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ABSTRACT

This report discusses implications of a nationwide study for French as a second language. The study sought to: (1) examine policies, programs, and activities in core French in different parts of Canada; (2) pool ideas, experience, and research on planning, organization, curriculum development, teaching approaches, teacher education, professional development, resources and evaluation, thereby encouraging exchanges of information about core French across Canada; and (3) identify how the core French program could be strengthened to ensure higher proficiency levels for all students and a better integration into the overall school program. The report outlines the objectives of the core French program, and suggests the objectives can be facilitated by a multidimensional curriculum comprised of four components: a language syllabus; a communicative/experiential syllabus; a culture syllabus, and a general language education syllabus. The implications of the study will require French teachers to have the following: a high level of linguistic competency; a thorough and up-to-date understanding of French culture, with an emphasis on the culture of local francophone communities, Quebec and other francophone regions of Canada; a good understanding of the communicative teaching approach; skills in curriculum development; a good level of knowledge about general language education; an understanding of how to teach in a multidimensional manner; and a commitment to ongoing professional development. (VWL)

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# Implications of the national core French study for FSL teachers

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## Janet Flewelling



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### Background

In the past twenty years, French as a second language programs across Canada have experienced a considerable amount of change. Concern about the quality of core French programs being offered has grown as shortages of qualified teachers, competition with immersion programs, changes in attitude towards the core French program and a decline in the morale of those involved in the program have become problematic.

In spite of the growth of the immersion program, it nonetheless remains a fact that "the large majority of French as a second language students in Canadian schools are, and will continue to be, enrolled in core French" (LeBlanc, 1990, 1). Realizing that, since each province is responsible for its own educational programs, and that there was no national consensus on the teaching of core French, the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT) responded to a suggestion by the late H.H. Stern by proposing a nationwide study of the program. In 1985, the Secretary of State approved funding for the study.

The primary objectives of the study were:

- 1) to examine policies, programs and activities in core French in different parts of Canada;
- 2) to pool ideas, experience and research on planning, organization,

curriculum development, teaching approaches, teacher education, professional development, resources and evaluation, thereby encouraging exchanges of information about core French across Canada;

- 3) to identify how the core French program could be strengthened so as to ensure higher proficiency levels on the part of students and a better integration into the overall school program (LeBlanc, 1990).

The study took a multidimensional approach since the researchers involved though that language study is too complex to be presented from a single focus. Four basic components were suggested and each was referred to as a syllabus:

- 1) Language Syllabus
- 2) Communicative/Experiential Syllabus
- 3) Culture Syllabus
- 4) General Language Education Syllabus

Also considered were the following implementational aspects:

- 5) Integrative Pedagogy
- 6) Research and Evaluation
- 7) Teacher Training

The final report of the NCSF (National Core French Study) appeared in the fall of 1990. While many of the findings reflect what is already known about teaching and learning a second language, recommendations regarding the content of the program and how it might be organized

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into pedagogical units were proposed to reflect current theory on communication and the realization that these theories need to be translated into practice in core French classrooms.

The recommendations made by the NCFS have wide-ranging implications for university French programs, FSL teacher trainers, those who are currently teaching FSL, prospective candidates for FSL training programs, and publishers of commercial French programs. This paper proposes to look at the study findings and consider their implications for current and future FSL teachers as well as others who influence the teaching of French as a second language.

### Results of the Study

In the introduction to the National Core French Study—A Synthesis (LeBlanc, 1990), there is a list of the 92 conclusions of the NCFS. The conclusions are categorized under the following headings:

- A Multidimensional Curriculum
- A Language Syllabus
- Communicative/Experiential Syllabus
- A Cultural Syllabus
- A General Language Education Syllabus
- An Integrated Pedagogy
- An Evaluation Procedure
- A Few Teacher Training Requirements
- A Few General Dimensions

The scope of this article does not permit a complete listing of all of the study's conclusions, however, the key points can be outlined as follows:

#### A Multidimensional Curriculum

The study maintains that the general objectives of the core French program should be the learning of French as a means of communication and the contribution it makes to the students' general education. It indicates that this goal can be greatly facilitated by the introduction of a multidimensional curriculum which should be comprised of at least four components: a language syllabus, a communicative/experiential syllabus, a culture syllabus and a general language education syllabus.

