Report

17

Language and Education: Canada and Alberta

John Sokolowski, Ministry of Education, Alberta, Canada

HISTORY AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Language education in Canada has evolved in the context of our French-English duality and, especially since the turn of the century, in the context of multilingualism. On the whole, Canada's historic linguistic and cultural duality has created a context favourable for multilingual education. In 1897, bilingual school legislation was introduced in the province of Manitoba which allowed the establishment of bilingual education in several languages. This legislation was the direct result of the struggle for French Catholic schools. A 1901 ordinance of the Northwest Territories, which allowed the teaching of basic reading and writing in any language after hours in the public schools of what is now Saskatchewan and Alberta, was passed in the context of the use of French as well as English as a language of instruction in the second half of the nineteenth century in Western Canada and of the French fact in Central Canada. Alberta´ s 1971 legislation, later adopted by Manitoba and Saskatchewan, which permitted any language to be used in the schools as a language of instruction for up to half of the day, would have been inconceivable outside of the context of the Canadian Federal Government´ s Bilingualism and Biculturalism Commission, its policy of multiculturalism, as well as the model provided by French immersion.

Canada is also a multilingual society. In 1996, 23% of Canadians reported French as their mother tongue and 16% a language other than French or English[29]*. Before the arrival of Europeans, Canada was home to numerous indigenous linguistic and cultural groups. In Western Canada, linguistic diversity in the non-Native population has been an aspect of society from the very beginning of mass immigration in the last decade of the last century. In 1921, in Alberta, 26% of the population over the age of ten were able to speak a language other than English or French (Sixth Census of Canada, 1921, Volume II, Population). In 1996, 16% of Albertans reported a language other than English or French as their mother tongue (Statistics Canada,* Mother Tongue: 20% Sample Data*, 1996 Census Native Tables). The languages change over time. Ukrainian and German are declining, Chinese is increasing. But for the last hundred years in the Western Canadian provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, speakers of languages other than English or French have constituted a considerable minority. It is not surprising that these provinces have the longest history of multilingualism in education. In more recent times, British Columbia and Ontario have become increasingly multilingual and multicultural. This demographic fact is reflected in the Ontario International Languages Programs which date back to 1977 and the inclusion of opportunities to learn*

[29] All current mother tongue and language usage statistics are taken from the 1996 Census of Canada. They are summarized in *Trends and Issues in Language Education. A Discussion Paper*, published by Alberta Learning, and derived from the census sources noted in the bibliography.

"languages which are significant within our communities" as objective 4 in the British Columbia Language Education Policy.

*However, Canada is also a nation with only two European languages which have been able to maintain themselves over time. These are English and French. About 60% of Canadians give English as their mother tongue. In 1996, 23% of the Canadians gave French as their mother tongue, down from 29% in 1951 (*Trends and Issues in Language Education*, "Language Use in Canada. Changing Realities"). Native languages are, for the most part, threatened with extinction. Immigrant languages tend to decline as people switch to English at home. For instance, according to the 1991 Census of Canada,*

*16% of Albertans had a mother tongue other than English or French, but only 7% used a language other than English or French at home (Statistics Canada, Catalogue No. 93-317, pp. 10-11). Less than 1% of Albertans list French as their home language (*Trends and Issues in Language Education*, p. 19, Draft 1999).*

Language education across Canada has had a stormy history. In 1912, the teaching in French in Ontario was severely limited. In 1915, the Alberta Legislature unanimously condemned bilingualism in any form in the schools of Alberta. In 1916, Manitoba banned bilingual education at a time when about 1/6 of Manitoba students were enrolled in German, French, Ukrainian, Polish and other bilingual schools. In 1919, Saskatchewan banned teaching languages other than English and French, and severely restricted the use of French. And it was only the Canadian Federal Government´ s official policies of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism, and the proclamation of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in the 1960s and 1970s which reversed many of these drastic decisions.

Throughout Canadian history, the questions of language and language education have always been highly politicized. For instance, it was political lobbying by the Ukrainian Professional and Business Club of Edmonton, Alberta, which opened the way in the 1970s for the establishment in Western Canada of bilingual programs in languages other than French. Politics have influenced Canadian national policy in language education and provincial initiatives. And I don´ t think that it would be an exaggeration to say that the current political situation, with an emphasis on fiscal conservativism and a

de-emphasis of multiculturalism in most of Canada, is hardly favourable for governments to undertake new language learning initiatives. And this at a time when most European countries have recently reinforced or are planning to reinforce their teaching of foreign languages (Bergentoft, 1994, p. 23).

