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11th March, 1964

Mrs. Murielle M. Parkes,  
 150 Putney Ave.,  
 St. Lambert, P.Q.

Dear Mrs. Parkes:

I am so sorry to be slow in answering your letter. I have just realized now, in reading it more carefully, that the matter is urgent and I should have had my reply in your hands before the 9th, which was the day before yesterday.

I received the Chambly Protestant Central School Board questionnaire and replied to it under the headings which they had drawn up. I should also have written a separate letter to congratulate them on their broad minded approach to this wonderful request from 240 parents and to tell them that, in my opinion, they cannot go wrong with the plan if they adhere to the simple principle of teaching kindergarten and the early grades in French to English children. This is not, in any sense, an experimental procedure. It has been carried out for a great many years. However it would be something new and something admirable if they will establish it in a public school.

Having read the proposal over, I can only say that, if I had young children of my own, I should like to enter them there and if the scheme is established, I am perfectly certain you will have the parents of young children coming to St. Lambert because of it. This is something that

the parents have always wanted. The really completely bilingual people have their parents to thank more often than they have the planning of educators.

My understanding is that you will teach the ordinary subjects of kindergarten and the first grade and second grade in French to English children, without teaching French as a language at all. You will deal with the usual games, songs, folk tales and folk literature. These children will, at the same time, be hearing English spoken at home, and at the weekend and in the evenings Mother Goose stories or whatever the Canadian mother uses to correspond with that will be told them in English and they will be learning from the Bible if the parents are religious people, as I hope they are. The child has a remarkable capacity to switch from one language to another tongue.

When the child enters the school, he will expect French without thinking it out at all; when he enters his home, he will expect English; when he meets the school teacher, he will expect French; and when he meets his parents, he will expect English. The presence of a person who always speaks one language causes the child to make the switch and to go on with his learning of that particular language quite independently of what he is doing in regard to the other language. Adults have this capacity to switch also but it is a far more efficient process in adults who have begun to learn their language early.

There is no danger of conflict, nor will the intellectual performance of these children be less than that of unilingual children; indeed, quite the opposite will obtain. This has been proven in the study made in the Psychological Department of Professor Hebb at McGill. It is quite clear from the general experience of those who have learned more than one language early. It is quite clear that they learn third and fourth languages with greater ease. They are, in fact, better educated than the unilingual individual.

In regard to reading, when they take up reading and writing, they should do so in school in French and it is perfectly certain that the bright children in homes where there is a good deal of intellectual activity will start to learn to read English spontaneously on their own and if their mothers wish to teach them, that is all to the good.

If you find that other parents, who do not enter the plan in the first year, want to enter their children in the second or third year of the scheme, they should have some introductory work by means of a special course. But that should be conducted by a French-speaking person separately. At the end of three years in what you have called "The French Bath," the children should be introduced to English reading and writing when they start their schooling in English. This should be carried out by an English-speaking person, of course. It will hardly be necessary for the children who come from families where they have been taught to read English at home.

When they are first beginning, it is well to have the same person speak English or French regularly, or, it works perfectly well if one room is reserved for French and another for English. I know of a woman who is doing that at the moment. Being completely bilingual herself, she has declared upstairs French and downstairs English and during the past year her children have conformed to that without thinking anything about it. So, even the change of the place or the change of the person helps the child to make an easy switch and to learn without confusion.

*grade,* There is an excellent bilingual school being conducted at the present time at Notre Dame de Sion, 4700 Dorval Avenue, Montreal 26 by the nuns of Notre Dame de Sion. The children have two years of kindergarten and then the first, *grade,* bilingually. That is to say, whatever they are, French, English, Jewish and so on, they are taught in French in the morning and in English in the afternoon. I have visited this school and find that there is no difficulty. The work goes forward happily and smoothly. Those children, when they go into either French or English schools, are potentially bilingual.

There are two processes to keep in mind. One is the beginning of the second language. This beginning of the second language should be carried out by the mother's method. Following that, there is the expansion of vocabulary. If the child has begun the second language preferably between the age of four and seven, he can expand the vocabulary of that language at any time by reading or talking or exposure to it. In that case, the child will never have to make any effort that is obvious and his accent will be normal. If, on the other hand, it is all delayed until the teens, I do not need

to tell you how the second language is apt to be spoken and what the defects are. We are forced to learn by the dead language method when we take up a new language late although even then the direct mother's method can be employed.

I hope, above all, that religious prejudice will not prevent you from securing native teachers. Until educators have abolished the rule that a Catholic cannot be an ordinary teacher to English Protestant children and that a Protestant cannot be an ordinary teacher to Catholic children, those who are responsible for our education are guilty of religious bigotry, in my opinion.

In a small book which was published this year, called "The Second Career" I have included two essays on speech, one on its neurophysiology and the other on learning a second language. If you are interested, these will elaborate some of the things I have been trying to say.

With best wishes for your project, and hoping that you will get away with it — we need an example of this sort in the Province of Quebec and in Canada,

As ever yours,



WF/mb