

It's More Than French Immersion

Description

Today there is much talk about second language programs in our anglophone school system. There has been a lot of effort and debate over this for a long time. Stats Canada reveals that only about 16% of NB Anglophones can carry on a conversation in French which is really the statistic that drives the government to once again, try to find something that works. If job attainment were your concern, then that 16% number would need to be revised to reflect the smaller number who could meet an acceptable French proficiency level. There is another aspect to this that is being missed in all the uproar about second language education.

RETENTION.

It is one thing to learn French but quite a another to retain it in this English dominated country and continent. Francophones are very familiar with the difficulty in maintaining the French language in this environment.

Stats Canada has produced a document regarding retention of the French language in their issue of "Insights on Canadian Society", a study on English – French bilingualism based on data from the 2006 and 2016 censuses of population released in the fall of 2019 and here's their point:

"Assuming that the English–French bilingualism retention level remains similar to what has been observed in recent years, the English–French bilingualism rate among Canadians outside Quebec with English as a mother tongue would remain fairly unchanged from 2016 to 2036, at around 7%"

So, from this year's upcoming graduating classes, only about 7% will retain the French they have learnt and that is because of the impossible position that Anglophones have been put in trying to maintain a minority language in majority language environment. Note here that New Brunswick may achieve a little better result because of a larger percentage of Francophones in some areas (perhaps up to 12 %) but still significantly low.

The south of New Brunswick where the large majority of Anglophones reside is an English area. There are 8 counties of the 15 in the province that hold an English population of over 92%. The Stats Canada document referenced above also looked at the factors affecting the learning and retention of French. The exposure to the minority language has a significant impact on learning the language. Children in these English communities seldom hear French in their daily lives. Hence the low retention rate.

Another factor responsible for the difficulty of Anglo children to learn and retain French is the absence of French use in the home. In the past, some Francophones have simply responded to this by stating that Anglophones must start listening to French radio, movies, and music. Is that a realistic response?

So as the interest groups battle once again over the appropriate second language program, the serious problem of retention continues to loom in the background and will negate the outcome they want.

Category

1. Uncategorized

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