

Canadian Parents for French

**Provincial and National French
Second-Language Education
Stakeholder Consultations**

Northwest Territories Consultation

Yellowknife, NWT

March 23, 2004

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Introduction

Randy Patrick of Canadian Parents for French (CPF) welcomed participants and thanked them for attending. He explained that the reason for the NWT's involvement in the consultations was that the territory would soon become a branch of CPF; until now, the NWT had been part of the Alberta branch. The NWT-CPF wants to lead and contribute to the development of French language education in the NWT. Branch status also provides NWT-CPF with funding. Patrick introduced the facilitator, Jean-Marie Mariez.

Mariez also welcomed participants and thanked them for attending the consultations, especially on such short notice. He asked the stakeholders present to share information and ideas from this evening with those who were unable to attend.

Mary Vane, Executive Director of CPF, noted that these consultations were a first step—further discussion and collaboration on strategy would be necessary in the future. She also noted the recommendations should include the identification of funding required for implementation.

Mariez provided some background information. In the 1970s and 1980s, many people were interested in learning a second language but in 2003, the federal Action Plan for Official Languages responded to the fact that, despite public support for linguistic duality and second official language education, the rapid growth of French immersion in the 1970s and 1980s had not continued through the 1990s.

The Plan sets an ambitious objective of doubling the number of high school graduates who are functionally bilingual by the year 2013. As there are now 20 to 25 students in the NWT finishing their education in immersion, the target by 2013 would be to have 40 to 50 students. The plan also identifies strategies to achieve this goal and allocates additional monies for French second-language education. In March 2004, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, in partnership with the Department of Canadian Heritage, PCO Intergovernmental Affairs, and Canadian Parents for French, organized a symposium entitled *Vision and Challenges for the 21st Century*. Stakeholders from various sectors of Canadian society discussed issues and proposed strategies that would help to achieve the *Action Plan's* goal for 2013.

Referring to the “Canadian Parents for French, Provincial and National French Second-Language Education Stakeholder Consultations” handout, Mariez noted that this evening was an opportunity for NWT French second-language education stakeholders to respond to recommendation and strategies articulated at the *Vision and Challenges* symposium with other provinces and territories. CPF is sponsoring the consultation with funding from PCO Intergovernmental Affairs.

Mariez explained the process for the evening. Stakeholders would be divided into two groups to discuss two questions on the theme of “Education.” After the groups completed their deliberations, all stakeholders would meet and review the outcomes. Upon completion of “Education,” the themes “Business” and “Arts, Culture, and Sports” would be assigned, one to

each group. After completing the second discussion in one of two groups, stakeholders would meet to review outcomes and wrap up the consultations.

A participant asked if he was to speak for his particular community or for the benefit of the NWT. It was noted that it was important to represent the realities of the NWT, including one's particular community and school reality.

Education

Question 1: Students and learning

What are the first steps to be taken in marketing bilingual education to students at all levels—from elementary to high school entry, from high school graduation to post-secondary education and life-long learning—and making it a genuine experience to learn a second language? How can resources and support from outside the classroom be mobilized to enrich FSL instruction and capture the magic of bilingual education?

Recommendations

- Promote FSL education to parents. Hold information sessions
- Provide adequate resources for classroom supports.
- Provide extra support for small schools and communities.
- Use mentors.
- Provide money for bussing so that more students can participate in FSL education.

Discussion

How can resources and support from outside the classroom be mobilized to enrich FSL instruction and capture the magic of bilingual education?

Participants in Group 1 described how marketing must include promotion to parents. Community learning is a good thing at all levels. Parental sessions should be held for core French programs as well as for French immersion programs.

Support for classroom activities must include appropriate resources for a variety of students, as there is great disparity in levels of knowledge and skill. These materials are costly to develop and will require funding to complete.

Support is particularly necessary for teachers in small communities. The group recommended funding a core French support specialist who would travel throughout a region supporting French teachers.

One means to support French students is through mentorship, bringing more French-speaking people into the school including French-speaking business people in the community. With about twenty French-based businesses in the NWT, there may be some way to set up work experience opportunities, although it was unclear how this would be done. A participant mentioned that NWT students cannot go to the post office and speak French.

Notwithstanding the objective to double the number of bilingual high school graduates, it is important to focus on teaching French before or early in a child's school career. It is accepted that students learn a second language best when they are very young.

Participants identified a number of challenges. Employees of NWT businesses do not generally need French language in the territory and the public sector is less likely to need French than it is in a province such as New Brunswick.

In order to encourage more people to go into French immersion, CPF could provide money for bussing when students are required to travel out of their school's catchment area.

Question 2: Teachers and instruction

What are the prospects for attracting and training the next generation of competent, enthusiastic FSL instructors, and for ensuring that they have the resources and support that they need to succeed?

