



## **2006 National FSL Teacher Survey** by Alina MacFarlane, PhD

In 2006, a national survey of French as a second language (FSL) teachers was jointly undertaken by the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT), the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF), and the Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers (CAIT). The survey was funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage.

A total of 1305 FSL teachers representing all provinces and territories and all four FSL program types currently available in Canada (Core French, French Immersion, Extended French, and Intensive French), completed a Web-based questionnaire on their perceptions regarding resources, support from key stakeholders, teaching conditions, and professional development opportunities.

### **Findings**

Overall, there were very few significant differences in teachers' responses attributable to FSL program taught, province/territory, size of school/board, teaching experience, language background, or professional training. Findings indicate that:

- The majority of teachers consider commercial materials and library resources to be “poor” or “adequate”;
- More than 40% of the teachers do not have a classroom dedicated to FSL or a FSL consultant to help them with their teaching;
- The majority of teachers report that funding for activities as well as the availability of French-speaking supply teachers, consultants for students with special needs, and French-speaking non-teaching staff are also concerns;
- Most teachers consider the community in which they teach to be the least supportive of their work while school administration is perceived to be very supportive;
- The majority of FSL teachers report that teaching conditions are “slightly” or “somewhat” manageable. It may be, however, that teachers found it difficult to interpret this question since “class diversity” was the challenge most often mentioned in open-ended questions;
- Most FSL teachers report participation in professional development activities (PD) each year. They suggest that more funding, relevant topics, sessions during school hours, and the availability of French-speaking supply teachers would make PD more accessible to them.

## Future Directions

The survey report concluded with a number of suggestions for future directions:

- Negative attitudes towards FSL have been well documented in the literature and substantiated by this survey. Teacher associations need to work with such groups as the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages (OCOL) and Canadian Parents for French (CPF) to document the advantages of learning French, improve the image of FSL, and change societal attitudes.
- Almost 40% of respondents have considered leaving FSL teaching in the last year. There is a need for a follow-up study of the teaching and learning conditions that have led to this result. Teacher associations can provide research findings on newer, more successful program models, and ways of overcoming scheduling restrictions to provincial/territorial departments of education and school board officials.
- Only 31.6% of respondents hold FSL specialist certificates. To what extent does this play a role in their ability to meet the challenges of FSL teaching and their future as FSL teachers? Sponsoring associations, in partnership with faculties of education, may be able to answer this question and ensure that faculty curricula reflect the resulting findings.
- 50% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with commercial materials and the ways in which they represent Francophone culture. This implies that 50% have found suitable resources. Sponsoring associations can help teachers locate “good” resources and work with educational publishers to develop new ones.
- It is impossible to determine the representativeness of the sample of responding teachers because there is no comprehensive listing of FSL teachers in Canada. Information on the demographics of FSL would greatly facilitate future research as well as communication, including the distribution of information and resources to FSL teachers in Canada.

*Alina MacFarlane is the CASLT Research Officer and one of the three researchers involved in this National FSL Teacher survey project.*

*The full report entitled “Teaching French as a Second Language in Canada: Teachers’ Perspectives” is available in both English and French versions on the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers’ (CASLT) Web site, [www.caslt.org](http://www.caslt.org). Key strategies to help address pressing issues faced by French as a Second Language (FSL) educators were on the agenda at the CASLT annual Networking Day, held in Halifax December 1 2006.*