#### *Le Syllabus Langue* (Gisèle Painchaud)

This syllabus states that in core French teaching, the emphasis must be on function, rather than on form. The goal is to foster communication in natural settings, therefore the language items to be taught should be the ones students need to allow them to communicate. Sounds, vocabulary and grammar must all be taught within a context, taking into account the speakers, the topic of conversation, the reason for the communication and the place in which the conversation takes place. The message should have primacy over form, but the accuracy of the message must also be considered.

#### *The Communicative/Experiential Syllabus* (Roger Tremblay, Monique Duplantie, Diane Huot Tremblay)

This syllabus emphasizes that communication is the primary goal of language study. Communication should not be delayed until the linguistic code (i.e. the grammar) has been mastered. Students should be helped to acquire strategies that will enable them to communicate even when they don't have a good grasp of the language. The goal is that students be able to do things with the language rather than just talk about the language.

The students' environment should be a source of content for the language program. This will establish relevancy for the students and therefore make it more likely that they will be motivated to use the language. Themes chosen for study should be of educational value. Recommended fields of experience are: the physical dimension, the social dimension, the civic dimension, the intellectual dimension, and the leisure dimension.

#### *Le Syllabus Culture* (Clarence Leblanc, Claudine Courtel, Pierre Trescases)

This syllabus states that language and culture are inseparable. There is a cultural component in all aspects of communication. The objective of culture teaching is the acquisition of an acceptable level of cultural awareness, understanding and knowledge. The culture presented must be alive, dynamic and modern. The emphasis should be on the French fact within

Canada, not on "foreign" French. The teaching of culture should be ordered as follows: local, region and province, Quebec, North America and finally France and other French speaking countries. The presentation should be in the form of a spiral; that is to say that each topic should be presented at an early stage of language learning in a less linguistically demanding manner and then re-introduced when the students are more mature and more advanced in their linguistic abilities.

#### *Le Syllabus Formation langagière générale* (Yvonne Hébert)

The goal of general language instruction is to help students understand the role of language in society. Hopefully this would build bridges between the mother tongue and the target language, reduce prejudices and create an interest in languages in general. It is important to help students relate their experiences as L2 (second language) learners with those of a learner in general. Thus students will gain a better understanding of learning strategies in general and L2 strategies in particular. The result should be that the students will be better learners, not just of the second language, but in all subject areas. The student will gain a better understanding of how language and culture interact.

Possible topics could be: language throughout the world, the distinction between language and dialect, the notion of standard and variation, language prejudices, the relationship between language and thought, the role of language in society, bilingualism and multilingualism, learning how to learn a language, grammars and dictionaries, the origin of languages, the language development of children, animal languages, other modes of communication and the place of the L2 being studied in relation to other languages.

#### *Integrative Pedagogy—A Synthesis* (Raymond LeBlanc)

It is important to recognize that all of the syllabuses are complementary and that they enrich one another. It is also important to develop and use teaching materials which cut across syllabus divi-

sions. Language learning must be closely related to the student to the point of becoming part of his/her life experience. Students should be encouraged to develop their own strategies. "It would not be wise, therefore, to limit oneself to a monolithic 'good for everyone' approach, experience having shown the limits of such a decision" (p. 71). The competent user of the language must have grammatical, discursive, sociocultural and strategic knowledge, and above all he must know how to use this knowledge in authentic communicative situations.

*The Evaluation Syllabus* (Birgit Harley, Alison d'Anglejan, Stan Shapson)

Evaluation is an integral part of any pedagogy in second language teaching. Formative evaluation should play a primary role since language learning is a long process. Summative evaluation is necessary as well for administrative reasons. Evaluation must contribute to the student's development, both as a L2 learner and as a person. Therefore, evaluation activities must be relevant to and understood by the student and the student must be involved in the evaluation process.

*Teacher Training — A Synthesis* (Raymond LeBlanc)

FSL teachers must have a thorough knowledge of French so that they can be good models to their students. They must have a solid knowledge of the target culture. They must be a master of the subject, including language, culture, experience and general language education. They must understand the process of language learning and acquisition. They must know the main learning strategies and the effects of their application. They must have a sound knowledge of the nature of authentic communication and its possibilities in the classroom. They must have access to opportunities for professional development, and relevant and effective classroom materials must be available.

