

**Canadian Parents for French**

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

**Prince Edward Island Consultation**

**Charlottetown, PEI**

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## Table of Contents

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Introduction.....	1
Education .....	2
Question 1: Students and learning .....	2
Question 2: Teachers and instruction.....	5
Question 3: Public opinion and community context.....	7
Question 4: Institutional support and accessibility .....	9
Plenary Discussion.....	11
Business .....	12
Question 5 .....	12
Arts, Culture, and Sports.....	14
Question 6 .....	14
Conclusions/Closing .....	16

## Introduction

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Gail Lecky, Executive Director of Canadian Parents for French (CPF) Prince Edward Island, reviewed the agenda, and provided an overview of the Federal Action Plan on Official Languages. She then introduced Maurice Poirier, President of the PEI Teachers Federation and a French immersion teacher.

Poirier, who had attended the Symposium on Official Languages held in Toronto earlier in March, thanked CPF-PEI for nominating him to attend the symposium. One of the main objectives of the federal government's new plan on linguistic duality is to double the number of bilingual young Canadian by 2013. Knowing more than one language shows respect for other cultures. Poirier said that it is crucial for Canadians to know other languages and understand cultural traditions—because Canada is such a small country, the ability to speak more than one language provides an edge.

A number of conclusions and recommendations flowed from the national symposium:

- Provide young Canadians with French role models to emulate.
- Develop new courses with a strong emphasis on oral communication.
- Celebrate second language learning and promote it for students through Grade 12.
- Recruit more teachers to ensure that the pool of available teachers is sufficient. It was noted that Alberta intends to recruit teachers aggressively until 2006 to ensure it has enough to deliver its programs.
- Make video conferencing available so that children can share in learning.
- Expand the number and hours of classes available. In some jurisdictions, students in Grades 4 to 6 have intensive all-French training for five months of the year, but beyond that only have one French class daily.

Poirier described the actions and future plans of other provinces. For example, Dr. Lyle Oberg, Minister of Learning in Alberta will make second language study mandatory by 2004, and the province will offer learning in seven languages (French, Cree, German, Spanish, Japanese, Ukrainian, and Mandarin) by 2006.

Two of the presenters at the Toronto Symposium, Mike Goldblum of the *Toronto Star* and Peter Robinson of Mountain Equipment Co-op both said that a bilingual job applicant has the advantage—bilingualism is seen to be a plus in global trading. The CBC foreign offices use bilingual reporters. As well, Poirier noted that many of the lawyers graduating from McGill are recruited by foreign companies, who value them for their ability to speak two languages.

Also at the Symposium, 1960s Olympian Richard Pound was quoted as saying it is impossible to understand a Canada with one language. Jacques Ben Simon, National Film Board, predicted that in the future, unilingualism would be the exception. The Honourable Pierre Pettigrew, Minister of Health, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, and Minister responsible for Official

Languages, reiterated the government's commitment to implementing the program. The federal government is concerned about the lack of post-secondary university programs in French.

Facilitator Des Lecky then explained the challenges and strategies in future French language education. Participants were divided into two separate groups for their breakout discussions.

## **Education**

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### **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**

- Provide more opportunities for students to take university majors in French, and a list of resource people for mentorships/presentations.
- Recognize that IT is not the answer to everything. A local or national portal project would have problems related to accessibility for everyone, and issues with varying levels of technology, quality of available connections, and teacher savvy.
- Develop a database of prominent arts, culture, and sport figures willing to act as ambassadors for French language.
- Develop champions at the national level.
- Institute a level of competency that will prevent students from dropping out.
- Provide more opportunities to learn other languages, i.e., Spanish. “The fact that we only have French and English in our schools shows that we do not value languages.” Other places have found that expanding language opportunities do not translate into a drop in French enrolment. One participant disagreed, saying that it did on the Island.
- Provide funding for exchanges of ideas, cultures, and real life experiences. This is most effective in improving awareness.
- Provide more funding and expand the programs to more school levels.
- Encourage opportunities outside school for students to speak French. “It’s pretty sad that PEI is lagging behind on this,” said a participant.

