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Canadian Institute
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English-Language Schools in Quebec

Current Status and New Issues

Phase 2: Report on Round Tables in
the Quebec City Region and Greater Montreal

Research report prepared by

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Université Laval

with the cooperation of

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The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
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Table of contents

Introduction.....	1
Outline of the Topics Discussed	2
Synthesis of the round table in the Quebec City region.....	5
Synthesis of the round table in the Montreal region.....	9
Conclusion	12
References.....	14

Introduction¹

In the fall of 2007, a retrospective study on English-language schools in Quebec was published (Pilote and Bolduc, 2007). As the purpose of this study was to identify the issues surrounding the English-language school, an overview of the major transformations and legislative measures that have shaped the Anglophone community and English-language schools over the past 40 years was prepared. However, it quickly became apparent that very little scientific research on English-language schools in Quebec was conducted during this period.²

Because so little has been written about the current and future issues, two round tables were organized with stakeholders

in English-language education in Quebec, in order to identify some of the issues facing English-language education in Quebec today. With help from our partners at the Community Economic Development and Employability Committee (CEDEC) — Quebec City and Chaudière Appalaches regions and CEDEC — South Shore, we obtained the collaboration of 16 individuals: 8 men and 8 women. These individuals attended the meetings in their capacity as school principals or vice principals (a total of 5 people including one retired school principal), school teachers (3), parents (3), and representatives (5) of the following English-language school boards: Central Quebec, Riverside, Lester B. Pearson, and Sir Wilfrid Laurier.

The first round table took place in Quebec City in November 2007 at the offices of the Central Quebec School Board. Seven (7) stakeholders from the English-language education community participated. A second round table, in which 9 stakeholders participated, was held at the offices of the Riverside School Board on Montreal's South Shore. These round tables lasted

¹ The original report, in French, is entitled *L'école de langue anglaise au Québec : Bilan des connaissances et nouveaux enjeux*. Our thanks to Elizabeth Fairley for translating this report and to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for its funding through the Standard Research Grant program (Diane Gérin-Lajoie, Principal Investigator).

² It is a sign of the times that the language question is resurfacing in Quebec. Since the publication of the retrospective report in 2007, we have noted a few publications that are directly related to this subject. Readers are referred to the following three documents that are either partially or fully devoted to English-language education in Quebec: Lamarre (2008 and 2007), Corbeil and Lafrenière (2007), and the OQLF (2008).

approximately two hours and were conducted entirely in English. Following a brief presentation of the main observations from a literature review of English-language schools (Pilote and Bolduc, 2007), the participants were asked to discuss the following question: *In your opinion, what should be the role of English schools be regarding the transmission of language(s) and culture(s) within the context of a Francophone majority?* What followed were lively discussions on the future of English-language schools in Quebec, with a particular focus on language and culture.

This report provides an outline of the topics discussed, followed by a synthesis of the discussions from each of the round tables. The conclusion contains the main findings and the limitations of the approach, as well as the suggestions for further research.

Outline of the Topics Discussed

The participants all agreed that “the Anglophone community” has changed. However, it is not the only community to have changed. One important

observation made by the participants was that **attitudes toward language** have changed in both communities. Anglophones now want to master French, whereas Francophones also want to learn and speak English: “*We need both—English and French—to have the same qualification now to have access to jobs: being bilingual.*” Similarly, many young people attend an English-language school because of the opportunities and advantages of knowing English, not to espouse the values of the English-language community or to become members of this community. They are motivated more by a desire to acquire language skills than by a desire to belong to a specific culture.

The ability of schools to act as agents of **cultural transmission** for the English-language community has also been compromised by the restructuring of school boards. According to one participant from the Quebec City region, creating school boards along linguistic lines, rather than along confessional lines has resulted in a more heterogeneous school population and an increased difficulty in identifying a common culture: “*The language and the*

culture, we have to define what they are. Which in our case is difficult because with the changes in the law, going from confessional to linguistics, we have become much more diverse, we have become much more open.”

