Research Note

Access to French as Second Official Language Programs in English-Dominant Canada

Callie Mady, Glenda Black

Nipissing University

Language policies in any country exist within socio-historical contexts—embedded in history and influenced by socio-political factors. In Canada, such factors were the impetus to the formation of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism [RCBB], 1967), which was grounded in an English/French partnership and recommended that Canada become an English/French bilingual country. Although the subsequent *Official Languages Act* (Department of Justice, 1985) and *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (Department of Justice, 1982) limited their focus to first language maintenance, they did recognise second language education as contributing to the equality of status of both official languages. In Canada, however, the impact of second language education is mitigated by the provinces and territories who hold constitutional jurisdiction over education (Liddicoat & Baldauf, 2008; Marsh & Willis, 2003).

Currently in Canadian schools, policies for access to French as second official language (FSOL) programs range along a continuum from informal to formal. Where some Ministries of Education have developed informal policies that Delaney (2002) described as *de facto* policies or practices that have become legitimized over time, Loreman (2007) posits that these policies can lead to inconsistencies. On the other end of the continuum, some Ministries of Education have formal policies that have been developed through a formulation process that includes input by stakeholders before adoption of the policy (Delaney, 2002).

As it pertains to access to FSOL education, the provinces and territories have not used their authority to create many formal policies. Such an absence of direction is a variable contributing to the inconsistent and inequitable access to FSOL education (Mady & Arnett, 2009; Mady & Turnbull, 2010) where formal policies may be the most effective starting point to achieving more equitable access (Conrick & Regan, 2007; Cooper, Fusarelli, & Randall, 2004).

In addition to governments, language organizations also attempt to influence second language education. Canadian Parents for French (CPF), the sponsor of this research, is one such organization. With its view to improve FSOL, CPF identifies 11 criteria on which to judge equitability of access (CPF, 2010). It is these criteria that form the observation schema of this study.

Method

The purpose of this content analysis study was to examine formal provincial/territorial policies as they pertain to CPF's indicators of equitable access to FSOL programs. The study sought to

answer the following research question:

> To what extent do the provinces/territories put formal, specific policies into place in order to provide for equitable access to FSOL programs?

The sampling unit for this research was the Canadian Ministries of Education web sites. Each provincial/territorial Ministry of Education web site was explored, with the exception of Quebec where French is the language of education, to examine five categories of documents (where available) from each province and territory: FSOL and English as a second language (ESL) curriculum documents, FSOL and ESL policy documents and policy documents on inclusion. Where documents were not electronically available on the sites, the Ministries were contacted and where documents existed they were sent by mail to allow for analysis. This study used standard document analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 782) with an accompanying observation guide to direct the investigation through each document. Table 1 illustrates the findings of the analysis.

The significant finding from the study is the relative absence of specific, formal policies at the provincial/territorial level that would ensure equitable access to FSOL programming according to CPF's criteria. In particular as Table 1 indicates, of the 132 opportunities for specific policies to ensure access to FSOL education, only five such policies were found—two in New Brunswick, two in Ontario and one in the Yukon. Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Ontario had partial policies in that they had policies to ensure access to core programming but not immersion, for example. British Columbia also had two policies that were in contradiction to the indicators for equitable access; for example, where equitable access would have policies to ensure inclusion of academically challenged students, British Columbia has a policy that provides for exemption of such students from their obligatory second language component. In short, Table 1 indicates that whereas the federal government has met with success in status planning (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997) in having Canada's officially bilingual status as law, it has met with less success in its FSOL acquisition planning.

In fact, the federal government, as well as the provinces and territories, have limited access to FOSL education. First, the federal government has failed to establish second language learning as a right in Canada. The absence of second language learning as a right, then, provides for varied interpretations, federal, provincial, community, and individual, as to the importance of second language learning opportunities. Second, nationally, where the government recognised second language education as a means to enhance the equality of English and French in Canada and allocated funding to improve programming, the federal government did not link funding to improvement in access.

In the present study, if formal specific policies are an indicator, the provinces and territories continue to exert their influence over access to FSOL by not ensuring its availability through formal policies. Although absence of formal policies pertaining to access to FSOL does not necessarily equate to absence of commitment or equitable practices, it does provide for more opportunities for potential inconsistencies. Conversely, an increase in formal policies that specifically address the above influential factors of equitable access to FSOL programming could provide a foundation grounded in research (Levin & Farthing, 2004), where applicable, on which administrators could base their decisions.