NATIONAL POLICY

*Though education is a provincial matter in Canada, the Canadian Federal Government has a clearly defined policy of support for the official languages — English and French. The objective of this support, as defined in the 1995-96 Estimates of the Federal Ministry of Canadian Heritage is: "To provide financial assistance in order to offer official language minority communities the possibility to be educated in their own language and all Canadians the chance to learn a second official language, and to foster the full recognition of both English and French in Canadian society" (*1995-96 Estimates: Canadian Heritage*, pp. 3-25).*

"Official Languages in Education," one of the Official Languages Support Programs, in 1993-94 enabled 1.8 million young Canadians (600,000 Francophones and 1.2 million Anglophones) to learn the second official language. It is estimated that the Official Languages in Education Program cost

$211,200,000 in 1995-96. Clearly, the Canadian Federal Government has a well defined policy and firm financial commitment to official language education.

But what is the policy of the Federal Government toward languages other than English or French? The Canadian Federal Government´ s involvement in language education has been limited to some support toward the so-called ""heritage languages." In the Canadian context, these are languages other than French or English which are taught outside of the provincial school systems, through private community-based schools. The Canadian Federal Government does not fund the teaching of non-official languages in regular schools.

In a book published in 1994, Jim Cummins of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in Toronto summarized the history of federal heritage languages policy development (Cummins, 1994, p. 436). Heritage language policy developed out of the proclamation of Multiculturalism in 1971. Among its accomplishments was the "Non-official Languages Study," issued in 1976, which showed substantial support among ethnocultural groups for the teaching of their languages in school. A parallel study commissioned by the Federal Government and which appeared in 1977, the "Majority Attitudes Study," showed significant opposition among official language Canadians to public funding for heritage language education. Between 1977-90, under the Cultural Enrichment Program, the Federal Government funded about 10% of the operating costs of community based language schools. In 1990, this financial support was eliminated, but to quote Cummins, "the Federal Government emphasized that it was simply changing priorities for heritage language support rather than diminishing its commitment to heritage languages" (Cummins, 1994, p. 436). Its major initiative became the National Heritage Languages Institute in Edmonton, the capital of Alberta, for which the government allocated approximately $6,000,000. The Institute was never established.

According to the 1995-96 Estimates: Canadian Heritage*, the Federal Government continues to support a program called Community Support and Participation/Heritage Cultures and Languages. In 1995-96, $3,157,000 was allocated on this program. To quote* Canadian Heritage*, "This program works in partnership with ethnocultural organizations, immigrant serving agencies, immigrant women´ s groups, universities, the various components of the Canadian cultural sector, non-government organizations and governments at all levels in addressing issues of community participation and integration, accessibility to Canadian institutions, inter-group relations, and public awareness of the contribution which a pluralistic society makes to Canadian identity" (*1995-96 Estimates: Canadian Heritage*, pp. 3-20). Absent from the description of the Community Support and Participation/Heritage Cultures and Languages Program is any mention whatsoever of languages.*

Until April 1995, the Federal Government through the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada supported Asian language learning initiatives at both secondary and post secondary levels. For example, Alberta´ s Japanese Language and Culture Program of Studies was developed with financial support of the Asia Pacific Foundation. In 1995, Asia Pacific Foundation initiatives in language education ceased.

Canadian federal policy is focused internally and only on the two official languages to any significant degree. In Canada, at the Federal Government level, there is no focus on international language learning needs, and consequently no national goals or standards have been developed.

On the other hand, it is undeniable that federal support for official languages has created a favourable atmosphere for language learning in general. Over the years, hundreds of millions of dollars have been poured into curriculum development, research, textbook purchase, teacher training, promotion of French language education and selling the value of bilingualism. This has created a body of expertise and an atmosphere from which all languages benefit. The 1.2 million children a year who have an enhanced opportunity to study French because of federal funding have a distinct advantage in studying a third language.

THE ALBERTA SCENE

In the province of Alberta, historic linguistic and cultural diversity and the atmosphere favourable for language education created by official bilingualism have resulted in the emergence of a variety of language programs. Two programming types have developed. Second Language Programs provide a course in a particular language. Bilingual Programs provide a more intensive learning experience. Instruction is delivered using the target language in other areas of the curriculum such as art, music and social studies. Instruction in the target language may comprise up to 50 percent of the day. Programs can be developed by the Ministry of Education, now called Alberta Learning, or by a local school board.

Provincially developed programs are designed and authorized by Alberta Learning. In addition to French, provincially developed language programs are available for Blackfoot, Cree, German, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Siksika, Spanish, Ukrainian and Ukrainian bilingual.

Locally developed programs are provided by school boards who have designed their own programs to meet specific local needs. Locally developed programs currently offered include American Sign Language, Arabic, Arabic bilingual, Cantonese, Dene (Chipewyan), German bilingual, Hebrew bilingual, Mandarin, Mandarin bilingual, Polish, Polish bilingual, Russian, Swedish and Vietnamese. Although local programs have also been developed in Greek, Hungarian, Portuguese and other languages, they are not always offered every year.

