

VERSION PODIUM

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Allocution dans le cadre du Forum de QUESCREN sur l'éducation et la vitalité

(3 303 mots)

Rencontre virtuelle

5 novembre 2021

Seul le texte prononcé fait foi

Lands recognition

[ENGLISH]

Good afternoon. I would like to begin by acknowledging that I am speaking to you from Treaty One territory, the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota and Dene peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation. I am happy to be joining you today.

Conference overview, themes

I'd like to thank the Quebec English-Speaking Communities Research Network for inviting me to speak with you. I had the pleasure of speaking at your Forum in 2018, and I'm very pleased to see another opportunity to bring together researchers, practitioners, stakeholders and policy-makers to focus on solutions for the future of Quebec's diverse English-speaking communities.

In the ongoing pandemic situation, this multidisciplinary approach to working on best practices and initiatives is as important as ever. We need to come together to collectively navigate what our new normal is and to figure out how the past year and a half has affected the vitality of our communities and what that means for their future.

Personal Introduction

Just to repeat very briefly, for those of you who were not at the first Forum three years ago, I come from a small village in Manitoba—Ste. Anne des Chênes—about 50 kilometres southeast of Winnipeg.

[FRANÇAIS]

À l'époque de mon enfance, ce patelin était entièrement composé de Canadiens français, et, pourtant, je n'avais pas accès à l'école française.

J'avais 16 ans lorsque la *Loi sur les langues officielles* a été adoptée. C'était pour moi et pour ma génération une affirmation de qui nous étions comme Canadiens français et comme Franco-Manitobains par la suite.

Je me suis longtemps consacré aux domaines de l'enseignement, de la recherche et de l'administration universitaire, notamment en tant que recteur et vice-chancelier de l'Université de Moncton, de 2012 à 2018.

Auparavant, j'ai occupé un poste de sous-ministre adjoint au ministère de l'Éducation et au ministère de la Formation, des Collèges et des Universités de l'Ontario, en plus d'assurer la

direction de la Société franco-manitobaine, qui défend les intérêts de la communauté francophone au Manitoba.

Donc, l'importance de l'éducation, et surtout de l'éducation en milieu minoritaire, a toujours été et continue d'être un fil conducteur dans ma vie.

Speech themes

[ENGLISH]

And so, I'm very glad to be here with you today and to be a part of this important work on education and vitality.

Today I'd like to talk about diversity in education—one of the conference themes—as I've experienced it over the course of my lifetime, and to share some reflections and raise some questions for potential further study as we look to the future, especially in

terms of how our official languages are part of a broader fundamental value of inclusion.

Historical perspective

When we talk about diversity in education in Canada, it's instructive to look back on how notions of diversity have been defined over time and what changes we have seen.

If we look back to 1867, for example, the constitution, then known as the ***British North America Act***, laid down a framework for diversity in education along religious lines: it provided a constitutional right to either a Protestant or Roman Catholic education. But within this framework, French-speaking Catholics outside Quebec had difficulty getting access to French-language education.

In my home province of Manitoba, this led to a crisis. At the time of the ***Manitoba Act*** in 1870, the non-First Nations population was roughly half French-speaking Catholics and half English-speaking Protestants, and public funds for schools reflected that balance. But as demographics shifted over time and English-speaking Protestants grew in number, cultural and religious tensions increased, and in 1890 a non-denominational school system was created. The French-Catholic schools lost their funding, and all public schools were English only. French-speaking Manitobans felt their language and culture were being threatened and that their rights had been violated.

This fuelled religious tensions not just in Manitoba, but also among French speakers and English speakers across Canada. Eventually a compromise was struck in Manitoba, allowing some French in addition to English in public schools, but only if there

were enough students.¹ Unfortunately, another result of that conflict was that English became the only provincial official language in Manitoba until 1985, and because of that, the use of French declined.

[FRANÇAIS]

De ce fait, je n'ai pas eu accès à une éducation en français durant mon enfance. Mon manuel scolaire de sciences sociales était intitulé *My British Heritage*, ce à quoi aucun des enfants canadiens français de ma classe ne pouvait s'identifier. C'est ma mère qui s'est occupée de m'enseigner l'histoire des Franco-Manitobains et qui m'a raconté l'histoire de Louis Riel. Grâce à mes parents, qui se sont battus pour nos droits à l'éducation, mes plus jeunes frères et sœurs ont pu recevoir une éducation en français au Manitoba.

