CORE FRENCH CERTIFICATE

A Review of Existing Core French Program Characteristics in Provinces/Territories
and
Recommendations for a Core French Certificate

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The purpose of this document is to examine the feasibility of a certificate for students completing core French (CF). This document is divided into four sections:

- The first section describes various certificate types.
- The second section suggests which type of certificate would best suit the Canadian CF context and presents arguments for and against such a CF certificate in each province and territory.
- The third section examines administrative considerations for the implementation of a CF certificate.
- The fourth section illustrates two possible CF certificate formats.

1.0 Certificate type

There are several types of certificates for language learners:

- certificates based on proficiency measured by a test/exam
- certificates based on proficiency measured by course grades
- certificates based on course completion /attendance

1.1 Certificates based on proficiency

The most common type of certificate for language learners is a proficiency certificate. This type of certificate is awarded on the basis of results on a proficiency test. Results are expressed in terms of proficiency levels, or bandscales, which are detailed descriptions of what learners are able to do and how well they are able to do it in the language studied. Such certificates are often used by language learners for admission to post-secondary study and/or for obtaining professional accreditation in the country where that language is spoken.

The best known examples are those which most reliably indicate a candidate's abilities; these are based on standardized tests with the results expressed in well-documented proficiency levels and are usually sent directly to the institution requiring them by the issuing organization (e.g. the TOEFL certificate for English as a second/foreign language).

European examples from H Coltrinari's report include:

- *The National Certificates*, a Finnish language testing system for adults with different educational backgrounds and language learning histories.
- The *Certificate in Advanced English* (CAE), an English certificate based on a test using real-world tasks, for people requiring English for professional or study purposes.

In Canada, the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks has established a series of benchmarks (another term for proficiency levels) and a test which are used to determine an immigrant to Canada's level of English. Students who try the test are provided with a letter indicating their "benchmarks" for all skills and an overall "benchmark". The same "benchmarks" and test are used in every Canadian province. This system makes it easier for learners to transfer from an ESL course in one province to another or for professional organizations to understand the language factor in accreditation from another province. Equivalent "benchmarks" and test are available for French.

There is also one example of a proficiency certificate for FSL within the public school system. The New Brunswick Department of Education offers all grade 12 FSL students the opportunity to try an oral proficiency test. Students receive a certificate indicating one of nine proficiency levels on the basis of the results of this test.

1.2 Certificates based on proficiency determined by course grades

Some language schools give certificates which specify a proficiency level based on course marks. Since no standardized test is administered as a basis for the student's level, these certificates are not usually accepted for post-secondary admission or professional accreditation. These certificates may also indicate the number of hours/days/months of instruction completed. Examples of institutions issuing such certificates include:

- Ottawa University,
- Carleton University, and
- Algonquin College.

1.3 Certificates based on course completion /attendance

Certificates are also awarded on the basis of course completion. In the Canadian school system, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and PEI offer certificates to immersion graduates. These certificates do not indicate proficiency level since outcomes are not defined in terms of proficiency levels and no proficiency test is given. Student proficiency is implied in immersion programs due to the length of time French is studied.

2.0 Core French certificate

Of the three types of certificates mentioned in the previous section, only a certificate based on course completion /attendance, is currently appropriate for core French graduates.

It would not be possible to have a national certificate based on proficiency measured by a test at present because there is no national proficiency FSL test suitable for school-aged learners in place.

It would also not be possible to have a national certificate based on proficiency measured by course grades at present. FSL courses in the public school system are not correlated with proficiency levels. Learning outcomes (for most provinces/territories) defined in FSL curricula are divided into sub-levels (usually Grade 6/Beginner; Grade 9/Intermediate; Grade 12/Advanced) but do not state very precisely what students are able to do with their second language skills or stipulate how well students can preform the given outcomes (Vandergrift, 1999). These are crucial in determining a student's level of language proficiency.

A CF course participation/attendance certificate could be offered to graduating core French students.

2.1 Advantages/disadvantages of a core French certificate (Generic)

The advantages a national core certificate could provide are:

- Provide a means by which teachers can reward core French graduates.
- Acknowledge student achievement in core French.
- Increase the visibility of core French.
- Encourage students to continue in core French to graduation
- Serve as an interim certificate until a proficiency test-based certificate can be implemented.
- Encourage dialogue among provinces/territories regarding what is required to be proficient in a second language and how best to achieve this goal.

In determining the criteria for a core French certificate, provinces may discuss commonalities in CF programs (i.e. curricula based on the NCFS, articulation of the core French program over nine years in most provinces) and begin to reflect on aligning outcomes (content standards and performance standards) and the advantages/disadvantages of a common FSL proficiency test.

Core French programs across Canada are very similar but there are several important differences:

- French is optional in some provinces, mandatory at several grade levels in some provinces and mandatory in all grades in Québec (see Table 1).
- Students in different provinces can begin learning French at different entry points: kindergarten, grade 1, grade 2, grade 3, grade 4, grade 5, grade 7, grade 10 (see Table 1).
- Learning outcomes vary. With optional implementation and different entry points, provinces differ in the number of years over which the core French program is articulated.

