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ABSTRACT

While new programs in French continue to be implemented and while older programs continue to expand at considerable rates, few individuals involved with the implementation and development of language programs appreciate sufficiently the various views which exist vis-a-vis the teaching of French as a second language in Ontario, as well as in other parts of the Dominion, beliefs which may promote or arrest further activity. This paper identifies those views and suggests that these beliefs, whether they be fact or myth, can be either supportive or nonsupportive of implementation and further development. (Author)

THE POLITICAL SOCIAL CONTEXT OF IMPLEMENTING AND DEVELOPING SECOND LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

A paper presented by

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PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

In several provinces of Canada, among them Ontario, the teaching of French as a second language is expanding. In spite of this increase, few individuals involved either directly or indirectly with this type of programming understand all of the forces which influence positively its implementation and subsequent expansion or conversely those which block or limit both its initial acceptance and continued growth once accepted. This article identifies those forces: it attempts to identify which forces support this type of change and which tend to arrest it; it also shows which forces or views are generally held by supporters and which are usually held by the non-supporters of various forms of French-language instruction.

SOME KEY DEFINITIONS

A force as defined herein is a view which a person holds towards the teaching of French as a second language: it may be a positive force, a view which is supportive of the teaching of French, or it may be a negative force, a view which is not supportive of the teaching of French. An example of a positive force, or view is the following: "The learning of another language such as French helps me to understand my own language better". Here is an example of a negative force or view: "Learning French makes children unable to know their own native language in depth". A supporter of a program is any person who will undertake at least one activity

designed to implement a new and/or develop an existing French-language program; a non-supporter is any person who will undertake at least one activity designed to arrest the implementation of a new French-language program and/or the development of an existing one. Needless to say, a number of individuals are neither supporters nor non-supporters; they will not undertake activities for or against the program.

METHODOLOGY

While a number of theories or models, e.g. Lewin's Force Field Theory, were used to guide the initial investigation upon which this more recent study is based as well as to assist in the explanation of data gathered in the first instance, the primary mode of inquiry employed in this latter endeavour was that of field methodology. The authors, familiar with French language instruction, study the topic from close quarters in its real-life setting(s) from as many perspectives as possible. A number of information sources were consulted but by far, the greatest proportion of the data was garnered through observations made at meetings and during discussions, over one hundred in number, involving more than a dozen school systems in at least four distinctly different geographical regions of the province; the actors in these many encounters included trustees, senior personnel of school systems including principals and coordinators of various programs, as well as parents and teachers in favour of and opposed to French language instruction, especially French language immersion programs. Newspaper accounts, more than two hundred in number from over two dozen newspapers, and the minutes of at least twenty school board meetings in approximately a dozen school systems constituted

a second key data source. A third source of information was brief interactions, sometimes called informal interviews, with representatives of all of the aforementioned groups. Finally, while scholarly writings were not used extensively in this project, nonetheless, a certain number were consulted.

It is important to emphasize that there are recurring validity checks in this study. Major ideas and observations were verified by checking documents and/or through focused interviews. When verification was unattainable, the idea was dropped or the authors note that it is not verifiable at the present time.

PARAMETERS OF THE TEACHING OF FRENCH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN ONTARIO

In a recent study of views related to French language programs and the support which various constituencies might give to such programs, Duhamel (1973) recorded the rather rapid growth of French programs in Ontario elementary schools. According to Ontario Ministry of Education statistics, a comparison of this situation at the elementary panel as it existed then with that in existence today would indicate an additional significant increase in programs of French as a second language.

Currently, there are basically three types of French language programs being offered in the schools; these are core, extension, and immersion.

A core program is a forty minute period of French or less, most often given daily. An extended program may include the above but it would also have at least one other subject, such as social studies or some other, taught in the French-language. An immersion program is one where French is used as the language of instruction for at least one half the school day; it may also involve additional time up to a whole school day.

With respect to increases in French-language instruction, it should be noted that in 1973, almost 600,000 pupils received French-language instruction, whereas today, slightly over 632,000 students receive instruction in the French language - an increase of about 6-1/2 per cent. In 1973, slightly over 5,000 students were enrolled in French language immersion programs at the elementary level; in 1977, more than 12,000 pupils are enrolled in this same type of program - an increase of over 135 per cent. It is interesting to note as well that these increases in the teaching of French as a second language were achieved in spite of an approximately 6-1/2 per cent decline in total elementary school enrolment during this same four year span. While similar statistics are as yet unavailable concerning increases in the teaching of extended French-language programs, it is nonetheless apparent that growth here has also been rapid, roughly half the rate of growth experienced in immersion programs.