#### **Discussion**

There was a variety of perceptions about the meaning of certain words in this question. One participant had a problem with the word “marketing,” which to her implies a business context. She argued that business should be kept separate from education. Another participant said that it implies that knowledge is a commodity item.

Another ambiguity came with the word “students.” Participants wondered if it meant *all* students, or just all French language students. Did it mean those already involved in French learning, or those who might become enrolled in the future?

The third problem word was “genuine.” Discussion among participants concluded that this meant “real world experience, and how it is applied.” The group then took approximately five minutes to read all the recommendations, and to note their own feelings and thoughts about each one.

Participants were asked to determine what the options are for high school graduates to study in French toward a degree (in Science, for instance) here in the Island. They noted that the option is limited to a French degree, although it is now possible to take distance education.

One of the participants, a student, was asked if she thought students would be interested in taking 50% of a course in French. She replied she thought so, and that she would be, personally. Another participant countered that this concept had been tried across Canada in the 1980s, but it was not very successful because students were not interested.

Another participant suggested that UPEI and Holland College should immediately make it mandatory for applicants to have finished Grade 12 French, but the majority of other participants did not agree.

The group examined the recommendations in numerical order, rating them in order of effectiveness and recommendations, and where necessary, added new recommendations and actions.

#### Recommendation #1

- Unanimous agreement, and a top priority
- A suggestion was made to make it compulsory to graduate with Grade 12 French for entrance to post-secondary studies, but this was voted down.

#### Recommendation #2

- Not applicable

#### Recommendation #3

- Agreed
- This shows students that they can use French outside of school. It is also important to show that it is possible to work in French on PEI. (This relates to the “genuine” portion of Question #1.)

#### Recommendation #4

- The consensus was that it would have little impact.
- It was felt that this could be used as a marketing tool through the use of videos, etc. It bridges the gap between school and home, allowing students to use French outside the school environment.

Recommendation #5

- Most effective here on PEI
- This recommendation will be highly effective, especially if people such as some of the French players on the PEI Rocket hockey team could be drafted as ambassadors.

Recommendation #6

- Very effective on a national level; not really effective on the PEI/provincial level
- Groups felt the “champion” should be on the political level

Recommendation #7

- Medium effectiveness
- Group members said that use of the Internet could have medium effectiveness, if it had its own direct site, without searching through multiple sites for all the information. In reality, teachers will have to show students how/where to access this information.

Recommendations #8 and #9:

- Medium importance
- Participants thought that #8 and #9 go together. Students who are driven would find a benefit, and #8 might influence undecided “fence sitters” in favour of French study, if it was marketed in the right way to include parents. Parents often influence what university/college the student attends by paying the student’s tuition. The level of competency was seen as being not as important as having a passion for the language.

Recommendation #10

- High importance, high impact
- These are financially viable for the largest percentage of students. A student present mentioned one of the student exchanges that costs only \$75, but noted that only a small number of students are aware of this program.

Recommendation #11

- High importance, high impact
- This should go beyond establishing a financial support system and be made available to students in the lower level grades.

Recommendation #12

- Medium importance, medium impact
- Many classes take part in virtual exchanges at present.

Recommendation #13

- High importance
- Educating parents and administrators is key, as is offering languages beyond French. Many parents do not realize what the course actually means. Focus falls primarily in high school, but many students drop out after Grade 5. Some administrators do not know about the French programs, and point students towards English-based culture.

## **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**

Participants prioritized their recommendations, identifying the top three:

- **Competency:** Establish a policy of oral proficiency, improve competency, and develop methodology courses for teachers. Explore the possibility of having two streams of French courses.
- **Teacher Support:** Provide more teacher support through bursaries, promotion, and collaboration of provincial associations, both socially and educationally. Possibly develop multicultural and language appreciation courses.
- **Resources:** Use technology, books, and mentorships. Involve parents more in education. Post homework to the school's Web page. Provide opportunities for people to have a rich life in French and English.

Another priority mentioned was to find a champion on the Council of Ministers of Education, someone who would go to bat for CPF. (There were no suggestions, however, on who this might be.)

