CANADA'S EDUCATION REVOLUTION IN ITS SECOND GENERATION:

French-Second-Language Education on the 40th Anniversary of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism

JAMES SHEA
James Shea is the Executive Director of Canadian Parents for French

ABSTRACT

The author reflects on the rewards of an experimental French immersion program in a school in suburban Montreal forty years ago and argues for sustained access to an education in both official languages for Canada's children.

The birth and development of French Second Language education in Canada parallels the birth and development of general public awareness of the issue of linguistic duality in Canada. Second official-language instruction and the progress of bilingualism in our school system and among Canadians, while sustained and shaped by government policy, has benefited enormously from parent activism and support. One of the great success stories of the last generation has been the enthusiastic response of Canadians from coast to coast to the learning of a second official language.

At the time of Canada's 1963 Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, parents were already pressuring for the establishment of an experimental French immersion program in a school in suburban Montreal. It was eventually established in 1965 at the St. Lambert Elementary School.

It is hard to overstate the revolutionary nature of this experiment. While previous generations of anglophones in Quebec had often been able to get by in English only, it had became increasingly obvious, with the transformations of the 1960s, that proficiency in French was going to be essential in the future.

Within a North American context with the dominance of English, other language groups have traditionally been required to speak English, but anglophones have rarely felt a similar obligation to learn a second language. It's often been noted that in Canada, French is taught, while English is caught. Generally speaking, if anglophones do not learn French in school, they are unlikely to learn it later in life. The 1960s showed a change in attitude, with anglophones now willing to overcome difficulties and inhibitions with learning French as a second language.

Immersion is a school program in which children who have little or no prior contact with the target language are put together in a classroom setting in which the second language is used as the medium of instruction. Across Canada, it involves teaching subjects partly or entirely in French to children whose mother tongue is English.

Word of the St. Lambert experiment spread, and French immersion programs began to pop up throughout English Canada. By 1977, the FSL movement had grown to the point that there were 45,084 (1,2%) students enrolled in immersion, and a national organization was called for. Canadian Parents for French (CPF) was born that year – only months after the election of the first Parti Québécois government galvanized all of Canada.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s more and more Canadians became aware of the success of French immersion. English-speaking parents were lining up overnight in the streets outside schools across the country to enroll their children in immersion programs. The rapid spread of French immersion was part of a larger process of awakening within Canada. English-speaking Canadians, most of whom spoke no French, believed that it was important that their children learn French and become bilingual.

Forty years since the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, the immersion model is being applied from one end of the country to the other. Since 1970, the Official Languages in Education Program of the Department of Canadian Heritage funds second-language education at the provincial/territorial level. The five-year bilateral action plans, deliver funding through the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, calculated according to enrolment data provided by the provinces, based on the recommendations of Statistics Canada.

In 2001, some 286,014 elementary and secondary students were enrolled in immersion programs.

In parallel with the growth of immersion programs, and informed by the research being done in the domain, pedagogical techniques for core French, or basic French second language education, were refined. A wide range of programs varying in intensity, time on task, and methodologies have evolved to serve different objectives and learning needs. Today, nearly two million students enrolled in English-language schools study core French.

The concept of official languages has become an important symbol of Canadian identity. A growing number of Canadians, particularly young Canadians, embrace the vision of Canada as a bilingual country. CPF has conducted opinion polls at five-year intervals since 1985, with remarkably stable responses. The latest CPF survey, conducted by Compas in April 2000, confirms that English-speaking Canadians continue to be supportive of French-language instruction in schools.

Attitudes toward French immersion are positive, with nearly six in ten (57%) saying they feel very or somewhat positive about immersion; 18% feel negative. Support exceeds opposition by more than 3:1. Attitudes toward core, or basic French second-language programs are largely positive, with almost two-thirds (64%) saying they feel very or somewhat positive about it; 17% feel negative. Support exceeds opposition by almost 4:1. Respondents are generally more positive about French second-language programs than about French immersion programs (64% vs. 57%). However, *strong* support for French immersion is higher than strong support for French second-language programs (24% vs. 20%).

A mix of altruism and personal benefit continue to explain why people think it is important for English-speaking children to learn French. Exactly half offer altruistic reasons to explain their support, pointing to the fact that Canada is a bilingual country with a bilingual and bicultural heritage (36%), that learning French is part of a good education (8%), and that it will help people understand French culture (6%). Somewhat fewer cite personal benefit reasons, believing that knowing French will help students find jobs (23%), provide other personal benefits (9%), and that it is useful to speak a second language (7%).

For Industry Canada and other bodies engaged in shaping Canada's labour market for the future, increased bilingualism among our young people is an even more important issue, given that interest in foreign languages is on the rise in other parts of the world, particularly in the United States and in Europe. Currently, anglophone Canadians are actually less bilingual than the British, who are the least bilingual of Europeans. This is a reality that puts our competitiveness at stake.

Interestingly, French immersion is also one of Canada's major exports in international education, with educators in Japan, Wales, Spain, and the USA applying made-in-Canada immersion methodology to the teaching of second languages, enhancing the language skills of young people around the globe. Inside Canada, students of heritage languages including Mohawk, Ukrainian and Cree benefit from the immersion approach in their cultural studies.

Initiatives such as French immersion draw strength and energy from the determination of thousands of parents who have worked behind the scenes to ensure that their vision of Canada is reflected in the type of education that is offered to their children.

We at CPF are very proud that ours is an organization built from the bottom up. We are determinedly grassroots. Since its foundation in 1977, CPF's services and activities have expanded to parallel the remarkable growth in FSL education.