Participants in both round tables generally agreed that **Quebec’s English-language school system was a well-established system**, compared to the school systems of French-language minorities in other Canadian provinces, where, in their opinion, they have to struggle constantly to gain access to an education in their own language. This is not to say that the English-language school system does not face **certain challenges**, for example, recruiting qualified Anglophone teachers. This leads to some interesting paradoxes, as the following excerpt illustrates:

I have the feeling that we are a sensitive community, in the sense that it wouldn’t take a lot to cause the community [to become] deeply fractured more than it is. A good example of this is that there is just not a critical mass of Anglophones. We are recruiting more and more bilingual teachers. In fact, they are Francophones teaching in English. And we are finding that in our schools the coffee table

conversations happen in French. And we’re having staff meetings and we are saying that we’ve got to emphasize English. Yes, but we can’t police it in the halls. Yet, we’re speaking all in French, almost! I find things are at a critical level. If we are not careful, English schools will not deliver the English education that they really should.

The notion of **freedom of choice** and the consequences of the **restrictions placed on access** to English-language instruction were also topics of lively debate at the round tables. The participants stated that, in Quebec, many parents and children do not really have the freedom to choose. Children may only attend an English-language school if they have a certificate of eligibility. An English-language education becomes a coveted thing for many parents, yet it is reserved from *Charter rights holders*, some of whom are Francophones whose Charter rights give them access to learning the English language and the opportunities associated with it:

I think in Quebec, because the choice is not there, what do parents want? They want their children to be successful in life, to have the opportunities that they didn’t have. So, anyone that can find a little inkling of getting access to English, they’re going

to get it, because to them, that opens doors for their children professionally or educationally or otherwise.

Participants also talked about the **language skills** that students developed in the English-language school system. The teachers, school principals, and other stakeholders who spoke during the round tables felt that the English-language school system does not provide students with the language skills, particularly the writing skills, to become fully bilingual: *“I find that kids speak French extremely well, but they are not very good at writing it. And they speak English so-so, they write it so-so. So, I would say there is a difference between being bilingual and functional.”* This is a very serious challenge: students are not acquiring sufficient mastery of English and the Quebec job market demands that they have better skills in French. There is a shared perception that, in Quebec, bilingualism means having *“excellent skills in French and some abilities in English”*, which makes Anglophones less employable. For example, one participant remarked that Anglophones make up a very small percentage of the provincial civil service. Another

participant remarked that this leads to a paradoxical situation in which some schools end up teaching more French as a mother tongue than English:

The battle is getting harder and harder to bring our students to a level of English that we would expect from our graduates. There are many reasons for that. A very recent example is that our minister decides that there should be more education in French. So we actually offer, because the parents are demanding it, French as a mother tongue, and of course our English. Well, French as a mother tongue now is 8 periods in a cycle, versus 6 periods of English! So we are teaching more French than English in our schools.

Whatever the case, the participants agreed that one of the primary roles of English-language schools in Quebec is to **train bilingual students who are able to work in Quebec**. Because bilingualism is very much in demand by employers, better acquisition of French should increase the chances that young Anglophones will find work. In the participants' view, Quebec's English-language school system does not have a mandate to transmit English-language culture or specific values: *“we have a*

mandate from the Ministry of Education to socialize, instruct and qualify, not to protect the culture.”

The acquisition of French language skills is also seen as a strategy for **keeping young people from moving away** and as a key condition for maintaining an Anglophone community in Quebec. In the Quebec City region, keeping young people from moving away is seen primarily as a regional problem (young people who do not return to Quebec City or the area). Round table participants in the Montreal region were more concerned about young people moving to other provinces in Canada or even to the United States. In either case, the objective is to enable young people to stay in their community and feel competent and well-equipped to work in Quebec.

Another theme that emerged from the discussions was the difficulty of obtaining **access to English-language services**, particularly outside the Montreal region. However, even in large urban centres, it can be difficult to obtain services in English. Some of the participants even expressed concern

about growing old in Quebec because they will be required to grow old in French (they were particularly referring to health services). Another area of concern amongst the participants was **financial resources**. The system lacks the resources it needs to create conditions conducive to welcoming students who are entering the English-language school system with inadequate English-language skills (for example, the children of *Charter rights holders* who speak French at home).

Synthesis of the round table in the Quebec City region

The first observation about the Quebec City region is that the Central Quebec School Board covers a **vast territory**, which makes it more difficult to create a sense of community:

Look at our School Board, geographically, I think we have to talk about that, because even within our own board, we cover one-third of the province. So, in the smaller communities, you can maybe define your schools as neighbourhood schools. If you look at Quebec City, in the urban area, we have students coming in from larger French communities.