### **Discussion**

Working from the list of specific actions and initiatives for the Education Sector developed at the National Symposium, participants were asked to clearly identify which of the 14 recommendations would be most effective on PEI in addressing the question, and what action items could take the recommendations to the next level.

An effective program will attract and retain good teachers as well as produce teachers for the future. The group assigned top priority to putting a solid structure into place in order to define, establish, and enforce levels of competency of both students and teachers and to recognize achievement. Building on initiatives #8, #9, and #2, participants recommended that a clear policy be established on the required oral and written proficiency for teachers. Members of the group also noted the need to provide teachers with more support in order to achieve these goals.

The merits of technological and public opinion initiatives outlined in #4, #5, #6, and #7 in assisting teachers and the program were debated. Technology is still generally perceived as a tool that can be effective but not without many frustrating loopholes. Prominent figures were seen as less important ambassadors and champions for the cause than everyday students and members of the community. How do we attract the best French teachers to PEI? They need to see that it is

possible to have not only a good quality of life here, but also a good life in the French language and culture, in a vibrant bilingual education system.

Participants made a number of comments:

- Recommended levels of advanced and superior proficiency for hiring core and immersion teachers are not always followed because of a shortage of available qualified candidates.
- Schools on PEI are presently quite autonomous in their hiring practices.
- It is important to set at least a benchmark, if not a restrictive policy, and require teachers to improve their competency with upgrading courses. Students can be turned off the whole concept of bilingualism by substandard teaching.
- Methodology courses are also a necessity. Speaking the language does not mean one can teach it. Immersion graduates do not necessarily have the skills to teach core French.
- It is important to look at gaps in university teacher training programs when establishing competency levels for future French teachers.
- If the federal goal is to be achieved by 2013, there will have to be more concentration placed on teaching everyday conversational French. Perhaps there could be two streams of courses offered (as is the case with math): an academic stream and a life skills stream.
- Summer bursaries for travel to St. Pierre, the Madeleine Islands, and Québec are now offered by the Department of Education for teacher training. Could the various associations of teachers do more to promote these opportunities?
- The different levels of French teachers—core, immersion and first language—could interact and support each other more. It is ironic that even at the teacher level, there are social and cultural barriers. The less fluent core French teachers, in particular, need support to feel comfortable in mixed-level teacher group situations.
- Core French is perceived as a particularly challenging course to teach in this region. How can we motivate the students and begin to challenge their negative attitudes? How can we support core French teachers and make their job more rewarding? One suggestion was the creation of a multilingual language and cultural appreciation course that integrated French as one component, along with indigenous languages. Music, songs, drumming, and technology could be used together as tools to help make it “cool.”
- A motivated teacher is the most important element in making language come alive. An effective program also involves the students and requires a certain amount of time on task. These basic necessary components should be addressed before looking at outside things.
- In small rural schools there is often a simpler and better opportunity to run with the students in creating innovative programs. Some teachers, however, have experienced many practical problems with technology.
- A French education portal would be more suitable for some objectives than others. Distance learning cannot take the place of a regular teacher, but mentorship can possibly work at a distance through technology. Some parents would like to see the children’s homework assignments listed on the site, at least to the Junior High level.
- Although expanding the choice of second language course options has been suggested and offered as a way to increase the motivation of students interested in languages, this route has had a negative impact on the number of students choosing core French.

- Prominent figures in the arts, culture, and sport could be successful ambassadors of bilingualism to help shape public opinion and support. It is important to take the lesson beyond the isolation of the classroom. The CPF Web site could, as well as the media, be used as a vehicle for this initiative. But it is even more important to publicize examples of ordinary families and communities living better with bilingualism.
- Champions to bring the proposals forward could be students or former students as well as politicians. The ultimate champion does have to be the Ministry of Education. Unless it really embraces French, it is just lip service.
- There has been a big effort in New Brunswick to bring the parent into immersion education as a partner. This approach supports the teacher as well. However, the core French parent is not included enough in this scenario.
- The *French with a Future* and mentorship program has had good exposure at Westisle High School in Prince County.
- The voice at home is a very important influence in establishing French as a priority and not simply an extra. We need to put parents more in the loop. The community educates a child.
- It is very difficult to separate the recommendations geared at supporting teachers from the ones for students and parents. The enthusiasms all feed on and reflect off each other.