¹ J.E. Rea and Jeff Scott, "[Manitoba Act](#)," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, Last modified on January 7, 2021.

[ENGLISH]

In Ontario at the turn of the 20th century, linguistic diversity in education was threatened with the introduction of **Regulation 17** in 1912, which stipulated that English was to be the only language of instruction and of communication with students beyond Grade 2 in all schools across the province. French-speaking Catholics had to attend temporary “Anglo-French schools,” which were designed to transition those students to learning in English and to move them away from French.² Regulation 17 was effectively repealed in 1927, but its impact continues to resonate.³

Both the Manitoba and Ontario examples illustrate how watering down language rights had an impact on generations of children. And throughout much of the 20th century, a shortage of French-

² Compendium of Language Management in Canada, “[Regulation 17: Circular of Instruction No. 17 for Ontario Separate Schools for the School Year 1912–1913](#),” *University of Ottawa*, (n.d.).

³ Marilyn Barber and Paul-François Sylvestre, “[Ontario Schools Question](#),” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, Last modified on February 22, 2016.

language education options contributed to the assimilation of Francophones outside of Quebec.

The story of diversity in education played out much differently in Quebec, notably in Montréal, which was the largest city in Canada for more than the first half of the 20th century. Montréal's English-language community, which had a strong denominational education system, was absorbing new waves of non-Anglo-Saxon immigration—Jews from eastern Europe and immigrants from Greece, Italy, other European countries and the Caribbean. Most immigrants attended schools reflecting their own religions, but Jews were not allowed into Catholic schools, so they had to attend Protestant schools. As columnist Josh Freed of the *Montreal Gazette* wrote, even though he's Jewish, he went to Protestant schools and came out knowing the lyrics and melody of "Jesus Loves Me" as well as any Protestant kid!

Quebec's *Charter of the French Language*, Bill 101, completely changed the diversity equation in education when it was passed in 1977. French-language schools, still mostly under the Catholic confessional system, were now confronted with the challenge of managing diversity, as the new law put an end to the right of immigrants to attend English schools.

It wasn't until 1997 that the province negotiated a constitutional amendment with the federal government, with the approval of the English-speaking minority, for schools to be reorganized along linguistic lines, replacing the religious framework that had been in place since the beginning of Confederation.

[FRANÇAIS]

Pendant ce temps, la consécration de la ***Charte canadienne des droits et libertés*** dans la *Loi constitutionnelle de 1982*

représentait un point culminant pour l'éducation des francophones hors Québec. La nouvelle constitution de 1982 demandait aux deux majorités, les francophones au Québec et les anglophones ailleurs, d'accommoder les minorités de langue officielle en leur sein.

À titre de premier ministre, Pierre Elliott Trudeau expliqua : « la clause [23] ... obligera les autres neuf provinces anglophones à donner de l'éducation à leurs minorités francophones – et, je le dis en passant, je crois que c'est un jour noble pour le Canada où enfin nous avons reconnu que les minorités scolaires francophones partout au Canada auront maintenant une garantie constitutionnelle d'être protégées. »⁴

⁴ Pierre Elliott Trudeau, transcription d'un discours prononcé lors de la Conférence fédérale-provinciale des premiers ministres sur la Constitution, Ottawa, 5 novembre 1981.

Cette partie de la *Charte*, la clause 23, est également de nature réparatrice, c'est-à-dire qu'elle doit être interprétée par les tribunaux de façon large et libérale afin d'aider à réparer ou à compenser les actions suppressives qui ont contribué au déclin de la vitalité de la langue française à l'extérieur du Québec, ainsi que des communautés francophones minoritaires.

Education and vitality

[ENGLISH]

Education and educational institutions are, have been and will always be intrinsically linked to community vitality. Within QUESCREN, and in official language minority communities across Canada more generally, there is increasing interest in the concept of an education continuum. That is to say, while section 23 provides certain guarantees for minority-language education at the elementary and high school level, there are other

challenges. Outside of Quebec, efforts are under way to preserve and promote French-language post-secondary education.