Recommendations

- Provide adequate support to teachers in order to prevent burnout.
- Respect First Nations and Inuit language instruction as well as FSL. It should not be an either/or choice.
- Explore the possibility of offering instruction in three languages: English, French, and a Native language.
- Make French language instruction fun.

Discussion

Participants discussing the second question noted that if more French teachers did not become available, increasing the number of French students could lead to very crowded classes.

Teachers are asked to do more than they are able to. The average retention of a core French teacher is seven or seven and one-half years. In order for this to improve, teachers need more support. Core French is very hard to teach—Grades 6 to 9 are most difficult. Students' and parents' attitudes are not generally supportive. Thus, it is important to promote core French and find ways to make it fun. In addition, educators in the NWT have to be respectful of First Nation and Inuit languages, even though it should not be an either/or situation.

One participant suggested that there could be French-language activities outside of the school, but another countered that children are already busy with extra-curricular activities. Another participant suggested bringing the community to the school. The many French-speaking business owners in Yellowknife might be persuaded to get involved in school activities or receive students in their businesses. This would be important in relation to career development as well.

As well, there will always be an issue with recruiting French teachers in rural (small, remote) communities. Because of the interest by First Nations and Inuit people in Aboriginal languages, the viability of French-language classes can be questionable. Parents and students in Calgary (among other centres) are considering education in three languages, something that should be promoted as an option for Northerners.

Teachers are being asked to do things they are not trained to do. The high attrition rate for French teachers leads to high student attrition from French immersion programs. Good teachers encourage kids to stay in French. Teaching positions are demanding because of difficulties of scheduling, high level of preparation, wide range of student skill levels, and lack of support. It is important to promote core French and find ways to make it fun.

One participant asked if French immersion parents were supportive. The response was that they were not as supportive as they used to be when French immersion was first introduced. The elitism is gone from French immersion.

Question 3: Public opinion and community context

What are the dimensions of a community-based campaign to promote FSL instruction and support Canada's Vision for 2013 objectives? What are the first steps, and who should be involved?

Recommendations

- Create opportunities for bilingual community members to interact.
- Establish a national data centre to consolidate and centralize available Web information, complete with a search engine for teachers.
- Recruit a prominent person to promote FSL education.
- Support CPF.
- Provide funds for French language cultural tours.
- Use posters, TV advertisements, radio advertisements, newspapers, and magazines to promote FSL education.
- Provide funding for cultural exchanges.
- Provide support for parents of FSL students, so they can be active participants in their children's education.

Discussion

Participants recommended that communities create opportunities for bilingual members to connect. Communities are not supporting French.

A national data centre is an excellent idea to consolidate and centralize all available Web information. A search engine would allow for access to any subject. All other French language teaching organizations should be involved. There should be a very practical section for teachers including checklists, teacher strategies, and methods of promoting French language as well as information for school boards, etc. Practical information will be used. It should include both Core and French immersion curriculum materials.

Recruiting a prominent person to promote French language education would be a bonus for public opinion. One participant thought this would be difficult but another noted that Yellowknife has various proficient francophones, including artists, chefs, and others. Other figures who could promote the French language are NWT French immersion graduates whose success is related to their bilingualism, for example, students returning as French teachers.

More organizations need to be encouraged to support CPF. The list should include the Canadian Teachers' Federation.

Authors, writers, and dramatists—almost all English speaking—frequently visit NWT communities. Money for French-language cultural tours would be a big help.

Identifying a national champion, such as the Minister of Education in Newfoundland and Labrador, is a good idea.

It is not good to rely too much on use of the Internet because youth are too busy to spend time searching for French language, unless they are already interested. By using a lot of posters, TV advertisements, radio advertisements, newspaper and magazines, a broad base of people would be reached. Posters should include an Internet address that would provide more information.

Recognition opportunities should continue, including scholarships and prizes.

Participants had a number of suggestions to promote French-language education, beginning with the provision of work opportunities in French-speaking businesses. One participant countered that this would be difficult, as French is not a functional language in the workplace in the NWT. Other suggestions were to promote immersion opportunities for a semester, and/or three-month exchanges as well as summer programs for all students.

Some challenges specific to the NWT were raised. First Nations and Inuit people, who comprise about half of the population, feel strongly about the preservation and study of their own languages. As well, travel is very expensive. Air travel within the NWT or to Québec is as costly as Ontario–France travel. This cost needs to be figured into funding so that students are not required to do as much fundraising.

Language programs for parents were suggested as a way to increase the number of parents who want their children to learn French.

Some parents are concerned that they will not be able to help their children with French. Because potential French immersion parents are primarily English speaking, they often need reassurance about their children's competency in English and worry that the addition of French will be a drain on other areas. Educators need to have good responses to this. Another participant identified available studies and information including "The Handbook for Administrators in French Language."