### **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**

- Connect FSL students with the wider French-speaking community.
- Use mentors and ambassadors to promote FSL education and the benefits of bilingualism.
- Promote student exchanges.
- Use the media to promote French events.

#### **Discussion**

Leaders do not make the importance of French as a second language part of public discourse. There is a need to identify credible speakers (for example, former students) in different sectors to articulate the importance of French and tie it into their personal experiences so it is attractive to other students.

The number of students in French programs has been very stable here on PEI, while other provinces have experienced a decline in numbers. Twenty years ago, French immersion was a hot topic and people were debating the importance of speaking French. Now it has become accepted and many have become blasé.

An addition to recommendation #5 was suggested: To the sentence “Recruit prominent figures in the arenas of the arts, culture, and sport . . . .,” add “business people and politicians.” One person noted that recently, PEI Liberal Leader Robert Ghiz phoned one of his former teachers to express his appreciation and delight that she was receiving the “Teacher of the year award.” Things like this need to be made public.

French education has to start with parents as well as with students. One key is students speaking to their peers, or “kids talking to kids.”

The message of the marketing campaign should go beyond the financial benefits of bilingualism, to include social benefits—bringing the culture alive. Recommendations #10 through #13 all relate to the social aspects of language.

There is a perception that teachers will set virtual exchanges up. Some participants felt that, because they are a lot of work, they will not happen, except in isolated instances.

A portion of “Meet the Teacher” nights should be “French immersion is . . . .,” or “Core French is . . . .” There should also be brochures and other support items for parents. Educating parents is a huge part of the process. CPF brings teachers on board so that it has the expertise to draw from; this expertise needs to be dispensed to the parents, as well.

Listing in levels of importance, the group chose Recommendation #5 in first place and #6 in second place, with #3, 11, 12, and 13 all being noteworthy. Prominent business/sport/political people should be brought in to promote language to the community at large, and to the media.

The media was discussed, with participants noting the inequity of media coverage for French events. One participant said that, when all the children were here for the Acadian games, the French papers provided excellent coverage, but there was not one single mention of the games in the *Guardian*, when they usually print whatever they are “fed.” In reference to this, another participant pointed out that getting media coverage is simple, provided one knows whom to contact.

The value of student exchanges was again brought up. Many participants agree that real life exchanges (rather than virtual ones) were most beneficial, causing students to use the language. Mention was made of French immersion camps in Maine. Each camp is 27 days in length, and costs US \$2000. The camps are full to overflowing, and are now taking applications for the year 2006.

A student in the group informed participants of the French days camps to be held this summer, June 26 to late August, in the Montague area. The camps cater to Grades 1 through 6.

Fears, challenges, stumbling blocks, and points of resistance to language need to be identified in order to move forward.

In the report-back to the plenary session, participants who discussed Question 3 reported on the dimensions of a community-based campaign to promote FSL and support Canada’s *Vision for*

2013. They made a strong case for the many intangible benefits of connecting students with the wider community that go beyond simply improving language skills. Mentors and ambassadors in business, politics, and the arts can be individually selected to respond to the special needs and interests of specific student and parent groups, thus breaking down barriers to a truly meaningful bilingualism.

Student exchanges are recognized as positive life-changing events. Every student should have the opportunity to visit Ottawa and Québec at least once before Grade 12. It is so important to encourage programs and exchanges where kids talk to each other, both at home and away.

In general, participants saw community support as a way to encourage students to learn French for the enjoyment and love of the language, rather than simply as a route to earning more money. More information on bilingual and francophone events needs to be channelled to the English media to make up for discrepancies in reporting, and work together to recreate the buzz around bilingualism and multiculturalism.

#### **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**

- Support real-life opportunities for FSL students to participate in francophone and bilingual cultural and community events.
- Promote French language co-op opportunities.
- Mandate a second language requirement for entrance to post-secondary institutions.