THE PROBLEM

Yet, in spite of this significant increase in French language instruction, the authors' observations, readings, and discussions suggest that many individuals at all levels of the educational hierarchy fail to appreciate or to understand clearly the many support and non-support factors which may influence the implementation and subsequent expansion of French immersion programs. Further, a rapid perusal of a random selection of newspaper articles published in the Ottawa area during the current year lends additional support to this allegation, in spite of, as will be demonstrated shortly, the critical importance of identifiable support and non-support factors as they affect second-language instruction.

Lewin (1935) indicates that in order to be able to understand and predict behaviour as accurately as possible, the state of the person and of the environment must be taken into account. What are the forces operating within a certain environment - the beliefs that individuals hold vis-à-vis a particular phenomenon such as French-language programs; the beliefs that various groups hold concerning the same issue? A number of authorities, among them Wolman (1960), Crookston and Blaesser (1969), elaborate this idea: they show that an understanding of the belief system of various actors can assist

in developing or arresting an idea. In this particular study the point being made is simple: the implementation and/or development of any French-language program will unleash a number of forces which support or inhibit this move. An awareness of the existence of these various beliefs or forces is an asset to anyone who is involved or may become involved with such programs.

Since the views which people hold vis-à-vis French-language programs may provide at least some indication of how much support or non-support these programs might receive were they to be either implemented or expanded in a particular jurisdiction, it would seem beneficial for those involved with these programs to be able to recognize the beliefs which individuals hold regarding them.

The following is a résumé presented in six sections, of the forces discovered by Duhamel in his most recent study of this issue, particularly as they affect early immersion programs, for example, at the kindergarten level or in the primary grades. This endeavour is in effect, an update, a validation and an extension of a previous investigation completed in 1973.

It should be noted that even though many statements which will be made refer particularly to primary French-language education, many of them are equally applicable to other models of

French-language instruction, for example, core and extended programs. As such, the authors have not always identified the specific program(s) to which a particular view might refer.

Prior to proceeding with the identification of the views or forces supporting or inhibiting the implementation and/or development of French-language programs in different milieus, it is crucially important to stress that the writers have made no attempt to differentiate which of the various statements made by the participants may represent myths from those which represent accurate factual data. This issue instead will be the subject of a future paper.

VIEWS HELD VIS-A-VIS THE TEACHING OF FRENCH

1. Efficiency of French-Language Programs Other Than Core, Especially Immersion

Duhamel (1973) reports a rather widespread dissatisfaction with traditional methods of second language instruction and the related view that immersion programs, particularly for primary division pupils, are considered by many as a much more viable approach to bilingualism than are other instructional models. This position is often repeated in 1978. Four factors are identified as relating to this efficiency view. First, both practical experience and research data argue that new speech mechanisms can be acquired more easily at an early age. Parents who accept this view tend in general to be supportive of immersion programs, particularly those given to children at an early age.

Second, individuals who attribute greater success in achieving bilingualism, i.e., lasting linguistic development, to the immersion model as opposed to more traditional approaches of second language teaching are also generally supportive of immersion programs.

Third, individuals who believe that longer exposure to the target language is beneficial to the achievement of fluency in that language are likely as well to be supportive of immersion programs especially programs introduced at an early age.

Fourth, in a society where children are increasingly exposed to a wide range of educational experiences and programs before attaining formal school age, many individuals express the belief that regular kindergarten programs offer little challenge to their children; hence, they view immersion programs with instruction in a language other than the child's mother tongue as a more desirable, i.e., stimulating and challenging, learning environment.

2. Characteristics of Programs

It is generally accepted that innovations of all types are frequently regarded with caution and hesitation by numerous individuals simply because of the characteristics peculiar to any given change. The study undertaken identified several such attributes that were found to influence support or non-support of French-language programs and particularly French immersion programs throughout the province.

A key concern in many instances is the expense of French-language programs in general. While this question is somewhat problematic in terms of definition, i.e., cost to whom, and relative to what, the evidence suggests that, where immersion programs are believed to cost more than other second language programs, there is a strong likelihood of additional opposition to the immersion model of instruction. In fact, French immersion programs have on occasion been accepted only with the stipulation that funds allotted to them are guaranteed not to exceed those allotted to regular or traditional second language programs.

A more specific aspect of this larger issue of cost focuses on the learning and teaching materials required to equip an "extended" French-language program and an immersion classroom, these being on the whole somewhat more expensive than those required for other subject areas simply because there is a smaller market for French-language materials required in these programs than exists for English-language materials needed in regular classrooms. Opposition to the extended and immersion instructional model has sometimes stemmed from this situation. Closely allied to this concern with costs of learning and teaching materials for such programs, is the question of availability as well. Numerous persons expressed apprehension that necessary French-language textbooks and the like do not exist in sufficient quantity to ensure adequate distribution; as such, these same individuals tended to oppose the implementation of extended and/or immersion programs.

