

Oct. 25, 1968

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The Honourable Jean-Guy Cardinal
Minister of Education
Parliament Buildings
Quebec, P.Q.

Dear Sir,

As you may be aware, nearly two hundred English Protestant or non-Catholic children in the City of St. Lambert are taking or have taken their Kindergarten and Grade I totally in French as part of a unique experiment in bilingual education. After two years in French, the Grades II and III are receiving about one hour of English, and it is projected and hoped that they will receive approximately equal time in French and English over their school careers.

The uniqueness of this program, sponsored by the South Shore Protestant Regional School Board, consists in the fact that (1) it is a voluntary one initiated at the parents' request; (2) it is being carefully researched by Dr. W.E. Lambert of the Department of Psychology of McGill University to assess its educational effects and to ensure that mother tongue standards are being maintained; and (3) it is the only program we have heard of in the public sector that could produce a high level of bilingualism within the school system.

We bring this experiment to your attention at this time because we understand that policies are presently being formulated regarding language rights and their effects on school organization.

Various educational bodies are recommending that the province's schools be reorganized along language lines rather than confessional ones. Though this recommendation has some merit, we question whether it would accommodate all the educational possibilities which should be considered at this time. For example, where would bilingual education fit into a system divided along language lines? Would this division preclude an option which depends on both language groups working together, an option which is filling an increasingly recognized need not only in this community, but in the Montreal area as well (e.g. Roslyn School, Westmount), an option which does not cost more than a unilingual one?

To develop and perfect a course of study that produces bilingualism within the school system requires a new kind of thinking and cooperation between the language groups. In a bilingual course both languages are treated as "first languages" and used as media of instruction, both cultures are presented simultaneously.

The degree of bilingualism made possible by this method cannot be matched in a unilingual system where the second language is taught as a single subject. Even with improved methods and increased time, it remains impractical to teach the second language more than a certain percentage of the school day or other subjects would suffer. As far as is known today, complete bilingualism is largely dependent on spending a certain number of contact hours in the second language, and these ^{hours} cannot easily be found within the context of a unilingual system.

If the option of French education were made available to the English sector, and vice-versa, in a system divided along language lines, certain new possibilities would be opened up to those seeking bilingualism for their children. However, we do not think an exchange of students would be an ideal solution for a number of reasons. Since few wish to sacrifice mother tongue standards in pursuit of bilingualism, the practical result is that parents withdraw their children from the second language school to catch up on the mother tongue. This in turn results in a levelling off of the second tongue, and then possible further switching. In other words it is impossible to progress equally in both tongues when they are given in separate school systems. In addition, switching schools produces certain other educational and social difficulties. The bilingual option offers a solution in that both languages and cultures are nurtured simultaneously, not one at the expense of the other; one single school and one curriculum provide continuity in studies and social development. Moreover, any initial psychological difficulties which may be produced by immersion in a second-language milieu are minimized in the bilingual option where communication between the children of the same mother tongue is possible from the start.

Another problem in exchanges is one caused by numbers. If any large percentage of children of one language group enter the classes of the other language group, it is inevitable that adjustments in the curriculum have to be made to accommodate them - adjustments that could possibly penalize one side or the other. This necessity could be avoided if an especially designed bilingual course, such as St. Lambert's, were offered. St. Lambert's course has the merit of five years of planning behind it and two years of extensive testing with most encouraging results. Further testing is being done this year.

On the basis of the success of the bilingual experiment to date, and the difficulty of achieving bilingualism in any other way, we would suggest that provision be made for encouraging and developing this type of education in Quebec for those wishing it. Of course this option must be freely chosen by the parents and should not be made

compulsory for any segment of the population at this stage, as compulsion could seriously jeopardize results. We believe that the strength of St. Lambert's program lies in the fact that parents opted for this program out of their own conviction that it had educational and cultural advantages for their children. It seems significant that during the four years that this option has been available, fully sixty per cent of the parents have chosen it over the traditional English program. Success in learning a second language at a later age seems to depend partly on intelligence and/or linguistic skill yet these young children who were not preselected on this basis were able to progress normally in this bilingual milieu.

We urge you to reserve an important place for bilingual education in any realignment of the educational structures. It would seem that proposals being voiced in the province today have failed to emphasize this desirable option, which we, having experienced, feel responds to a great need in the Quebec of today.

Yours very truly,

Olga C. Melikoff (Mrs. A.)
Chairman
St. Lambert Bilingual
School Study Group

St. Lambert, Que.
October 25, 1968.

[Copies sent to:

Mr. Leopold Garant, Chairman, Superior Council of Education
The Honourable Jean-Jacques Bertrand]