#### **Discussion**

Again working from the 14 initiatives for the Education Sector developed from the National Symposium, the group gave priority in addressing this question to #1, recommending an expansion of the types of programs, choice of courses, and number of places for students at the post-secondary level, but also at all levels. The importance of teacher training, competency, and support at all levels, as outlined in #2 and #8 was again emphasized. Mentorship, co-op course components, and the establishment of links with the francophone schools and community were highlighted as positive steps to be further explored. There is a growing understanding of the importance of culture and community to all students learning and speaking French in a minority language environment, whether as a first language or a second one. “When kids are having fun and meaningful experiences in French, that’s relevant,” said one participant. The need for FSL champions expressed in #6 was highlighted. The concept of an intensive five-month period of

French for core French students as outlined in #14 was found to have merit despite inherent difficulties in implementation.

Many participants agreed with the following statements:

- Students receive a mixed message when we tell them that FSL is important and yet we do not mandate it across PEI in Grades 10 to 12, and do not have French as a graduation requirement.
- Core French programs should be offered to students as early as Grade 1. At this stage, it is important to instil an appreciation for the language in a fun and light way so that it becomes part of life.
- At post secondary institutions such as Holland College, content-based FSL literacy programs specific to work place needs would be an important addition to the training of students, particularly in the Culinary Institute and the helping professions of Resident Care and Youth Worker.
- More choice of courses and continuity of courses across PEI are needed within the immersion system, particularly at the secondary level. There is a problem finding teachers proficient in both French and the actual subject matter of various courses. Students need only 25% of their courses in French in order to graduate on PEI with a French immersion certificate, whereas in Nova Scotia the requirement is 50%.
- Immersion students on PEI are currently speaking French most fluently at the Grade 6 level, although this situation is beginning to change with recent new FSL offerings at the Junior High level and at Westisle High School.
- There is a perception that Nova Scotia immersion programs may be more successful than those on PEI may. Are they providing sports and after school activities in French as well as in English? We need to encourage teachers and students who do not yet feel comfortable with this more broadly based approach to learning.
- In a recent study in the Atlantic Provinces, some students did not want FSL to be mandated into the curriculum. It is ironic that some students even asked for more English and less French to be used on the French portal.
- We need to work along with the universities in encouraging FSL, by promoting the requirement of a compulsory second language for university entrance.
- More methodology and proficiency upgrading courses are needed for teacher training, e.g. Masters Program in FSL.
- Short co-op components where students spend course-related time in francophone businesses or in courses taught in French at the university would increase career exposure and create links with the community. Businesses offering bilingual services should be encouraged to promote themselves on this basis, so that students can perceive French as a living, useful language to learn.
- Full or part-time exchanges between the French schools and FSL programs would make learning French more real and enjoyable for students. This initiative was tried last year on a limited level between the high school students of Charlottetown Rural and François Buote. Some immersion students have participated successfully in the Acadian Games.
- French as a first language funding programs are currently emphasized by Heritage Canada, largely because of the importance of supporting cultural needs in a minority language

environment. A growing understanding of the importance of cultural and community connection to all students learning and speaking French can potentially help eliminate some of the rigid distinctions and competition for support among groups.

- Levels of competency for both students and teachers could be introduced as an incentive rather than a restriction. The PEI culture has not been welcoming to the concept of standardized testing.
- Champions are needed to make the case for a strong core French program to the CMEC. PEI needs a person to champion FSL to its own Minister. The CSALT needs a champion for the establishment of nationwide proficiency tests. Here on PEI the promotion of former Director of French Programming, Linda Lowther, to the position of Senior Director of Public Education, is seen as a positive sign.
- The concept of an intensive period of up to five months of operating in French to engage students in learning a second language was viewed with merit, particularly at the Junior High level. Two schools are ready to try this program, despite the follow-up issues that arise when students then re-enter the regular core French program. Perhaps some concepts from the intensive program, such as journal writing and conversation, could be introduced into the core program.