It is unlikely that a student who has studied core French for 4 years will have the same level of proficiency as one who has studied French for 12 or 13 years.

- Some provinces have tests in place for graduating core French students:
  - British Columbia's test is based on the grade 12 curriculum rather than on proficiency levels;
  - Québec's test is based on the secondaire 5 curriculum;
  - New Brunswick has an oral proficiency test which is optional and a well-established certificate is issued to students who pass it;
  - Nova Scotia uses the same optional proficiency test as New Brunswick for students in one school board.
- Some provinces offer extended core and these students would need to be included in a core certificate.

While similar differences exist for immersion programs, immersion certificates are offered in some provinces at the provincial level only. Some provinces may see disadvantages to a national core French certificate:

- Provinces with strong support for core French (mandatory grades, well-articulated program, established entry point, etc.) may not wish to be included with provinces with weaker programs.
- Provinces with high learning outcomes in core French (e.g. Québec, New Brunswick) may not see any advantages to a national certificate.
- Provinces which already provide certificates (or the equivalent) may feel that a national certificate undermines the value of their provincial certificate.

Table 1. Synthesis of CF Program Characteristics by Province

	BC	AB	SK	MB	ON	QC	NB	NS	PE	NF
CF program articulated over at least 9 years	8 years	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
CF compulsory	5-8*	-	-	-	4-9	K-11	1-10	4-9	4-9	4-9
Entry points	K, 4, or 5**	many 4**	many 7**	K,1, or 4**	K,1, or 4**	K or 1**	K or 1**	4**	K, 1 or 4**	K,1, or 4**
Extended CF					x			x		x
Intensive CF			pilot				pilot	pilot		x
Exit test	x					x	optional	optional		Gr. 11
Existing CF certificate/certification							x			
Immersion certificate/diploma	English and French diploma	subjects in French noted on transcripts	bilingual mention on transcripts for those completing 50% of credits in French.	special diploma indicating courses taken in French	-	-	immersion certificate	immersion certificate	immersion certificate	diplomas/ transcripts specify French immersion
Terminal course designation	French 12	French 30	French 30	Senior 4 Basic French	FSF4U FEF4U FSF4O	?	?	Core French 12	FRE 621A	FR 3201
Minimum number of hours of instruction to end of grade 12					1040	1300				960

* any second language, but usually French ** usual entry point

2.2 Advantages/Disadvantages of a CF Certificate in Specific Provinces

The following sections examine the specific advantages and disadvantages of offering a CF certificate based on course completion/attendance in each province. (The Yukon , the Northwest Territories and Nunavut were not included since these jurisdictions follow the British Columbia and Alberta programs.)

2.2.1 British Columbia

- Students in BC will soon have to submit a portfolio representing a collection of proof of their skills in order to graduate. A CF certificate would be an addition to this portfolio (personal communication - D. Tijman).

- In BC, students are already highly motivated to study a language. Students take French to meet university entrance requirements: UBC requires a grade 11 language course for Sciences and a grade 12 language course for Arts. SFU requires a grade 11 language course for entrance. A certificate may highlight the importance of French versus other language choices.

2.2.2 Alberta

- Although language study will not be compulsory in Alberta until 2006, the Enhancing Second Language Learning project is attempting to increase enrolment in language courses. A certificate may highlight the importance of French over other available languages.

- Since offering French is optional for school divisions and since there are 4 possible entry points (Grade 1, Grade 4, Grade 7, and Grade 10) in Alberta, not all students are able to complete French 30, the grade 12 course. This is particularly true for those starting in Grade 10 who would need to complete 4 courses in 3 years. The CF entry point is expected to be stabilized at grade 4 in the near future which may facilitate completion of French 30 in Grade 12 (personal communication - Carolyn King). A certificate would reinforce this initiative and address irregularities in course offerings in grade 12.

2.2.3 Saskatchewan

Given that Saskatchewan has optional implementation, multiple entry points and an inconsistently articulated program from grade 4 through grade 12, a CF certificate would have the same benefits as in Alberta:

- A certificate may highlight the importance of French among other languages taught.
- A certificate may reinforce a grade 4 entry point to core French.

2.2.4 Manitoba

- Since CF is not mandatory in Manitoba, a certificate may highlight the importance of French among other languages taught.
- Although Manitoba has optional implementation, the official entry point is grade 4. A certificate may be a first step to making French mandatory in some grades which would result in better articulation of programs across the province.

2.2.5 ONTARIO

- A CF certificate may encourage students finishing grade 9 (the last mandatory year) to complete grade 12 by acknowledging student achievement.
- Students in extended French are not eligible for an immersion certificate. A core French certificate would recognize their extra effort.

2.2.6 QUÉBEC

- Students are already strongly encouraged to learn French in Québec. French is mandatory in Québec from grade 1 until the end of high school (Secondaire 5). Students must pass oral and written exams at that time. Anglophone students may choose to try the exams given to francophone students. Those who pass have access to a variety of post-secondary offerings at CEGEPs and consequently to a wider variety of college/university programs. The Québec government grants bursaries of up to $2,000 to students wishing to pursue post-secondary education in French.
- A core French certificate would represent a double recognition for Québec core French students.