Where Quebec City and the surrounding area are concerned, according to the participants, the Anglophone population is so small that it is difficult to maintain an identity as a group. **Recruiting Anglophone teachers**, or even bilingual teachers, is a major challenge. As mentioned above, in this region, an increasing number of students who are considered “non-Anglophone” are attending English-language schools. Even when one parent is an Anglophone, the children do not necessarily speak English at home. This situation also applies to teachers and other school staff members.

One administrator who has been working in English-language education for many years talked about the fact that **English is making way for French in the schools**: “*I have seen this school change from being an English school to what I call now effectively a “fausse école anglaise” [pretend English school]. You hear very little English in the school, except in the classes.*” Participants in the Quebec City round table were also concerned about the funding of their education system. Unlike the French-language education system, which receives funding for classes to welcome

students with inadequate French language skills and to help them fit into the system, the English-language system receives no funding for this. As can be seen from the following excerpt, this adds to the work of teachers and makes it harder for students with inadequate English-language skills to fit in:

In Quebec, regarding the school system, on the French side, if they have Anglophones or Allophones that don't have the choice, they are funded for “des classes d'accueil” [classes to welcome students with inadequate French language skills]. That's a big difference, because we are having the same influx but we are not having access to the funding to welcome French students who don't speak English. Another problem is that people who are eligible do not place their kids in English throughout the whole curriculum (elementary, secondary, etc.) we have various degrees of language skills in our classes and this is a challenge for the teachers.

The participants in the Quebec City round table were unable to agree on or define an **Anglophone culture**. What is the Anglophone culture? Is there an Anglophone culture in Quebec? What is the school's role in transmitting culture? Although the participants were unable to

reach a consensus, the diversity of cultural backgrounds in the language community did emerge as a theme:

When you talk about English culture, there isn't an English culture. There is an Irish culture, there is a Scottish culture, and there is an English culture. Those cultures are not the same. So when you talk about the Quebec City area, you have to take a look at historical (sic). Quebec High School is Protestant Scottish; St-Pats' would be more Irish Catholic—more integrative of the Francophone population. So our cultural basis is not the same.

Thus, although they share a language, Anglophones have different cultural backgrounds. After a lengthy discussion, the participants concluded that the role of English-language schools was not to transmit cultural heritage, but to develop a sense of belonging amongst the students, so that they would stay in the region or come back to the region after completing their education. Although they did not agree on a definition of culture, participants were emphatic that there was not *one* common Anglophone culture but rather a *melting pot*, with an attitude of openness and respect for the Other.

In addition to developing a sense of belonging, another theme that emerged during the discussions was **keeping young people in the Quebec City region** (local retention). All of the participants shared a strong desire to see young people in their community return to the Quebec City region after completing their education outside the region.

For example, one participant suggested winning them back by means of a “*Grande Séduction*” (a reference to a popular Quebec movie³), with opportunities for training and work placements in the Quebec City region.

In the same vein, the participants remarked that, most of the time, it was necessary to work in French in the Quebec City region. On the one hand, this constraint with respect to the **workplace language** was seen as a factor discouraging young people, who had attended an English-language school and who had left the region, from coming back. On the other hand, participants shared a perception that the Quebec City region lacked skilled bilingual workers. Some felt that these

³ The English version is “Seducing Dr. Lewis.”

young people should not have difficulty finding employment after graduation. One participant pointed out that the expectation for these jobs would be that English is a requirement while French is the dominant language, i.e., asymmetrical bilingualism:

In the province of Quebec, regarding the workforce, you have an advantage if you are bilingual. But in reality, you have an extreme advantage when your French skills are better than your English skills. Because as you enter the work force, that's the language of work. The bonus is that you can understand English and you can write English well enough to deal with the work.

In spite of all of these factors, participants in this round table had a **positive vision** of life in Quebec City: “*Our reality and the reality in Montreal are not the same at all. As an Anglophone in Quebec City, la vie est belle*⁴.” Naturally, most of life takes place in French. There are few English-language newspapers, films or television shows. Because English is so rare, Anglophones become sought after by employers in the region. Clearly, this positive vision endures, in spite of all the

reservations expressed about the level of bilingualism that is actually required and that could work against Anglophones who don't speak perfect French; the opposite is also true for Francophones.

One final note: there was a great deal of discussion, during the Quebec City round table, about the restrictions on access to English-language schooling under *Bill 101*. According to the participants, while this legislation has affected all Quebeckers, it has had a particular impact on members of the Francophone majority who no longer have a choice about the language of instruction.