Reporting back to the plenary, participants who discussed Question 4 noted effective major program and policy changes to enhance FSL education across Canada. They echoed many of the same interests as those who answered Question 3, supporting real-life opportunities for students to participate in francophone and bilingual cultural and community experiences. Co-op programs and school exchanges can create meaningful links for all students studying French at core, immersion, or first language levels. There also must be a corresponding expansion of types of programs and choice and continuity of courses at all levels within the system. Specific initiatives mentioned were the introduction of core French as early as Grades 1 or 2, the creation of content-based French courses for the workplace at Holland College, the provision of more secondary courses such as Math and Science in French, and a greater emphasis on extra-curricular activities in French.

Post-secondary institutions should have a second language entrance requirement. There must also be an increase in post-secondary teacher training courses in methodology and language proficiency. There was general agreement that having champions in the right place at the right time would enhance the FSL program. The participants were in favour of looking at ways to introduce the alternative five-month intensive core French program into the PEI system. Perhaps most importantly, there was consensus on the need to establish and support levels of competency for both students and teachers.

## **Plenary Discussion**

General discussion in the plenary session centred on the advantages and disadvantages of establishing French as a second language requirement to graduate from high school and/or as an entrance requirement for university. Despite ample research evidence that second language proficiency helps the student develop problem-solving abilities in their first language—as well as in other subjects such as Math and Science—there is still some opposition in PEI to introducing

core French as a requirement. A former teacher and principal expressed the fear that such a requirement would be “the kiss of death” for many Island children. Obviously, everyone wants students to succeed, and great care should be taken to establish levels and supports to that end. Math, although difficult for many students, is accepted as necessary. Schools offer a choice of Arts Math and Science Math. There was consensus among most participants that the post-secondary institutions must play a stronger role in supporting requirements and course improvements for FSL. External pressure points can help create intrinsic motivation for change. Business and community-based initiatives will also be key factors in regaining the “importance to second language learning that we seem to have lost.”

The plenary concluded with an informal exercise in which participants were each given three dots to indicate their chosen priorities for implementation among the 14 education strategy recommendations, or to add recommendations. On an adjusted scale of 1 to 10, initiatives #1 and #8 received by far the highest support, each with a count of 10. This result correlates with the emphasis observed in the workshops. Recommendations #5 and #13 followed with a vote of six. Next came #2 and #10 with a count of four, initiative #3 with a count of two and #9 with one. A new recommendation #15, “to involve parents and administrators more in education,” received two votes. A second new recommendation, “to offer other languages along with English and French,” along with initiatives #4, #6, #7, #11, #12 and #14, was judged to be of lower priority at this time.

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## Business

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### 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

- Recommendations 1 and 5 were deemed to be the most effective.
- A 7<sup>th</sup> recommendation was added: Develop French language training for careers in Tourism, Business, Administration, and Health Care, stressing the importance of the cultural appropriateness of the language.

#### Discussion

Discussion on Question 5 began with a clarification of the meaning of the question and recommendations. In particular, the group felt that Recommendation 2 was worded poorly. Most participants agreed that they were not sure what Recommendation 2 means.

#### Recommendation 1

- Rated effective
- Emphasize and recognize bilingualism, for example, by paying bilingual students a higher wage for their summer jobs. Bilingual students often have a much heavier work load because all French customers are referred to them for service, and they end up doing twice the work for the same amount of pay as the unilingual student workers.
- Educate employers and employees about the importance of French language training. As an example, one woman remarked on an Island restaurant that translated its menu into Japanese before it was translated into French. (PEI gets approximately 20,000 Japanese visitors per summer, while over 100,000 visitors come from Quebec.)
- Expose the public to more French media, such as French television and radio programs. Make parents aware that their children can go to a French film in Island theatres. Promote French magazines and books.

#### Recommendation 2

- Less effective
- Encourage business people to talk about the global business climate. Using the example of successful Island businessperson Tim Banks going to Europe to do business, a participant said that Mr. Banks would have to know the linguistic ability of his contacts. This is true for any businessperson trading in the global economy: the need for bilingualism (or multilingualism) is real.