People voicing opposition to extended and immersion programs in general also indicated a host of other concerns which led them to question the expansion of these educational models. One, there was some fear that, due to possible higher expenditures necessitated by the unique nature of extended or immersion programs as well as other types of French language programs, regular English language programs within the school curriculum might be negatively affected, i.e., restricted or possibly even eliminated. Two, there was fear that French-language extended or immersion programs might receive certain benefits, for example, restricted pupil-teacher ratio, not equally available to those involved in the regular school program. Three, a suggestion that there is a scarcity of adequately trained personnel to staff French-language programs was accompanied by a certain skepticism among both educators and parents that the quality of teaching in these programs is perhaps inferior when compared with that of the regular program. Four, various groups expressed the view that not all children were optimally suited to the type of learning experience offered in second language programs, especially the immersion model. Specifically, there was concern that the non-gifted child or those with special learning disabilities might do less well in French-language programs as they might otherwise in the regular one; often, these same individuals felt that the immersion instructional model would really benefit only children of superior intellectual ability.

Still another source of resistance, most often to immersion programs, stems from the belief of some parents that unless they themselves are fluent in the target language, they will be incapable.

of assisting their child should he or she encounter difficulties or learning problems within the immersion environment. Some parental opposition to extended or immersion programs also stemmed from the bussing of children enrolled in such programs, and the concomitant social disruptiveness that might occur when established peer groups are broken up so that a child may attend a program in a school distant from his own neighbourhood and separated from his friends who remain in the regular school stream. Some parents objected as well to the experimental nature of extended programs or of initial immersion programs and the general lack of sound, factual information about these approaches to education and their possible effects on the children exposed to them. Continuity also emerged as a critical issue among parents trying to establish the merits of immersion programs; at the time of the investigation, there was little or no evidence that boards had up to that point given parents any kind of assurance regarding the continuation of an immersion program within the system once begun. Furthermore, among parents anticipating moves and hence the transfer of their children during their elementary school careers from one school system where immersion programs were offered to another or others where a similar program might be unavailable to them, there was a noticeable hesitation to enrol their children in French immersion programs, due to possible negative effects upon the children, not necessarily of the extended or immersion program per se, but more particularly of the disruptive nature of such a drastic change, especially from immersion to regular classroom environments. While parents expressed less anxiety regarding this issue vis-à-vis

extended French-language programs, similar concerns were nonetheless voiced by some individuals.

Finally, certain individuals maintained that a half-day of complete immersion at the Kindergarten level, or a full day at the grade 1 level, was in fact too much exposure to a new language for young children. Concerns about stress and frustrations which children might experience under these conditions suggest that the time factor may indeed be a critical element influencing the support or non-support of the immersion educational model.

3. Job Security

Comments of respondents with regard to increases in French-language instruction indicated that a highly significant area of concern among many educators, senior staff, trustees, and among some parents as well, was that of job security. Numerous individuals, fearing the future possibility of English-speaking educators being required to upgrade their linguistic competence in the target language, in this instance, French, voiced opposition to both existing extended and immersion programs and more emphatically to the expansion of these programs. There was concern as well about staff transfers which might be necessitated by expanding French-language extended and immersion programs; while this was most frequently a comment from teachers themselves, there were also parents who shared this concern because they feared the possibility of losing valuable teachers in regular programs to the

detriment of their child's educational development. A small number of persons also opposed extended and immersion programs on the grounds that being unqualified as teachers for such, they might be forced to fill other teacher roles than those for which they had in fact been trained. Other facets of the job security question in relation to extended and immersion programs centred on foreseeable job losses in an era of economic restraints and surplus teachers, limited promotional opportunities for the non-French-speaking educator, and the displacement and/or unemployment of Canadian teachers stemming from the hiring of qualified personnel to staff extended or immersion classrooms from out-of-province and possibly even out-of-country. Generally speaking, the study indicated that, where the expansion of French-language programs evoked any concerns whatsoever with regard to tenure and job security, such expansion was for the most part strongly opposed, primarily by educators themselves but to a lesser degree by other constituencies as well, i.e., parents and trustees.

