*, rather than merely spectators.
- The *Action Media* project made junior high students aware of Francophone culture and the value of linguistic duality. Students researched a Francophone musician, genre of French music or Francophone historical figure in Nova Scotia. With the aid of Radio-Halifax-Métro, more than one hundred students prepared scripts and recorded three-minute audio presentations which were broadcast throughout March and April.

What all these events demonstrate is that there is an appetite for French language content in every single part of the country - even those areas, perhaps especially those areas, where French is not a daily reality. Meeting this demand has made CPF one of the biggest promoters of Francophone and bilingual performers in the country.

2. CPF's ideas on 150th Anniversary Celebration of Canada's Confederation

In the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage report *Canada's 150th Anniversary in 2017* the committee divided their recommendations in four categories; we will present our thoughts on three of the four categories - planning, legacies, and participants.

Planning

Through the organization of our events CPF has been able to adapt some best practices which have assisted us in our programming. As one of the biggest promoters of Francophone and bilingual performers in the country, our success is based on five key points:

1. We recognize that a demand exists and needs to be met.

2. We adapt the content to the linguistic capacity of different audiences. *Bilingualism Rocks*, for example, was able to play to young Francophones, to English track students with little or no knowledge of French, and frequently to mixed audiences.
3. We associate some sort of education component to performances like workshops, study guides, or background information.
4. We repeat our events. Perhaps this is a function of our school audience; after all, the Prince George Carnival is always new and exciting to successive waves of third-graders; and
5. We use bilingual performers. I mentioned a few moments ago that we had become important promoters of Francophone and bilingual performers. I'd like to emphasize that many of the performers in our events, from singers and actors to clowns to balloon ladies, speak French as a second or other language. In that sense, our events model bilingual behaviour to audiences across the country.

Thus we suggest in the planning of the 150th anniversary of Canadian Confederation the federal government work to include the following recommendations.

- *Adapt French language programming for a specific region.*

The success of programs such as *Bilingualism Rocks* and *Speak for yourself* hinge on creating an event which travelled to various communities, despite different linguistic profiles. Making these events open to a variety of audiences through an adapting linguistic balance. Both programs were able to garner great success in each community which was visited, which was seen with a demand to return the following year.

- *Lay the foundation of the 150th anniversary on events leading up to 2017*

Many of the events mentioned by Heritage Canada ADM Nicole Bourget, in her appearance to the Committee are significant to various Canadians across the country. For instance our Prince Edward Island branch is already working on ways to incorporate the anniversary of the Charlottetown conference in their future programming.

While these are still in the development stages, our PEI branch is looking to develop

1. An essay contest on how official languages has shaped our country;
2. A video contest across Canada having students portray one of the 25 delegates at the Charlottetown Conference. Use web based tools like YouTube for showing and judging, perhaps bringing the top 5 to PEI to present to schools;
3. Partnering with FFF using their Ambassador program, having half the delegate portray the conference of 1864 and the other half look at confederation of today - if we were not a country what would each province bring or want from confederation;
4. Theme the province's *Concours d'art oratoire* to the 2014 anniversary; and
5. Possibly host the National *Concours d'art oratoire* in PEI that year with themed presentations.

By capitalizing on other events in a similar way the Federal Government can build positive anticipation for the 150th anniversary of Canadian Confederation.

Legacies

The legacy surrounding the 150th anniversary celebration should be a great one. In every testimony thus far, witnesses have stressed how we should remember these events as something special. In her presentation to the committee, FCFA President, Marie France Kenney, stated how she still has her passport from the centennial celebration of Confederation. In a recent episode of Dragons' Den all the 'dragons' began singing Canada's Centennial celebration song.

These examples illustrate the emotional potency of celebrations. Though we do not flaunt our pride, Canadians care about our identity. And much like Expo 67 or more recently the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, the 150th anniversary of Confederation – to which we would integrate the 150th anniversary of the Charlottetown Conference – offers an opportunity for reinforcing our common national identity. In addition, this sesquicentennial is a wonderful way for two entire generations of Canadians to bridge the centennial and our bicentennial in 2067

The Centennial's legacy was primarily a bricks and mortar legacy. Think of all the museums, theatres municipal parks and other facilities across Canada dating from that time. For 2017, Canadian Parents for French thinks our legacy should be a stronger sense of linguistic duality though a greater recognition of individual official-languages bilingualism as a nation-building characteristic.