#### Recommendation 3

- Award businesses for their bilingual capability, in the same way that successful businesses receive awards for quality management. Bilingual businesses should publicize their ability to provide good service by a sign that reads, “This business celebrates bilingualism.” It is the “human” side of business, allowing people to be served in their own language. It has little to do with unilingualism, and everything to do with hospitality and Human Rights.

#### Recommendation 4

- Use success stories, best practices, and videos to publicize what works. Use key businesses that are easily recognizable.

#### Recommendation 5

- Rated effective
- Reword this recommendation to ensure clarity of meaning.
- Increase public exposure, for instance, by having Kevin “Boomer” Gallant do the weather in French. He was also suggested as a possible ambassador, as his children went through French immersion. The business case needs to be widened to include the work world.

#### Recommendation 6

- Participants stated that this is less effective as it stands, but could be more effective if, rather than tax breaks, businesses could provide French training. This would essentially be a bilingualism bonus. The possibility of Human Resources Skills Development funding language training programs was suggested. Monies in the action plan could also be targeted for this training, which should be available to both employees and employers.

The group asked that a seventh recommendation be added:

#### Recommendation 7

- Develop French language training for careers in Tourism, Business, Administration, and Health Care.
- Stress the cultural appropriateness of the language. A participant used the example of visiting a restaurant with her elderly aunt. The server addressed her aunt as “tu.” She was very embarrassed. Students are taught to use “tu” to address strangers, when they should use “vous.”

## **Arts, Culture, and Sports**

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### **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**

- Recommendations 2 and 4 were given the highest priority.

#### **Discussion**

Participants began the session with the assertion that the most exciting challenge presented by collaboration with the arts, culture, and sport sectors is the opportunity to show FSL students that the language is alive, and how important it is to be multicultural as true Canadians.

#### Recommendation 1

- A cohesive agenda on the national level, lead by CMEC and supported by Heritage Canada, would encourage the development of positive initiatives at the provincial level.

#### Recommendation 2

- High priority
- There is a need to explore the underlying cultural and financial reasons for the low participation of Island students.

#### Recommendation 3

- Money earmarked for 60-second vignettes would be better spent on animators to bring bilingualism to regular media programming. If vignettes are produced, they should include students and everyday people as role models as well as celebrities.

#### Recommendation 4

- Highest priority
- This strategy has the potential to access information that is more particular to the profile of one culture and translate it to the other.

#### Recommendation 5

- Many FSL teachers already know all too well the challenges of bilingualism. Professional development in multicultural celebration, openness, and opportunities should be targeted not only to teachers, but also to school counsellors and administrators.
- An interest was expressed in challenging children more with new language teaching concepts and alternative school environments.

#### Participants added a number of comments:

- Bilingualism should have a greater presence on the networks. For example, French and English characters could interact or animators could translate the alternate language to the audience. Bernard St. Laurent's show *C'est la vie* on CBC Radio has been successful with this approach.
- A normalization of easy back and forth bilingualism will help to take away the fear of making mistakes in front of others. This fear now holds many bilingual people back from expressing themselves in their second language.
- Multilingualism, or at least bilingualism, will ideally become a national expectation across Canada as it is in Europe. We live, however, in a very conservative society here on PEI. We are perhaps not as open as we would like to think we are.
- The goal has to be more than direct translation—bilingualism must also provide an insight into the nuances of cultural differences. This approach is particularly important in the translation of school course material. History and social studies courses provide a challenge and an opportunity in this regard,
- The francophone 'Rocket' hockey team now based in Charlottetown could champion bilingualism for Island children.
- In PEI, there are more bilingual francophones than anglophones. This situation is based on necessity, as well as on personal interest. People will learn a language when they need it in order to communicate with those around them; they will also learn more easily when they are immersed.
- We need to address the low participation rates of exchanges by PEI students. Taking students to another environment can open the world to them. Many Island teachers, trying to avoid fund-raising problems, do not realize that programs run by SEVEC, for example, incur minimal cost.
- Exchanges, even informal ones like unrelated children sleeping over at each other's homes, have not been a usual part of PEI culture. And now, with an increased emphasis on potential liabilities associated with billeting, the practical challenges associated with exchanges are

increasing. Hotels are expensive, and coordination of the visits is a lot of work for the volunteer hosts.