Nine Branch offices support some 175 Chapters, the local community-based units of CPF, working in school or school district jurisdictions in every province and territory. In 2003, CPF is a network of 18,000 members dedica-ted to creating, supporting and promoting opportunities for young people to learn and use French as a second language.

Despite the sustained and consistent public regard for FSL, the 1990s context of funding cuts and re-evaluation of priorities within the educational system resulted in the reassessment and even closure by school boards of many French immersion and core French programs as a money-saving measure. As a result the rapid growth in French immersion seen in the 1970s and 1980s slowed and essentially over the 1990s enrolments in French immersion remained stable. Though demand remains steady, the supply of quality FSL programs has narrowed for today's students.

Since 2000, CPF has published an annual report entitled *The State of French-Second Language Education in Canada*. These reports, CPF's principal advocacy tool, track provincial enrollments in immersion and other FSL programs, discuss issues, and identify identifying areas of strength and areas for action at the national, and provincial or territorial levels within the complex system of support for FSL learning.

The inaugural report gathered, for the first time, facts, figures and research into a comprehensive view of the current situation of FSL education that was welcomed by education decision-makers at every level for its careful research, its thorough data collection and its pan-Canadian perspective.

Subsequent reports have built upon the first, with specific areas of focus complementing the update of provincial and territorial data. The 2001 FSL report included a *School Self-Assessment Tool* enabling interested parties, parents, teachers and administrators to discuss and evaluate their school's programs in a constructive manner.

In 2002, the worsening shortage of teachers of French in coming years was brought to the attention of ministries of education, school boards and faculties of education. With the commissioning and dissemination of the Teacher Shortage Study, CPF pointed out the urgent need for concerted action on this issue if the gains made in the last 25 years are to be maintained.

The FSL reports have identified the need for attention, resources, and action in several areas. Among the most urgent problems identified are actual and growing teacher shortages, the need for more and better resources and me-thods that will enable French immersion students encountering difficulties to get the help they need while staying in the program, the need for a totally transparent process of allocating federal funds in support of French second-language learning; and the need to evaluate current teaching methods and curricula and to adopt new ones informed by research.

The voice of CPF has been heard. The federal government's new Official Languages Action Plan responds directly to the issues identified in CPF's annual reports, and sets out both an ambitious objective and the means to achieve it.

Launched by Prime Minister Jean Chrétien in March 2003, a new action plan for official languages, authored by Intergovernmental Affairs minister Stéphane Dion, set a target of doubling the proportion of secondary school gra-duates with a functional knowledge of their second official language by 2013. Currently, 24% of Canadians between 15 and 19 know both languages.

The "Dion Plan" will dedicate $137 million over the next five years to initiatives in four priority areas in second-language education identified by CPF: Improvement of core English and French, a revitalization of immersion, an increase in the number of qualified teachers, and the provision of opportunities for bilingual graduates to put their skills to good use. An annex to the plan lays out an accountability and coordination framework.

Through close and strategic collaboration among the federal, provincial and territorial governments, school districts, researchers, post-secondary institutions, and volunteer organizations including CPF, we believe that the ambitious goal of doubled bilingualism can be realized.

On this 40th anniversary of the Royal Commission of Bilingualism and Biculturalism, we are at a unique point in the development of linguistic duality. CPF takes this opportunity to salute the achievements of the first generation of true Canadian bilinguals, to reflect on the importance of sustained support for French-second-language education programs, and to look forward to a future shared with others who also believe in the importance of access to quality education in both official languages for all Canadian children.

THE FIRST STAGE OF THE MULTICULTURALISM DEBATE

MICHAEL TEMELINI
Dr. Michael Temelini is a Visiting Professor at the Centro di Ricerca in Studi Canadesi (Canadian Studies) at the Università di Genova

ABSTRACT
The author highlights why the policy of multiculturalism was so unconventional by examining the parliamentary debates that preceded the Commission and the recommendations that flowed from it. He suggests that the body of work together promoted a civic humanist meaning of multiculturalism and ethnic conflict resolution

There is a prominent interpretation of multiculturalism which suggests that it is essentially a liberal theory of minority rights. According to this sense of the term, multiculturalism is primarily a principle of procedural justice, and a rule of law. It would be foolish to disavow the importance of this interpretation. The adoption of rules-based guarantees and special recognition, particularly concerning visible minorities and distinct national identities must be seen as a contribution to Canadian civilisation. What concerns me is the extent to which other meanings are screened out when multiculturalism is interpreted exclusively within the juridical vocabulary of minority rights. In fact multiculturalism was originally articulated and defended by Canadians in the language of civic humanism: a good, a moral commitment, and a civic virtue that must be willingly accepted by citizens in a practice of ongoing dialogue. It was subsequent to the articulation of multiculturalism as a good that it was entrenched as a right in the constitution. Understanding the difference between these two political domains, that is the good and the right, will do much to clarify the meaning and significance of multiculturalism in Canada. Recognizing this difference is also crucial to understanding Volume IV of the *Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism.*

I want to illustrate the difference between rights and the good, and highlight why the policy of multiculturalism was so unconventional, by surveying the House of Commons debates that led to the setting up of Canada's *Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism*, as well as the recommendations of its Volume IV, the subject of which was "the contribution by other ethnic groups to the cultural enrichment of Canada and the measures that should be taken to safeguard that contribution." It is a remarkable fact that many commentators on multiculturalism do not even mention these debates nor the *Royal Commission* itself. And yet the very first stage of the debate on multicultura-