

140 Putney Avenue
St. Lambert, Que.

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COPY

Mr. Paul Gallagher
Director of Studies
The St. Joseph Teachers College
3465 Durocher Street, Montreal

Dear Mr. Gallagher:

Mr. MacGillivray forwarded your thoughtful letter of January 7, 1966 to us for study, and I am taking the liberty of replying, on behalf of the St. Lambert Bilingual School Study Group, to some of the points you have raised.

Our brief to the Minister of Education doesnot attempt to lay down all the considerations involved in the implementation of a bilingual experiment. Rightly or wrongly, we considered that a short presentation would be more likely to receive consideration, so we omitted a good bit of our research. Also, we don't have all the answers!

The proposal is the result of three years of study by the St. Lambert Protestant Parents (a group of amateurs but nevertheless devoted ones), recently augmented by Mrs. K. Stewart of the St. Francis of Assisi P.T.A. of St. Lambert. Much of the research was done in the winter of 1963-64 when our first brief was prepared for the Chambly County Protestant Central School Board. At that time we were requesting a simpler (from an administrative point of view) program which was, in essence, for Kindergarten, Grades I, II, and III all in French in the St. Lambert Protestant Schools, for children whose parents desired it. The possibility of sending English Protestant children to the French Catholic schools had just been cut off because of lack of space.

The current proposal is an offshoot of the original one expanded to accommodate the interest of English Catholics, to attempt to bring in French children, and to give the experiment a more scientific base by soliciting university support.

As background to the proposal, a thorough study of the UNESCO Report (Foreign Languages in Primary Education - Report on an International Meeting of Experts, 1962) and other literature was made. Interviews were held with Dr. Lambert and Dr. Penfield, and the opinions of a number of educators were sought. A lively correspondence with Mr. Giles, principal of the Toronto French School, was entered into and is still being pursued. French school curriculum. Many English-speaking parents with children in French schools here were questioned regarding their children's progress at various levels and when transferring to English. In the fall we contacted Miss Bateau, and a principal of a local French School with a

wide

experience of English children in her school.

This principal's impressions may be of interest to you. She felt that of the 82 English pupils in the French schools in St. Lambert (elementary) at least three in the past six years may have suffered from emotional problems which could be directly related to the use of the second language. The academic failure rate has been very low. With the newer methods, stressing oral presentation, she foresaw more difficulties in the early grades, which could have the effect of slowing the progress of the whole class. For this reason she thought a French curriculum adapted specifically to the English child would be highly desirable.

We agree with you that it would indeed be unfortunate if school subjects were taught for other purposes (such as bilingualism) than those for which they were intended. Although it was recently reported that Dr. Lambert believed that a language was best learned when used as a vehicle for learning other material (and not the language itself), I think we all agree that the other material must not be sacrificed to learning the language. The experience of English children in French schools here has not shown that the language had been learned at the expense of subject matter. Of course in the early years there is not much subject ^{matter} per se, to be mastered, but rather tools to be acquired. We have found from questioning parents that those who learned to read in French had no trouble with English reading later, though some had spelling difficulties when first exposed to English writing. The (Dec. '65) Toronto French School in its second brief to the B & B Commission reports striking transfer results from French reading to English reading in second grade. Their results are undoubtedly more impressive than those that can be achieved in a public school with its larger classes.

According to the UNESCO report, the learning of the first language and of the second when done at an early age has little relation to intelligence. Even children with very low intelligence manage to learn one language well and similarly they can learn another, given sufficient early exposure. Their vocabulary will not compare in size with that of the bright child's in either the mother tongue or the second language. This does not mean that the child of lower intelligence would not profit from a second language; on the contrary to deny him the opportunity may be doing him a great injustice, especially since in adult life his need for bilingualism may be even greater than ^{that of} others. With this in mind, it hardly seems fair to bar an opportunity, not dependent on intelligence, from children who will have many academic channels closed to them. Just as the current monolingual program is ideally made flexible to accommodate varying intelligences, so should a bilingual program be made flexible.

In suggesting a bilingual curriculum for our community, we were thinking of the direct benefits to the children involved. We were not thinking of cementing relations between French and English. If this came as a result of increased bilingualism, so much the better. The

children who emerge from a bilingual school may return to monolingual homes, but if they choose to move in only one language group, it will not be because they are hampered, as children are nowadays, by lack of knowledge of the other tongue. As you suggest, there are many factors at work, and we are not prepared to deal with them because of lack of knowledge.

Our approach to the Minister of Education may well have been incorrect. Experience with our local boards has shown, however, that they are more likely to endorse a proposal already found acceptable to the Department. We are now in the discussion stage with the boards, and Mr. R. Haeblerlé of the Department has been most helpful in meeting with commissioners and study group members. The Chambly County Central School Board is holding a special meeting next week to decide on their participation; the St. Lambert School Board (Protestant) recommended the project to the Central Board; and the St. Lambert Catholic School Commission is the furthest from accepting the idea because they can offer a French curriculum to English-Catholics. However, they haven't ~~fully~~ ^{closed} ~~rejected~~ ^{down} the idea.

We agree with you that the recruiting of the teachers must be done with extreme care. A teacher would have to be flexible and have an understanding of the difficulties of communicating with children in a language other than their own. The teacher in the current French kindergarten for English children has a warm personality, excellent diction, and a highly creative approach. Our search for good teachers will certainly be simplified if we can draw from both religious groups. If our project wins support, we will be needing at least two new teachers for the current year, one for kindergarten and one for Grade I. Any leads would be greatly appreciated, as finding suitable teachers will be one of our greatest problems.

We realize that a bilingual experiment here means breaking a lot of new ground, particularly in curriculum. However, bilingual instruction is not new on the world scene. We must study the experiences of others and adapt them to our own situation. We welcome advice and comments such as yours and we hope you will feel free to give us further suggestions.

Yours very truly,



Chairman

St. Lambert Bilingual School Study Group