- Students need to see local media personalities using both languages; they need everyday role models as well as celebrity ones.
- The French school in Charlottetown co-exists side-by side with cultural facilities for the francophone community. The FSL program is missing this important link with, for example, the performing arts.
- New concepts should be explored, for example, a combined immersion/French school in the West-Prince area. Another suggestion was for a teaching approach that flips between language modules, living in French one week and English the next.
- Children are often not given credit for how intelligent they are. The younger they are when exposed to a second language, the easier it will be for them to become truly bilingual.

## **Conclusions/Closing**

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Facilitator Des Lecky opened the session by telling the group about the aftermath of the Symposium, and what will be happen in the coming months. The national branch of CPF will meet again in April, at which time notes from the regional consultations will be shared. A summary of the provincial and territorial consultations will be produced and distributed. Lecky said that neither money nor approval has been received, although the start date is April 1.

Lecky asked participants what they could undertake here on PEI in the next two to three months, as well as what steps stakeholders want CPF to take. He asked them to highlight areas in which CPF can be a leader.

One man said he was trying to figure out who actually would make these decisions. Another participant said it was her understanding that all provinces are working on action plans. Canadian Heritage did an evaluation of the last Official Languages Action Plan, out of which came targeted measures for initiatives for the next four years. These measures are well defined as to provincial goals and expectations. PEI is already passed the draft stage, and is ready to start consultations. One woman said that conclusions from all of the provincial sessions would be taken into account for follow-up.

Some of the funding available for some of the activities are not necessarily education-type funding—monies could come from community-based funding programs and from other sources. There are not a lot of dollars for research. On a national scale, attempts are being made to get funding for national research through Canadian Heritage. It was noted that money would be available to fund a French program before it would be available for research.

Another participant suggested holding a yearly parental conference, similar to today's meeting, to help parents become aware of the importance of learning a second language. She said that the role of parents has to be recognized as the first teachers of their children. The parental role cannot be underestimated in the retention of children in the French immersion programs.

Gail Lecky asked each participant the following question: If you could move one agenda item forward, what would that item be? Participants answered by identifying these items as being the most important to them:

- Make bilingualism an everyday occurrence, for instance, by singing *O Canada* in both official languages every day in every school.
- Identify what, exactly, the aforementioned daily actions are.
- Promote more student exposure to the French language, so they can use the French and make it “real.”
- Bring the community and classroom together, so the students can go out into the world and use their newly-gained knowledge of language.
- Engage parents and students in real, authentic discourse, so that through the discourse, they will become connected. Although the curriculum was good, a participant said he was not given the tools to access how the curriculum was presented in the classroom. Accountability is needed.
- Highlight the relevance of learning a second language.
- Respect the right of all cultures and languages.
- Provide more services in both languages. Languages are not promoted by shoving them down anyone’s throat.
- Take students out of the classroom and present them with everything they can see and do in French in the community.
- Continue this tremendous opportunity. It is too good an initiative to not continue to use it.
- Provide practical experiences for the children—they will not see anything as real unless they see it themselves. This takes experienced bilingual professionals.
- Recognize the role of post-secondary institutions as important partners in moving this initiative forward. This role has a significant impact on the public perception.
- Turn the negatives into positives. Parents face many challenges with their children. It would be helpful to have social activities, all in French, and an opportunity to interact with other parents, learning other cultures.
- Promote the SEVEC exchange program. The program and its opportunities are not utilized to their full potential because many parents and students do not realize that a large portion of the cost of the exchange is paid for.

In conclusion, Des Lecky thanked participants for their participation, hard work, and ideas throughout the day. Gail Lecky thanked Des Lecky for being an excellent facilitator, and Eileen Martin Conway, President of CPF-PEI, thanked everyone in French. Gail Lecky then invited all conference participants to join her for supper at St. James Gate, and the meeting was adjourned.