2.2.7 NEW BRUNSWICK

- New Brunswick issues a Certificate of Completion to core French (as well as immersion) graduates. Any students in a grade 12 French course in New Brunswick is eligible for the oral proficiency interview. Results are given in a certificate of proficiency which states the student's proficiency level (with performance descriptors for each level described on the reverse side). These certificates are recognized by NB employers offering bilingual positions.
- A core French certificate would represent a double recognition for New Brunswick core French students

2.2.8 NOVA SCOTIA

- A certificate may encourage students finishing grade 9 to complete grade 12 by acknowledging student achievement.
- One board gives oral proficiency interviews (the same one given in New Brunswick) to

graduating core and extended core students. Successful candidates receive a certificate.

- A core French certificate would represent a double recognition for Nova Scotia core French students.
- Students in extended French are not eligible for an immersion certificate. A core French certificate would recognize their extra effort.

2.2.9 PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

- A certificate may encourage students finishing grade 9 to complete grade 12 by acknowledging student achievement.

2.2.10 NEWFOUNDLAND/LABRADOR

- In Newfoundland/Labrador, three CF courses are offered to students at the senior high school level - Level I: FR 2200; Level II: FR 3200; and Level III: FR 3201. Although ideally, students taking CF in senior high school would take one course per year , FR 3201 is based on the assumption that students have sufficient proficiency to study content directly in French. Students in FR 3200 are required to pass a 15 minute oral interview as part of their course requirements. A written component will soon (has been already?) be added. Since not all students attain the required level of proficiency and not all schools are able to offer FR 3201, students often conclude their study of CF with FR 3200. A certificate may encourage boards to offer grade 12 CF and address irregularities in course offerings at grade 12.
- Students in extended French are not eligible for an immersion certificate. A core French certificate would recognize their extra effort.

3.0 Administrative considerations.

This section outlines some of the administrative issues to be considered including:

- who will issue the certificate?
- who will organize distribution?
- how much will it cost?
- how will it be marketed?

3.1 Who will issue the certificate?

Both CASLT and the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages (OCOL) have expressed interest in issuing the certificate. However, since education is a provincial responsibility, a certificate will need to be approved by the provincial/territorial ministries of education. At the same time, any additional qualifications deemed desirable by the province can be added to the requirements for receiving a certificate.

A roundtable discussion among provincial representatives could be a first step in the development of a national proficiency test. As mentioned earlier, discussion topics could include what is required to be proficient in a second language and how best to achieve this goal, commonalities in CF programs, and ways to align outcomes.

3.2 Who will organize distribution?

CASLT and OCOL could share the following distribution tasks:

- Initial request for number of expected graduates to school boards
- Printing and mail-out of certificates
- Request for list of certificate recipients
- Preparation of database
- Distribution of certificates at graduation.

Table 2 below presents the number of core French graduates by province over the last three years.

Table 2. Number of Grade 12 Core French Students by Province/Territory

	1999-0	2000-1	2001-2
Alberta	2,834	2,796	2,656
British Columbia	5,155	5,108	5,399
Manitoba	1,093	960	1,060
New Brunswick	5,639	5,061	5,195
Newfoundland	592	566	423
Nova Scotia	1,540	1,274	1,115

Northwest Territories	35	33	25
Nunavut	unavailable	unavailable	0
Ontario	1,063 (12) 7,934 (OAC)	878 (12) 7,285 (OAC)	unavailable
Prince Edward Island	126	156	115
Québec	6,541 (11)	6,591 (11)	6,817 (11)
Saskatchewan	1,869	1,649	1,264
Yukon Territories	49	34	23
Total	33,407 (- ON 12)	31,513 (- ON 12)	24,092 (no ON)

* adapted from CPF's *State of French Second Language in Canada 2002*

There are approximately 360 school boards in Canada.

3.3 Cost: Production and distribution of certificates

The cost of certificates depends on the amount of detail desired. A one-colour, 81/2 x 11 certificate with a logo printed on both sides would cost $1,080 for 30,000 copies (quote from Performance Printing, Smith Falls). This does not include design. Mail-out costs would also need to be added. Time for yearly organization has also not been factored.

3.4 How will it be marketed?

- Solicit support of Canadian corporations as a step towards bilingualism
- Workshops at language and language-related conferences
- Newsletters through second language organizations

4.0 Model Certificates

Two model certificates have been prepared to provide an overall idea of what a core French certificate might look like. These certificate prototypes are found in separate files:

The first is a generic certificate that could be used in every province/territory. School board or school officials would be required to print the name of the province and the name of the student on each certificate before distribution. The back of the certificate lists the final course in the core French series offered by each province and a generic description of what core French graduates should be able to do in French.

The second is a provincial certificate using NB as the example. School board or school officials would be required to print the name of the student on each certificate before distribution. The back of the certificate list the description of what a graduate from the NB core French program should be able to do (taken from the NB website).