Question 4: Institutional support and accessibility

What major program and policy changes would enhance FSL instruction across Canada? What are the first, most practical steps that can be taken to build a more effective, more accessible system, and who should be involved?

Recommendations

- Offer professional development opportunities for teachers.
- Test oral proficiency when teachers are hired.

Discussion

Participants first noted that competency is an important issue. An NWT school board was cited as an example—it rejected applicants because of level of language skill and yet these same applicants found jobs in other Canadian schools. There is a demand for French teachers. The solution to competency issues is to offer opportunities for teachers to improve linguistic skills through summer programs.

The group did not support the implementation of competency tests. One participant noted that teacher testing is difficult to agree with. It is a territorial/provincial matter. The Northwest Territories Teachers Association does not agree with testing. A teacher's university degree is proof of his or her competency.

One participant noted that oral testing could be completed when the teacher is interviewed and another participant said his school had French-speaking people attend the interview for that purpose.

Business

Question 5

Is there scope for ongoing collaboration between the business and education sectors to increase the proportion of high school graduates with a working knowledge of both official languages? If so, based on the initial list of strategies developed at the National Symposium, what are the most promising opportunities for early action?

Recommendations

- Report on French news from all parts of Canada—just not from Quebec.
- Ensure that Heritage Canada works closely with businesses to promote bilingualism.
- Explore the possibility of having CPF partner with national and territorial Chambers of Commerce to promote bilingualism.

Discussion

Participants noted that this question was difficult to comment on. They were not sure if the Canadian Unity Council could provide travel money to students.

The group recommended that French news from all parts of Canada be reported, as “it isn’t just about Quebec.” One participant noted that Channel 20 allows free time for programming and another participant identified the need for more mainstream coverage.

There were questions about CPF’s liaison with French businesses and a suggestion that Canadian Heritage work more closely with businesses. The federal government promotes and publicizes bilingualism; the group stated that it would like the business community to do the same with federal government support.

Is CPF making a connection with business? Territorial CPF could partner with the Territorial Chamber of Commerce and the national CPF could partner with the National Chamber of Commerce. Students must understand that businesses want bilingual employees—both businesses and Heritage Canada should promote business and language needs. In addition, it is important to understand a culture as well as know its language.

A participant observed that not all students will stay in Canada, so the need for multi language skills is great. Students need to “think globally.”

One participant noted that newspapers should be provided more information on French programming in schools but other participants pointed out schools were begging for coverage.

Another participant questioned what the term “bilingual work program” meant. Is the person required to be completely bilingual? “Functional bilingual” programs should be training in French, learning as-you-go.

Arts, Culture, and Sports

Question 6

Is there scope for ongoing collaboration between the arts, culture, and sport sector and the FSL education community to increase the proportion of high school graduates with a working knowledge of both official languages? If so, based on the initial list of strategies developed at the National Symposium, what are the most promising opportunities for early action?

Recommendations

- Provide more funding opportunities in arts and language projects, and promote them to parents. (Some projects may already exist.)
- Expand *Jeu de la Francophonie* to include more events and activities. A more extensive training program would help to increase participation.
- Prepare a booklet or kit for parents on how to promote the use of French at home. This could include French music and cooking, advise on how to use French television programming as a learning tool, how to motivate kids to watch French programs, and questions that parents could ask their children.
- Promote French television and radio programming. A great variety of it is available in the NWT
- Provide money for sporting figures, and drama and arts personnel to come in and teach their skills, sport, or their craft in French. For instance, in Yellowknife the Speed Skating Association brings in a French-speaking coach every year for its summer camp. Almost all of the participating speed skaters are in French immersion. This gives students an opportunity to use the language outside school and outside the school season.
- Promote and deliver community-based evening courses on various subjects or hobbies taught in French.

Discussion

Participants suggested that nationally, CFP could help with access to broadcasting programming and with cultural exchanges. Locally, CFP could have a huge impact by funding pottery, crafts, and drama classes in French.

Conclusions/Closing

Mariez drew the meeting to a close, thanking participants once again. He expressed hope that CFP would be pleased with the results, particularly given the short time frame.

Mary Vane said it was CPF's hope that there will be funding down the road that would enable the NWT-CPF to flesh out its plans. She noted that this is a start on a journey to increasing French bilingualism in the NWT.

Participants had some additional comments:

- Ensure that the required resources are in place in order to keep children in French immersion—resources to strengthen students' skills and to support their confidence from the beginning of their schooling. This requires a global vision from Grade 1 to Grade 12, supported by an action plan from CPF.
- Produce resources specifically for French immersion students and do not rely solely on resources developed for francophone students.
- Use successful students who have graduated from immersion programs to promote French immersion.

Patrick concluded the evening and thanked participants for giving up their evening for the good of youth and children.