### General Dimensions

The researchers involved in the study indicate that it was not within the mandate of the study to propose FSL performance objectives. This would be the responsibility

of each province. They did, however, state that every effort should be made to ensure that all core French students receive 40 minutes of FSL instruction daily from grades 4 to 12.

They voiced their belief that there is great value in providing a mechanism for provincial coordinators of core French programs to meet on a regular basis so that information could be exchanged and ideas shared.

Finally, they referred to the teaching materials which were developed for grades 6, 8 and 10 as part of the study. These materials illustrate many of the dimensions referred to in the study and they would be useful to teachers who wanted clarification on how to implement the strategies discussed in the study.

### Implications of the study

The NCFS suggests a major shift from traditional second language teaching approaches. In order for such a shift to be effective, FSL teachers will require:

- 1) a high level of linguistic competency;
- 2) a thorough and up-to-date understanding of French culture, with an emphasis on the culture of local francophone communities, Quebec and other francophone regions of Canada;
- 3) a good understanding of the communicative teaching approach;
- 4) skills in curriculum development;
- 5) a good level of knowledge about general language education;
- 6) an understanding of how to teach in a multidimensional manner;
- 7) a commitment to ongoing professional development.

These requirements generate far-reaching implications for the teaching of French as a second language. If teachers are to teach communicatively, they will need a very high level of fluency in French. This means that university French courses will have to put a higher emphasis on the development of oral skills in particular. Faculties of education should conduct obligatory testing of all applicants to the French Education program to ensure that only students with a high level

of fluency are admitted into the program. The same should be done for all applicants to the Ministry FSL courses.

Many current FSL teachers have a better understanding of the culture of France than of Canadian francophone areas. Teachers should be encouraged to spend time in francophone regions of Canada. Not only would this increase their understanding of French Canadian culture, but it would also provide them with an opportunity to improve their language skills. Publishers of French teaching programs should be encouraged to develop programs which emphasize the French culture of Canada.

French Education instructors at faculties of education should make teachers in-training aware of the fact that as French teachers they will need to be prepared to commit themselves to ongoing professional development. French teachers will always have to make efforts to maintain or upgrade their oral French as well as to keep abreast of current francophone culture. Optimally, this would require teachers to be willing to spend time in a francophone milieu on a semi-regular basis. Boards of education and ministries of education should offer incentives and assistance to all French teachers to encourage them to spend time in a francophone milieu. Universities and boards of education should offer French language improvement courses designed for teachers who already speak well but who need to be able to work at maintaining their level of fluency on an ongoing basis locally.

Teachers tend to teach the way they were taught. Teachers who are more comfortable with traditional approaches to the teaching of French will need inservicing from their board of education to help them become more comfortable with communicative teaching. University instructors will need to adopt a more communicative approach to the teaching of French and French Education. Textbook publishers will have to develop teaching programs which follow the communicative approach.

Teachers will need skills in curriculum development so that they can supplement their teaching programs with

authentic materials and activities. There will be a particularly strong need for this for the teaching of culture and general language education. Boards of education can help teachers develop these skills through in-servicing.

Universities should consider offering courses on general language education as part of the undergraduate program. Faculties of education should help teachers deal with the concept of multi-dimensional teaching.

Clearly, all of these goals will not be met at once. But if change is to take place, then it will be necessary to ensure that teachers become aware of the direction in which French as a second language teaching is moving. Board of education French consultants will have a responsibility to make practicing French teachers aware of the implications of the NCFS and to encourage their board to provide programs for FSL teachers which will assist them in their efforts to change. Instructors at faculties of education will have the responsibility of encouraging university French departments to offer programs which will produce graduates with the skills necessary for entry into FSL teacher training programs and of ensuring that FSL teacher training courses encourage the development of the skills necessary for teaching French in the manner advocated by the NCFS. The Ministries of Education will have a responsibility to update their guidelines for the teaching of core French so that they more closely reflect the recommendations of the NCFS.

Awareness is the key which will promote a willingness to change — one step at a time. □

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