



**Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers
Association canadienne des professeurs de langues secondes**

**Brief presented to the
Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages**

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On behalf of the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT), I would like to thank the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages for having invited us to provide a summary of our association's views regarding best practices for language policies and second language learning in a context of linguistic duality and plurality.

The mission of CASLT, an association with a 43-year history, is to foster professional excellence in the teaching of second languages in Canada. It is composed of over 3000 members, and its organizational structure, representative of all Canadian Provinces and Territories, allows it to support its members, and the second language community at large, through professional learning, pedagogical resources, the dissemination of research and advocacy for language teaching and learning.

One of the greatest challenges in developing and assessing language policies is the challenge of speaking with one voice on issues when perspectives across the country are diverse. However, a strong core message that values language learning and its many benefits, which is endorsed at the federal level, can assist significantly to promote, advance and encourage additional language education programs.

A panCanadian policy would advance the learning of official and additional languages, which, as we know, confers numerous benefits on learners such as enhanced self-esteem, access to broader employment opportunities, the knowledge industry, culture, travel and personal relationships. Language learning also enhances intercultural understanding, strengthens the learner's first language, and through communication, provides access to higher learning, employment and enriched perspectives.

I will highlight three important elements that could form the basis of a national language education policy or guidelines. I would like to add that throughout the information shared with you, the term "additional" is used to define any language other than the first language or mother tongue.

First, I would like to emphasize the role that a Common Framework of Reference for Languages, based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (the CEFR) can play in establishing a common terminology and benchmark for all Canadian language learners. The CEFR has become an International standard and provides clear, neutral, common language for understanding language competencies and is being used in almost every country in the world, many of which are our close economic or educational partners and friends. The implementation and use of the CEFR in Canada has been to varying degrees and requires coordination and a national impetus. CASLT has played a major role in the work related to using the CEFR in Canada for the learning, teaching and evaluation of languages and will continue to collaborate with the federal government and support its members with its implementation.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages is not only a tool for elementary and secondary levels, but also for post-secondary, the labour market, immigration, Canada's own International Education market, and national and international mobilization. The framework also emphasizes learner autonomy by providing a pathway for language learning, thus accentuates the fact that learning a language does not stop after grade 12, but is a lifelong skill to be maintained.

In our view, it is time for Canada to adopt the use of one tool to define language competencies for all citizens, immigrants, international students, at any age and for all languages in the world and used in the international and national workplace in Canada. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages offers this kind of tool -- it is the only tool/framework of its kind that is flexible enough for all language learners and language users regardless of age or language learning status.

Second, I turn to the supply of and demand for Official Second Language programs, such as French Immersion, Intensive French, Core French, Core English and Intensive English. It is vital to have a panCanadian language policy that encourages, supports and requires learning of the two

official languages at all education levels that allow learners to establish a solid understanding and grasp of their second official language.

Although language learning is often promoted mostly by the citizens of Canada and the associations that support language teaching and school districts/schools/teachers, additional support is needed to promote the benefits Second Language learning by better informing parents, students, principals, administrators, policy-makers and decision-makers about the advantages of acquiring a second or additional language (especially to new immigrants and parents of children with special needs).

Additional Language Education should be promoted and valued as being essential in the 21 century for interpersonal and intercultural development, long-term brain health and dexterity, and for responding to the needs and demands of the global economy.

Organizations such as CASLT which advance excellence in language teaching and learning with a broad focus on additional languages (English, French, First Nation Languages, Spanish, German, Japanese, and so on) articulate the importance of plurilingualism in the Canadian context. The value of learning Canada's official languages within our plurilingual context is unparalleled. A focus on the ways in which languages can support and inform the learning of English or French is important. The focus on the integral relationship between language and culture also needs greater emphasis. But more importantly, the focus on developing a strong Canada, populated by plurilingual, pluricultural citizens who are prepared to participate in the global community that our world has become. Our association is well-placed to work with the federal government in informing its policy and advancing it.

Although education is a provincial and territorial responsibility, a broad panCanadian policy on language learning would assist Canadian jurisdictions in establishing local policies and guidelines that would foster additional language learning. For example, a panCanadian statement could emphasize the benefit to Canadian society (greater appreciation of different cultures, valuing

our multicultural society), the value to the learner (communication skills, reinforcing the first language, broadening perspectives) and the need for language learning opportunities for all (new Canadian students, students with special learning needs).

The federal government needs to continue to place resources into financing language associations which support teachers in the field. Research needs to be developed to share with practitioners. The government needs to promote that languages are good for all – starting with the official languages which are also two of the most influential languages in the world – the COE (Council of Europe) and Canada are just two of the leaders worldwide that have French and English as official languages.