In Alberta, the percentage of students in high schools and at the universities taking a language other than French is growing. In Alberta high schools in 1991-92, 14% of language students were enrolled in languages other than French[30]*. By 1997-98 that figure was 29% (Alberta Education,* Trends and Issues in Language Education*, "Enrollment Patterns in Alberta, Language Patterns", p. 43, Draft 1999). Enrollments in Spanish during this period increased by 450%. Already by 1994, at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, fully 2/3 of the language and literature students were enrolled in languages other than French (Alberta Education,* Trends and Issues in Language Education*, "Post Secondary Language Learning Programming and Enrollment", Draft 1997).*

However, although enrollments in languages other than French have grown, the overall number of students completing language courses is declining. Most of this decrease is due to a drastic decrease in French. For instance, course completions at the high school level in French fell by 31% between 1991-92 and 1997-98. At the same time, enrollments in other languages grew by 42%.

In Alberta, language study is not mandatory at any level and the introduction of language programs is a local decision. This had led to a great inequality of access for students across the province. This inequality is well illustrated by comparing the language offerings of the province's four largest boards.

[30] All course completion statistics were provided by Information Services, Alberta Learning.

Language Programming of Major Alberta Urban Boards (September 1999)				
	Calgary Public Schools	**Calgary Catholic Schools**	**Edmonton Catholic Schools**	**Edmonton Public Schools**
Elementary School (Kindergarten -grade 6)	American Sign Language Francophone[31] French French Immersion Mandarin Bilingual (grades 4-5)	Francophone French French Immersion	Cree French French Immersion Italian Polish Bilingual Ukrainian Bilingual *(with Kievo-Byzantine religious formation)* Vietnamese	American Sign Language Arabic Bilingual Cree French French Immersion German Bilingual Hebrew Bilingual Mandarin Bilingual Ukrainian Bilingual
Junior High School (grades 7-9)	Cree Francophone French French Immersion Spanish	Francophone French French Immersion	Cree French French Immersion Italian Polish Bilingual Ukrainian Bilingual (with Kievo-Byzantine religious formation) Vietnamese	American Sign Language Arabic Bilingual Cree French French Immersion German Bilingual Mandarin Mandarin Bilingual Spanish Ukrainian Ukrainian Bilingual
Senior High School (grades 10-12)	Blackfoot Cantonese Cree French French Immersion German Japanese Mandarin Spanish	Francophone French French Immersion German Italian Japanese Latin Mandarin Spanish	Cree French French Immersion Italian Japanese Latin Polish Polish Bilingual Spanish Ukrainian Ukrainian Bilingual (with Kievo-Byzantine religious formation)	American Sign Language Arabic Bilingual French French Immersion German German Bilingual Japanese Latin Mandarin Mandarin Bilingual Spanish Ukrainian

[31] Under Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, citizens of Canada, outside of Quebec, whose first language learned and still understood is French, have the right to have their children receive primary and secondary instruction in French. In Alberta, this instruction is provided in separate school facilities operated by Francophone school authorities, or in some cases, by local school boards. Francophone schools in the Edmonton area are administered by the North Central Francophone Regional Authority.

Most of the enrollment growth in international languages is at the high school level. This is problematic because the classic program pattern in Canadian schools for languages other than French is a second language course of three or four years in secondary schools. A three year course provides about 375 hours of instruction. A four year course entails approximately 500 hours of instruction. This time allotment is similar to the situation in England and Scotland and is disadvantageously low compared to European countries like Austria, Denmark, France, Italy, Spain or Sweden. A student learning his first foreign language in Austria, for instance, is exposed to 800 hours of instruction. How can Canadian students in a three or four year high school program possibly attain a similar level of proficiency? This situation is, however, somewhat counterbalanced by the existence of bilingual programs where instruction begins in kindergarten, by a recent trend to start language learning in grade 5 or grade 7 and by the fact that many Alberta students are exposed to some French language instruction in grades K-12.

In describing issues in language education in the USA, Richard Lambert talks about "the natural law of fifty percent attrition" (Lambert, 1994, p. 49). In American high school language courses, enrollments are heavily concentrated in the first two years and fall sharply by the third year. Attrition rates are often as high as 50% from one year to another. Similarly in Alberta, since there is no second language school finishing requirement, there is little motivation for Alberta students to complete a full three year or four year language course. In Alberta, Spanish courses lose about 65% of their enrollments between grades 10 and 12, Italian 60% and German 66% (Alberta Education, Trends and Issues in Language Education, "Attrition in Selected Second Language Course Completions", Alberta 1995/96-1997/98, Draft 1999).