[FRANÇAIS]

Nous avons vu les réactions des communautés aux coupes dans les institutions postsecondaires des communautés de langue officielle en situation minoritaire, comme à l'Université Laurentienne à Sudbury, en Ontario, et au Campus Saint-Jean, en Alberta. Ces coupes sont malavisées et ne tiennent pas compte des répercussions à long terme sur la vitalité des communautés.

Nous avons également été témoins d'une extraordinaire mobilisation des différents ordres de gouvernement et de groupes communautaires pour la construction de l'Université de l'Ontario français, qui a accueilli sa première cohorte d'étudiants de

premier cycle à temps plein. C'est un dénouement très prometteur pour l'avenir du français en Ontario.

[ENGLISH]

In Quebec's English-speaking communities, I'm discovering that challenges in the continuum are presenting themselves in early childhood education. This is particularly true outside of Montréal, where the English-speaking minority is experiencing problems that are similar to those of many Francophone communities outside of Quebec, and where it is sometimes difficult to access early childhood services in the minority official language.

I had a meeting on this issue recently with the Committee for Anglophone Social Action (CASA) in the Gaspé region and with the Community Health and Social Services Network in Québec City. The needs in early childhood education that they described

reminded me of the same needs I had when I was a young parent in a Francophone minority community in Manitoba.

A program developed by CASA called Bright Beginnings is being implemented across Quebec with funding from a private foundation, and there is clearly a need for more focused action in this area on the part of the federal government. And that's not to say Montréal doesn't have its own needs, too. Both in and outside of Montréal, there are shortages of specialized English-language services for pre-schoolers, in speech therapy and in other areas.

Modern tensions

To be sure, Quebec's English-language schools are facing some significant new issues today, including on the diversity front.

I am following these issues closely. Quebec’s *Act respecting the laicity of the State*—also known as Bill 21, or the “secularism law,”—and its *Act to amend mainly the Education Act with regard to school organization and governance*—also known as Bill 40—which abolished school boards and replaced them with service centres, are currently being challenged before the courts, so I am therefore limited in what I can say, given my role.

Meanwhile, Bill 96, the new language bill to amend the *Charter of the French Language*, could have a negative affect on future enrolment in English schools. My office is currently undertaking a careful legal and policy analysis of the issue. I hope the Government of Quebec will keep the lines of communication open with the English-speaking communities as it moves forward with the modernization of the *Charter of the French Language*.

My office is also looking at what impact Bill 96 could have on the modernization of the *Official Languages Act*. The principle of substantive equality of our two official languages is a fundamental concept of language rights in Canada.

Of course, I have noted the increasing language tensions around Bill 96. It is important that disagreements related to these issues can be debated in a spirit of respect for opposing viewpoints.

[FRANÇAIS]

Je m'inquiète toutefois des médias sociaux. La prolifération des réactions instinctives a un effet de division dans tout le Canada. Comment pouvons-nous faire en sorte qu'il y ait toujours un débat raisonné et un respect mutuel tout en allant de l'avant? Je crois que des conférences comme celle-ci sont essentielles. Des conférences où divers points de vue sont représentés, où nous

réfléchissons sérieusement à la diversité et où nous contribuons à forger une volonté commune de progresser de façon constructive.

Linguistic insecurity

[ENGLISH]

We've heard a lot about **linguistic insecurity** over the past couple of years, and there is an important link to make here with inclusion and education.

Linguistic insecurity in English or French is the idea that people aren't comfortable using these languages, whether it's their first or second official language. You could be a perfectly bilingual Franco-Albertan who is reluctant to speak in your French mother tongue because you feel that it makes others uncomfortable. Or you could be an English-speaking Quebecer who feels pressure to use French rather than English. You may be happy to use

French, but you may also be getting the message that your language is not welcome. Or you may fear that your French will be judged as inadequate. For a variety of reasons, there are insecurities at play.

