Bilingualism in a Plurilingual Canada Podcast Series

Teaching French as a Second Language in Canada: Teachers’ Perspectives, by Sharon Lapkin

Author
Sharon Lapkin is a Professor Emerita in the Modern Language Centre and Second Language Education program of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. Her research focuses on French as a second language (FSL) education in all its forms.
slapkin@oise.utoronto.ca

Summary
Sharon Lapkin share the results and implications of a national survey led by CASLT on FSL teacher working conditions.

Teacher Working Conditions Findings:

- Teacher respondents considered library resources, computer software and community resources to be poor. Immersion teachers in particular commented on the lack of materials available representing francophone culture.
- Close to half the teacher respondents reported that they had no classroom dedicated to FSL and no access to a consultant.
- In general school administration was perceived as very supportive, while the community was perceived to be the least supportive of FSL.
- The most frequently reported challenge in terms of teaching conditions was class diversity.
- Teachers suggested that professional development (PD) would be more accessible to them if there was more funding, a focus on relevant topics, and if PD was offered during school hours.

Main Implications of the Study:
1. Future research on FSL teachers and teaching would be greatly facilitated by information on the demographics of FSL teaching.
2. The greatest challenges for FSL teachers in any program is meeting expectations in terms of a high level of proficiency in French, excellence in teaching, and knowledge of experiential, interactive second language teaching approaches. Faculties of education must be made aware to ensure that FSL teacher preparation curricula take this into account.
3. We know relatively little about recent graduates from faculties of education. Are they better prepared for the challenges awaiting them? A study needs to be done of teachers during their first years of teaching.

4. There is a great need for PD activities that target areas such as upgrading French language skills and providing information on newer methodologies, among others. A collective effort among the departments of education, school boards and provincial and national associations can play a direct role in facilitating the organization of this PD.

5. There are clear needs in the area of resources. Teachers were overwhelmingly dissatisfied with the ways in which Francophone culture is reflected in available teaching materials, with library resources, computer software and opportunities for French language support in the community.

6. Negative attitudes towards French need to be changed. Agencies such as the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages and Canadian Parents for French attempt to change public attitudes; if teacher federations at the national, provincial/territorial and local levels, could partner with them, this would go a long way to improving the situation of the FSL teacher who is all too often marginalized.

7. 40% of the teacher respondents reported having considered leaving FSL teaching. This calls for a follow-up study to discover more about their reasons and how associations might help to address this systemic problem and reduce the number of disaffected teachers.

8. A lot of instructional time is lost from short daily periods for setting up and closing the period. Longer blocks of teaching time can lead to better outcomes for core French, as can newer program models such as intensive French.

Further Reading