To reiterate, in Alberta a second language is not a component of basic education, and not a requirement for graduation. This lack of status for language education has, I would suggest, palpable negative consequences including reduced student motivation and lack of attention to infrastructure development such as curriculum development, assessment, teacher training, teacher professional development and the development of provincial achievement and assessment standards.

CONCLUSION

So what can we conclude about the context for language education in Canada and Alberta as we approach the new millenium?

Firstly, the global context seems very favourable for the promotion of language learning, although we can expect that it will be some time before the global village has direct impact on Canadian education policy. This is especially true since the primary language of Canada is English and few of our business leaders or politicians, especially at the provincial level, know, use regularly or value any language other than English.

Secondly, Canada's official linguistic dualism and history of multilingualism and multiculturalism have historically created an atmosphere at once favourable to the emergence of many language programs, but also pregnant with the threat of hostile reaction and politicization of language issues.

In the national context, we have a Federal Government with a strong commitment to the official languages. At the same time, the Federal Government shows no consistent support for international language education, and no interest in establishing international language goals or standards for Canada or funding the learning of languages other than English or French.

The provincial context seems the most grounded in its demographic realities and global changes. At the provincial level, we see a range of language offerings which reflect the history and current demographic realities of the provinces. However, language education across Canada is marginalized and its marginalized status does little to encourage students to enroll and complete courses. Since language learning is on the margins of basic education it does not attract the same public and political interest and support as basic courses like mathematics or science.

And finally, in Alberta at least, it is students themselves who seem to be most sensitive to the new global context for language education. They are leading the changes by increasingly enrolling in a variety of language programs and not waiting for provincial or federal policy makers to set provincial or federal goals.

Bibliography

Alberta Learning. *Trends and Issues in Language Education. A Discussion Paper* (draft document 1999).

Bergentoft, Rune. "Foreign Language Instruction: A Comparative Perspective," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 532 (1994).

British Columbia Ministry of Education. *Language Education Policy* (Victoria, 1996).

Canada Finance. *1995-96 Estimates: Canadian Heritage Part III Expenditure Plan* (Ottawa, 1995).

Cummins, Jim. "Heritage Language Learning and Teaching" in J.W. Berry and J.A. Laponce, editors. *Ethnicity and Culture in Canada. The Research Landscape* (Toronto, 1994).

Government of Canada. *Sixth Census of Canada*, Vol. II, "Population" (Ottawa, 1921).

Lambert, Richard D. "Problems and Processes in U.S. Foreign Language Planning," *The Annals of American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 540 (1994).

Prokop, Manfred. "A Historical View of Legislation Governing Second Languages in Alberta Schools," *Alberta Modern Language Journal*, 27:1 (September 1990).

Sokolowski, John. "Ukrainian Bilingual Education," in *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, vol. V, ed. Danylo Husar Struk (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).

Statistics Canada. *A National Overview* (Ottawa: Industry Canada, 1997). 1996 Census of Canada. Catalogue No. 93-357-XPB.

_____. *Canada Year Book 1999*. (Ottawa: Ministry of Industry, 1998).

_____. *Population: Mother Tongue*. 1971 Census of Canada, Catalogue No. 92-725.

_____. *Nation Series (Complete Edition)*. (Ottawa: Ministry of Industry, 1998).

_____. *Profile of Census Divisions and Subdivisions*. (Ottawa: Industry Canada, 1999). Catalogue Numbers 95-190-XPB, 95-186 XPB, 95-191-XPB, 95-189-XPB, 95-188-XPB, 95-187-XPB, 95-185-XPB, 95-184-XPB, 95-183-XPB, 95-192-XPB, 95-193-XPB, 95-182-XPB.

Statistics Canada. *Profile of Census Tracts* (Ottawa: Industry Canada, 1999). 1996 Census of Canada. Catalogue No. 95-199-XPB, 95-206-XPB, 95-213-XPB.



- Canada is the world's second largest country but only has a population of 30,000,000 people (1998 Census).
- In 1998, the population of the province of Alberta was approximately 3,000,000 people.
- The capital of Alberta, Edmonton, and its metropolitan areas account for about 918,000 of Alberta's residents. Calgary and area has a population of 907,000 people.
- In 1997/1998 there were 574,666 students in Alberta schools (K - grade 12).
- In 1997/1998, 162,803 students in Alberta were enrolled in French language education: French as a second language (133,252), French immersion (26,221) and Francophone (3,330). This was a decrease of 21% from 1993/1994. Over 20,000 students were enrolled in about 15 other language programs. These tend to be small programs which, for the most part, are growing.