Ministries of education must work to identifying barriers and challenges to access, establishment, support, and promotion of high quality Second Language Education. Then they must put in place policies to address and redress these obstacles. For example, we need explicit policies directed at immigrant students to encourage their participation in FSL (a third language for them); we have ample research to suggest that they excel at this and that paradoxically, they are often excluded from it. Another example is New Brunswick's target of 70% of all high school graduates to be able to effectively communicate in their second official language. But work could also be done to calibrate Grade 12 exit proficiency across Provinces/Territories, and then calibrated this to post-secondary admission, Public Service entry and entry to the labour market.

An interprovincial/territorial working group or committee should be set up to discuss these and other issues. The federal government could promote the establishment of such a group.

Working with CMEC to ensure that such guidelines and policies are developed would facilitate the work, especially, if adequate funding is provided, and if reporting of the use of these funds are accountable and transparent.

The many challenges that face school administration in setting up and maintaining solid Second Language Education discourage the establishment programs. Hence support to create more

Second Language education programs must be set as a priority. The federal government should be seen as demonstrating the promotion and the support of Second Language Education programming. For example, making Second Language learning mandatory in provinces and territories, by funding incentives should be considered.

School boards, administrators, principals need also to be better informed, trained and supported to promote, launch and maintain Second Language programs. Clear guidelines and policies would facilitate their work. They must also be supported in multiple ways: with enough adequate information, facilities, transportation, educational resources, opportunities for professional development, contact with the culture of the language taught, trained personnel (teachers, yes, but also counsellors, teaching aids, etc.), and so on. All of the above are lacking to some degree in schools across the country.

Third, Innovative, research-based, approaches must be developed and studied. For example, virtual language classes and virtual language passports and portfolios should be accessible to all Canadian students and Canadians adults. The work of the Centre for Distance and Learning Innovation in Newfoundland-Labrador, and that of CAMET (Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training) are demonstrations of innovative approaches to Second Language Education.

Universities, research institutes and Second Language associations must be funded to support research in second language acquisition, learning, assessment and teaching (what works best, what to improve and how to improve it). They must also be supported in disseminating to the L2 education communities their research findings and best practice. Researchers and other pedagogical leaders and practitioners must be given forum and resources to continue their good work.

Faculties of education must be encouraged to promote the L2 teaching profession, and to ensure that their graduate programs include current and relevant course content such as

multiculturalism, inclusion, new technologies, social media, etc. More post-secondary institutions must offer programs to bilingual learners. Not only universities, but colleges across Canada must do so as well. The Immersion Program at the University of Ottawa is an excellent example that needs to be replicated elsewhere.

There is a relatively rich literature on good practices, for example the results of the CEFR. CASLT is an exemplary association that can continue to take a leadership role in all things CEFR and how it relates to the learning, teaching and evaluation of languages in Canada. A compendium of effective practices in Canadian jurisdictions, resources developed by national associations focused on language teaching and learning would also provide excellent guidance.

Public policy needs to value official bilingualism, and plurilingualism. All newcomers to Canada should learn both official languages. Promoting second or additional language use in the 21c is no longer an asset, it is a must. The world markets demand it; social, interpersonal networking for career development and career longevity requires pluricultural understanding and multilingual competencies.

On behalf of CASLT and its members, I offer my gratitude for your invitation and your interest in our views on these important matters that are integral to the continued development of our vibrant Canadian society.

Recommendations

- The Federal government engage in a pan-Canadian campaign to promote second language (L2) learning and the benefits of learning Canada's official languages. This strategy should also inform parents, students, the general public, new immigrants, principals, administrators, etc. regarding access to L2 programs.
- Fund a Common Framework of Reference for Language (CFRL) leadership through a national body such as CASLT to promote, coordinate and lead a CFRL implementation strategy with a

view to establish a framework of guidelines with regards to acquisitions, learning, teaching, assessing, etc.; or promote the establishment of such a framework through a funding formula via CMEC and CASLT.

- Increase the value of official languages education by promoting the CFRL to the public and private sectors.
- Encourage the government to support the SSHRC to fund research and dissemination of research results in Second Language Education (acquisition, teaching, teacher training, etc.)
- Finance additional exchange programs for teachers (for language and cultural training).
- Create a standing national (provincial and territorial experts) working group to study and discuss L2 issues, and share the results with stakeholders, policy-makers and decision-makers.
- Develop a more focussed national strategy for L2 education, by involving key national players such national second language associations, and the university communities.
- Encourage faculties of educations to promote the value of the L2 teaching profession and increase enrollment, and to offer cultural and linguistic exchange programs.
- Substantially increase funding to the second language component of Canadian Heritage programming.