4. Outcomes of French-language Programs

The study revealed a general trend across both constituencies and geographical areas such that, where French-language programs were believed to have desirable outcomes, there was a high degree of support for them. Among the benefits viewed to accrue from second-language learning, especially with regard to extended and early immersion programs, the following were the most frequently cited:

i) early exposure to second-language instruction facilitates further language acquisition in later life;

ii) early exposure to second-language instruction enhances both native language development and intellectual growth;

iii) knowledge of a second language is a requisite for the truly "educated" individual;

iv) bilingual and/or multilingual individuals are more highly valued on the job market and thus have greater opportunity to participate in meaningful and rewarding work careers;

v) knowledge of a second-language is useful for travel in an increasingly mobile society which stresses both communication and travel as leisure activities.

5. French-language Programs and Their Influence on French-English Relations

Support of French-language programs frequently appeared to rest upon the degree of legitimacy which respondents attributed to the "French-fact" within Canadian society. Those individuals who viewed French as "rightfully" one of the founding languages of our nation were, in general, supportive of French-language programs. These persons readily accepted the bilingual and bicultural

nature of Canada as set forth in the British North America Act; they eagerly recognized French as one of Canada's two official languages; they emphatically stressed the importance and relevance of bilingualism as Canadian goals; as a group, they viewed second-language learning as a positive step in promoting understanding between the French and English-speaking factions of Canadian society and cited concern for Canadian unity as a key reason for their support of such an undertaking.

In contrast, opposition to French-language programs was clearly evident among individuals who viewed knowledge of the French language as not uniformly necessary in all parts of Canada, who felt that many Canadians have neither the aptitude nor the desire to learn French, and who viewed the move toward bilingualism as less than voluntary in many instances. Finally, there was concern among those opposed to French-language programs that "concessions" of this sort to French-Canadians would only encourage other ethnic groups to make similar demands upon governments and educational systems, thereby increasing costs and further fragmenting existing educational structures throughout the country.

6. "Old Fears" Triggered by French-Language Instruction

In a great number of instances, the issue of language is inextricably linked to both politics and religion; the three overlap to a large extent and questions or difficulties in any one domain

frequently invite and provoke reaction in the other two. Comments and discussions about French-language instruction were often marked by subtle though unmistakable political and religious overtones. Three areas of concern emerged in this regard.

First, there was the suggestion by some that the teaching of French in schools was primarily a concession to France and French imperialism; such a belief was generally accompanied by a noticeable hostility toward France and the French language as well as a fierce commitment to be free of French influence in Canada.

Second, some individuals regarded the teaching of French as evidence of growing Quebec nationalism which, in their view, already influences disproportionately federal government policies in Canada, and which could in time elevate the French language to a status more prestigious than English or even, in fact, contribute to the disintegration of confederation such as it exists at present.

Finally, some individuals expressed concern that the teaching of French was but a subtle mechanism to extend the influence and power of the Roman Catholic Church in this country. As one individual sees it, "It's a sneaky way of getting more Catholics".

To summarize and qualify, it appears evident that often persons who fear or mistrust the motives of France, of Quebec, and/or of Roman Catholicism for whatever reasons are in general most reluctant to support the teaching of French on any meaningful scale, and in some cases, on any scale whatsoever. These individuals

seem to prefer the "melting pot" concept to the mosaic and often view the introduction and development of second language programs such as French as a source of weakness and disunity within the country.

By way of contrast, there were a number of people whose hesitancy to support French language instruction appeared to be rooted only in their genuine concern for the continued existence and improvement of the English language and culture quite apart from questions of a religious or political nature. These individuals seemed somewhat skeptical that the French and English languages and cultures could co-exist and indeed flourish together; to some, this situation represents a delicate balance nearly impossible to achieve and to maintain within this vast and varied country.

Concerns of the sort delineated herein were not necessarily common to large groups of individuals in any given setting. Nonetheless, where such issues emerged, there appeared to be considerable opposition to the teaching of French in general and, more particularly, to the introduction of new and the expansion of already existing French-language programs.

Conclusion

As the above discussion suggests, the factors which may influence the degree of support or non-support for French language programs are both varied and complex and the degree of support for, or opposition to, this kind of educational innovation is in many instances a function of the intensity of various constituents' convictions with regard to program goals, costs, suitability, outcomes and the like. Also, it was evident in the study that views held by many individuals, both those who support and those who oppose such programs, were frequently based not on factual data about the instructional model but rather on factors such as hearsay, hunches, suspicions and emotions.

While this latter issue poses a very critical problem to educators in terms of planning, implementing and expanding French-language programs in schools, the data about support and non-support factors gathered in this investigation will undoubtedly be of benefit to these same persons in terms of anticipating difficulties and developing strategies to deal with them. This data may even suggest that under certain circumstances, the implementation and/or development of certain French-language programs is premature, and should, in fact, be delayed until a more receptive climate can be developed, assuming that such a development is both feasible and desirable.

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