

Re: Bilingualism has ruined Canada but there is still hope.

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"mb" <azythos2@hotmail.com> wrote in message
news:1103081218.249154.186480@f14g2000cwb.googlegroups.com...
> *However, in many places --take Switzerland (where applicable), Finland,*
> *even Belgium-- the fact is that it's not even imaginable that anyone*
> *would finish high without the minimum requirements in the other*
> *language. I am not familiar with the Canadian school curriculum.*

The curriculum is set by the provincial governments – therefore, each province has a completely different school system. In Ontario (where I live), the high school curriculum has been changed recently.

Under the old system, high school was modular: students were given some degree of freedom to choose courses which lasted for half a year, with the expectation that a student could complete eight courses in a year. To graduate from high school, thirty courses were the basic minimum required. Of those thirty, fourteen were to some degree prescribed: it was necessary, for instance, to have five English courses, two maths, two sciences, one arts, etc. The remaining sixteen could be filled as the student wished. Universities required that students present, as part of their thirteen credits, at least six credits at the OAC level (which corresponded to the fifth year of high school, or grade 13), one of which had to be English.

Under this system, one of the fourteen prescribed credits was French. This was usually done in the first year of high school, Grade Nine. After this, French became optional. French instruction was usually started in elementary school, although there was some flexibility as to when it started. The school board where I lived started French in Grade Four, that is, when the student was about nine years old. A school board where I used to live started French in Grade One, when the student was six years old. Still, the Grade Nine French course was at the same level across the province.

It is not possible to consider oneself a Francophone having only completed Grade Nine French. At this point, the student really only knows three tenses: the present, the compound past with *etre/avoir*, and the 'near future' with *aller*. The knowledge of pronouns is limited, as relative

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pronouns and emphatic personal pronouns are not introduced until the next year or two. Essentially, the student is equipped only to deal with a short tourist visit to a French speaking region with the expectation that people there will be charmed at the attempts of the student to speak their language and then switch to English.

Even after OAC French, there is still a long way to go. I took French through to OAC and in my final year we were expected to read 'Bildungsroman' type juvenile trash literature – I rebelled and read Hugo's 93 instead. I still have difficulty following French TV and French radio. I am building on my skills here at Oxford and will soon be able to overcome my difficulties to some degree – I want to take the DALF next year – but I am quite disillusioned with the quality and curriculum of second–language French teaching in Ontario.

My expectation is that the new curriculum will not have greatly improved the situation, if indeed it has bothered to change it at all. The new curriculum was crafted with a utilitarian perspective, and most of the humanities – including languages – were not ranked high by that government which brought in the reforms. They focussed on functional literacy and numeracy – and created a system that sends people to university as math majors who have never even heard the word 'integrand'.

It might be questioned why French has suffered so much in Ontario. I must stress that there is a large perception amongst the population of the Toronto area that French is essentially useless. The communities here do not conform to the black and white of US daytime television, nor the French and English of the Canadian constitution. The largest non–English speaking communities here speak Cantonese, Mandarin, Hindi/Urdu or Punjabi as first languages, while the most well represented European languages other than English are Italian, Spanish and various Slavic languages (the Polish and Ukrainian communities are particularly strong). In York region (to the northwest of the City of Toronto), high schools began cutting down on Shakespeare in the English curriculum because too many of their students were Chinese–speaking ESL students – struggling with modern standard English, Shakespeare was simply beyond their grasp. In such an environment, the point of forcing French – and that through English – is not really obvious. To compound difficulties of usefulness, the schools specifically ignore Quebecois dialects or accents, focussing on 'Parisian' French, so the idea of stitching together a disparate nation does not really manifest itself. Still, there are French–immersion schools in the public system where children are forced to function in a French environment from an early age: these are decidedly more successful than the FSL programs through English–medium schools.

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