We would like to see the legacy of the 150th celebration of Canada's Confederation to consist of:

- *An official bilingual National Anthem, one which would be adopted and sung at all federal government and National events; and*
- *A changing of the current model of optional access to French second language education to a substantive right, which would allow all children in Canada the option to learn French in the program of their choice.*

Participation

Linguistic duality needs to an additive element to the 150th celebrations, which should be for all: young or old, new immigrants, Canadian citizens, French-, English-, or other language- speaking, should be part of these celebrations.

The federal government can promote linguistic duality in a number of simple ways:

- *All federally funded activities should integrate official languages in significant and public ways.*

We would encourage the federal government to assume that in all parts of Canada English and French are both spoken. The assumption that not enough people speak French in a community diminishes the ability of all Canadians to live both their official languages – whether it was what they learned in core French, through reading cereal boxes, as an adult learner or a French immersion student or graduate. French is alive in our communities – it needs an opportunity to show itself.

While not all communities across Canada have an even distribution of French and English speakers, we should still incorporate both languages to some degree. The impact of inclusion is twofold: the most obvious way is that it displays our linguistic duality, but it also illustrates respect to the minority language speakers in that despite their numbers they are still an important part of Canada's linguistic landscape.

- *Federally funded events should reach the remote parts of Canada.*

Through all of Canadian Parents for French's travelling shows we have learned one important lesson. There is an appetite for French culture throughout Canada. Many of the remote areas visited by *Bilingualism Rocks* were very receptive to French and French culture. There should be a strong policy of not assuming that because an area is English speaking there won't be any appreciation for French programming.

We would like to see federally funded events either create a platform which can be accessed by all Canadians, or the creation of a touring group which would visit the remote areas of Canada to promote the celebration and Canada's linguistic duality.

- *Use new media and technologies to engage audiences.*

The new iteration of *Allons en France*, and *Action Media* from its inception, both recognize new media as pervasive social integrators, especially for young.

In the case of *Action Media*, exposing youth to new technologies resulted in a high participation rate, and strong youth engagement.

- *Model bilingual behaviour.*

More and more Canadians claim both official languages as a first language – still hoping for a linguistic category of officially bilingual, and more and more Canadians study, work and live in their second official language. Let's recognize and celebrate that fact. In the case of large scale events, why not have MCs work in their second language instead of the current practice of Francophones speaking French and Anglophones speaking English. Why not have French, English and bilingual versions of promotional messages – say television spots. People from both linguistic communities are usually intensely proud of their second-language accomplishments – we should be encouraging them at every turn by appropriate modelling.

These small examples illustrate the importance of looking beyond traditional means of communications in order to engage with new generations of youth.

3. General Conclusion

A strong national identity is something to celebrate – and a key part of who we are as Canadians is officially bilingual and as such Canadian Parents for French believe that linguistic duality during the celebrations in 2017 should be strongly represented. With the integration of new technologies to

attract younger generations, new linguistic legacies can be created. The lessons we have learned to be successful proponents of linguistic duality through our events, we believe, are universal. Our vision of these celebrations is that both French and English speakers can access all the events funded by the Canadian government without difficulty.

Canada's 150th anniversary of Canadian Confederation is about our country and what makes it proud and unique. French is part of all Canadians' heritage (somewhat forgotten and sometimes on purpose) and we need to remind people of that. French immersion students often talk about learning their country's history through another set of eyes and it helps them understand more, explains their space and time. We could not be Canadians if we did not embrace our official languages – maybe it's a gift we need to give back - showcasing official languages in events all across and over Canada, a gift to pay forward - creating opportunities for our young to be that next prime minister, athlete, or trailblazer - and a gift to open up and celebrate over that year - by recognizing bilingual graduates and singing a bilingual national anthem.

Thank you.