Generally speaking, the tone of the round table was positive. The participants seemed reluctant to make waves and anxious to develop harmonious relationships with the Francophone majority. The key challenge remains access to employment and keeping young people in a region that has a small Anglophone population. In minority language schools, the diversity of the students' cultural backgrounds and the large number of Francophones attending these schools make it difficult to pursue the objective

⁴ Life is beautiful!

of transmitting the Anglophone community's culture.

Synthesis of the round table in the Montreal region

During the round table in the Montreal region, one of the central themes that emerged was **keeping young people in Quebec** (i.e., in the province). The participants were of the opinion that young Anglophones who do not have the skills to work in French tend to leave Quebec. These participants emphasized the importance of developing their French language skills so that they would stay. Here is how one participant put it:

From my generation, all my friends left. And most of them didn't leave because they didn't like Montreal or Quebec. They left because of job opportunities. And, of course, I put my kids in French immersion to stop that. Because I don't want my kids to have the same choice to make as other people, by not having the choice to leave. So it's very important to learn English [in] school, but also make sure that kids have French to be able to succeed here.

Educating young people to become bilingual is a formidable challenge, because **bilingualism** not only gives

young people **the option of staying but also enables them to leave.**⁵

Consequently, the fear being expressed in Montreal was not the fear that young people would lose their English or that they would be assimilated into the Francophone majority. It was that they would choose to leave Quebec. Many insisted that being sufficiently fluent in French to work in Quebec was important and that for many young people who were less comfortable in French, this would tip the balance and they would choose to work elsewhere.

During this round table, **Anglophone representation on decision-making bodies in the education system** was reported to be problematic. This was believed to be particularly true at the school level but also true at the upper levels of decision-making. In the opinion of the educators present, during round

⁵ This comment is consistent with a consensus in the literature that bilingualism is not helping to stop the migration of Quebec Anglophones from the province. According to some reports, Anglophones perceive that bilingualism is an asset for young people that makes them more competitive on the job market outside Quebec, whereas in Quebec they either think that their ability to speak English is not valued or that their French language skills are deemed as inadequate (Magnan, 2004). One recent study even revealed that, in Quebec, a greater number of bilingual Anglophones than unilingual Anglophones hoped to leave the province within the next five years (Jedwab, 2006).

tables, collaborative ventures, and commissions of inquiry, there are often very few representatives from the Anglophone community. Because these activities are conducted exclusively in French, one participant suggested that some individuals may not feel comfortable enough with their French to take part: *“I think when we say we are not represented at the table of concertation, it’s because our generation didn’t learn enough French to participate in that. Often we are invited, but none of us is confident enough to speak in French and we don’t go.”*

Participants were also hesitant about defining the **culture of the Anglophone community**. They talked about a *“melting pot”* and this community’s spirit of integration, acceptance, and openness to other cultures. According to one participant, it would be a challenge to find a young white Anglophone in one of their schools because schools in the Montreal area are so multicultural. The participants described the Anglophone community as very inclusive and believed this was one of the essential characteristics of an Anglophone culture.

Although this is not necessarily the case for the Island of Montreal, schools further from the centre are tending to **accept an increasing number of Francophones into their schools**. Participants reported that some teachers had to provide “bilingual” instruction so that all of their students could understand them. They talked about the *centres de la petite enfance* (CPE) or daycare centres, saying that these centres will definitely change the linguistic landscape in English-language schools, because children are learning French at an increasingly early age: *“The CPE would change things. The daycares now are primarily and mostly in French. And my grandson speaks French, not because his parents speak French at home, but because his songs, his culture is all happening in French.”*

Although both round tables discussed the long hours that some school children spend being bussed back and forth, the Montreal round table discussed at some length the impact of **limited social contact** outside of the classroom. Given the fact that the students are dispersed over a vast territory, some do not have opportunities to spend time with other Anglophone children outside of school.