Table 1

Formal FSOL Policies by Province/Territory According to CPF's Indicators of Equitable Access

Do the provinces/territories have policies:	AB	BC	MB	NB	NL	NWT	NS	NU	ON	PEI	SK	YT
to ensure that distance education is available to provide FSL learning opportunities to students in small, rural and remote districts?	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
to ensure that every parent is regularly informed about French-second-language options and entry points, as well as the French-language proficiency levels which can be expected from each option?	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
to ensure that a wide range of FSL entry points is maintained at the elementary and secondary levels?	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
to ensure that ESL students are encouraged and permitted to enrol in core, alternate core and French immersion programs?	N	N	N	P	N	N	N	N	P	N	N	N
to ensure the provision of specialist services for gifted students in core, alternate core and French immersion programs?	N	N	P	N	N	N	P	N	N	N	N	N
to ensure the provision of specialist services for academically challenged students in core, alternate core and French immersion programs?	N	N	P	N	N	N	P	N	N	N	N	N
to ensure the admission of academically challenged students to alternate core French and French immersion programs?	N	O	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
to prevent differential program fees for alternate core and French immersion programs?	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y
to prevent differential fees for transportation to alternate core and French immersion programs?	N	O	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
to prevent the establishment and use of admission criteria?	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
to prevent capping the numbers in alternate core and French immersion programs?	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N

Legend: Y=yes, N=no, P=issue partially addressed, O=issue addressed but in opposing direction.

AB=Alberta, BC=British Columbia, MB=Manitoba, NB=New Brunswick, NL=Newfoundland/Labrador, NWT=Northwest Territories, NS=Nova Scotia, NU= Nunavut, ON=Ontario, PEI=Prince Edward Island, SK=Saskatchewan, YT=Yukon Territories

References

Canadian Parents for French. (2010). *Equitable access to French-second language programs*. Retrieved December 31, 2011, from http://www.cpf.ca/eng/pdf/Equitable_Access.pdf

Conrick, M., & Regan, V. (2007). *French in Canada: Language issues*. New York: Peter Lang.

Cooper, B. S., Fusarelli, L. D., & Randall, E. V. (2004). *Better policies, better schools: Theories and applications*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Delaney, J. G. (2002). *Educational policy studies: a practical approach*. Calgary, AB: Detselig Enterprises.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2005). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Department of Justice. (1982). *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Part I of the Constitution Act, 1982*. Retrieved December 31, 2011, from http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/charter/

Department of Justice. (1985). *Official Languages Act* (R.S. C. 1985, c. 31 [4th Supp.]). Retrieved December 31, 2011, from http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/O-3.01/

Kaplan, R., & Baldauf, R., Jr. (1997). *Language planning from practice to theory*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Levin, B., & Farthing, G. (2004). Building connections with parents and communities: The Manitoba K-S4 agenda: Manitoba Education Agenda for Student Success. *Orbit, 34*(3), 13-17.

Liddicoat, A., & Baldauf, R., Jr. (Eds.). (2008). *Language planning and policy: Language planning in local contexts*. Toronto, ON: Multilingualism Matters.

Loreman, T. (2007). Seven pillars of support for inclusive education: Moving from "why?" to "how?" *International Journal of Whole Schooling, 3*(2), 22-38. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ847475). Retrieved December 31, 2011, from the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) Web site: http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/EJ847475.pdf

Mady, C., & Arnett, K. (2009). Inclusion in French immersion in Canada: One parent's perspective. *Exceptionality Education International, 19*(2&3), 37-49.

Mady, C., & Turnbull, M. (2010). Learning French as a second language: Reserved for Anglophones? *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, (99), 1-23. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ872379). Retrieved December 31, 2011, from the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) Web site: http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/EJ872379.pdf

Marsh, C. J., & Willis, G. (2003). *Curriculum: Alternative approaches, ongoing issues* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddler River, NJ: Pearson Education.

Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. (1967). *Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism*. Ottawa, ON: Queen's Printer.

Callie Mady is an Associate Professor in the Schulich School of Education at Nipissing University. Her primary research focus is the multilingual language acquisition of allophones learning French as a second official language in Canada.

Glenda Black is an Assistant Professor in the Schulich School of Education at Nipissing University. Her research focus areas are educational leadership and curriculum development and instruction: teaching and learning.