This leads to the perception that the community is isolated — huddled around the school — due to the lack of **English-language services**. Where French-language services in the broader community are concerned, children in the English-language school system are not always adequately informed: “*In terms of career development, there are resources out there, available in French. And bilingualism is high among the kids that we deal with. But the knowledge of what is out there, the knowledge of what is available in French is not there.*”

Participants in the Montreal round table talked about **vocational training programs**; they believe that the English-language vocational training programs are under-funded. They emphasized the need to improve what is offered by these services in English; otherwise, young Anglophones will be forced to take this training in French:

The number of vocational programs available has to be expanded significantly. Because there are many programs like electrician, carpenter, mechanic or others that [the Anglophones] are taking in French. If kids take it in English, there is a long waiting list or sometimes it costs

money. But there are plenty of opportunities in French.

In spite of the challenges facing the English-language school system, participants generally felt that, unlike the situation in other provinces where Francophones are a minority, **the French-language environment in Quebec is not a threat**. The following excerpts clearly reflect this sentiment:

- *I think the upcoming generation of Anglophones, the few that are left, I don't think they understand that they are a minority.*
- *They are Quebeckers, my son is a Quebecker [...].*
- *The Anglophone community, for the most part in Quebec, I know there are exceptions but for the most part, don't feel the same threat [as the Francophone minority outside Quebec]. Maybe it's because we live, I think it's because we live in such an international society in the North American context where English has such prominence, you know I mean there is no ignoring that [...]. It doesn't mean our children don't have to learn English, that they have good English instruction so that they acquire very good levels of competency in English but there is not the same fear, the same fear of loss. And I think you see it by people in schools, in English schools, that they are speaking French that they*

are interchanging in both languages, there isn't the same fear that if you don't speak English and if you happen to speak French that somehow your culture and your language are threatened. I think there is a threat of the opposite, the feeling of the opposite that if you don't acquire a certain level of French, then you will be doomed to leave Quebec.

During the round table in Montreal, a number of challenges facing the Anglophone community were raised. These included keeping young people in the community, access to employment in Quebec, access to English-language services, and developing English-language vocational training programs. In spite of these challenges, the participants felt that Anglophones were not at risk of losing either their language or their culture because of the dominance of the English language in North America. What mattered more to them was openness to different cultures and greater rapprochement with the Other, through learning French. Paradoxically, the future of the Anglophone community will depend on community members mastering French

in order to gain access to the Quebec job market.

Conclusion

These two round tables revealed that in spite of a number of common concerns, there are considerable differences between the regions — and even between schools — where education is concerned. We must point out that students — the first individuals to be concerned by, and key players in the socialization that takes place in, English-language schools — were conspicuously absent from the round tables. How do young people, educated in English, see themselves in relation to the issue of language and culture in education, in Quebec? How do they perceive the action of the school system in this regard? Another limitation of our study was that we would have liked a greater representation of participants from the Island of Montreal. We would have liked to organize more round tables in other parts of Quebec, with different social and historical characteristics, for example, the Eastern Townships or the Lower North Shore. For now, it is important to remember the different contexts in which Anglophones live when analyzing the phenomena that

affect not only English-language education in Quebec but also other aspects of their life as a community.

One topic consistently discussed by both groups was the social and demographic changes that were enabling new groups to access English-language schools, in particular, the children of mixed (Francophone-Anglophone) families. This influx of students, for whom English is not the language most commonly spoken, will have an impact on the evolution of the English-language education system. One important issue, according to participants, is the funding to integrate these students and facilitate their acquisition of English language skills. This phenomenon poses an additional challenge to the perpetuation and transmission of the culture of Quebec's Anglophone community — a culture that appears to be difficult to define and understand.

One interesting topic for further research would be the impact of early socialization within the daycare centre network, in which English-language services are not always available. Moreover, postsecondary education,

which is not subject to *Bill 101*, was not explicitly discussed in the round tables and yet the challenge of convincing young Anglophones to stay, which was discussed at length during the round tables, is closely connected to the postsecondary education choices that young people make and their entry into the job market. These are key moments that make it possible to observe the choices that graduates of the English-language education system make and to determine their individual and collective consequences. What language skills do these young people have at this point in their lives? How are their plans for the future shaped by the challenges facing Quebec's Anglophone community? What is the relationship between their career choices and their sense of belonging in Quebec? What is the language of preference for postsecondary education and early job experiences? What obstacles do they encounter at these moments? How do young Anglophone Quebecers see their future and the future of Quebec's Anglophone community? These are important questions that need to be explored by means of research into the real concerns of stakeholders in

Quebec's English-language schools. This research could be used to gather knowledge that would enable English-language schools to adequately prepare future generations of Anglophones to take their place within a Francophone Quebec.

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