[FRANÇAIS]

Voltaire a dit : « Le mieux est l'ennemi du bien. » J'entends souvent les gens dire qu'ils trouvent que leurs compétences dans leur seconde langue officielle ne seront jamais suffisamment bonnes. Pour être à l'aise avec ses compétences « suffisamment bonnes », il faut se faire confiance et faire le saut. Ce saut en est un important à prendre, car pour devenir à l'aise à utiliser sa seconde langue dans différentes situations, il faut s'y exercer beaucoup. C'est en fait un projet de toute une vie. C'est un message que nous essayons de transmettre lors de nos présentations aux enfants d'âge scolaire au Québec, dans les

écoles de langue anglaise et de langue française, ainsi que partout au Canada.

[ENGLISH]

We talk about the vicious circle: you feel insecure using your second language, so you don't use it, and because you don't use it, you don't get better, and so you keep on not using it, and you never get better.

By contrast, there is the virtuous circle: you try, so you get better, and because you're getting better, you keep trying, and so you keep getting better. Importantly, your effort to try can also inspire others to practise their second-language skills more, so everyone feels more comfortable.

Sometimes, of course, all it can take is just a few negative comments from someone about the quality of your second-language French or English—your quote-unquote “bad” accent, say, or your occasional mispronunciation—to turn a **virtuous** circle back into a **vicious** one.

[FRANÇAIS]

Quand nous pensons à la diversité et à l’inclusion dans le contexte d’un pays avec deux langues officielles, il est important pour nous de penser à apporter un peu plus de **sécurité linguistique** dans la société canadienne : la liberté d’être à l’aise de parler au niveau de la langue qui est la vôtre. Cela signifie que l’on doit mieux accepter et reconnaître les diverses variétés de français et d’anglais au Canada et les efforts des gens pour apprendre nos langues officielles.

Diversity in Canada and in English-speaking Quebec

[ENGLISH]

It bears mentioning that our official languages belong to all Canadians, regardless of their ethnic, cultural or linguistic background.

According to the most recent Census data, there are nearly seven million people in Canada whose mother tongue is neither English nor French, but who use one or both official languages to **participate** in our broader society.

In Quebec, among those who speak English as their first official language, 33 percent (or 360,000 people) are immigrants, 30 percent (or 330,000 people) are visible minorities, and 4 percent (or 45,000 people) are Indigenous. The English-speaking communities of Quebec are diverse and becoming increasingly more so.

[FRANÇAIS]

Trop souvent, je constate un discours qui place le respect de la diversité et de l'inclusion d'un côté, et le respect pour les langues officielles de l'autre, comme s'ils étaient mutuellement exclusifs.

Ils ne le sont pas.

Le **Canada** devient de plus en plus diversifié, tout comme nos communautés de langue officielle en situation minoritaire.

Je crois qu'il est très important de comprendre qu'au Canada, nos politiques en matière de multiculturalisme et de langues ont toujours été destinées à coexister et à se renforcer mutuellement : nous avons une politique sur les langues officielles **et** une politique sur le multiculturalisme, **et** nous avons maintenant une politique sur les langues autochtones. « **Et** », un

mot si petit mais si fort à la fois qui représente l'inclusion, l'une de nos grandes forces en tant que pays.

Reconciliation and official languages

[ENGLISH]

In my own lifetime, as I've said, I have witnessed first-hand some extraordinary changes in Canadian society. And not just publicly, but personally too: I have grandchildren of Indigenous background.

We've just marked Canada's first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation to honour the Survivors and lost children of residential schools, as well as their families and their communities. I recently spoke with Jamie Moses, the new Language Commissioner of the Cree Nation Government of Quebec, and learned that both of his parents went to French-language residential schools in Quebec and that he was raised

mostly by his grandparents. There is a growing realization that we all need to learn more about the history of residential schools in order to help mitigate the shortcomings in the traditional teaching of our national history.

[FRANÇAIS]

La voie de la réconciliation est essentielle pour le succès de notre pays.

Cette prise de conscience a suscité un soutien accru du public envers la préservation et la promotion des langues autochtones.

Oui, je suis le commissaire aux langues officielles du Canada **et** je soutiens pleinement la promotion, la protection et la revitalisation des langues autochtones dans le cadre du processus de réconciliation.

Reimagining Canada

[ENGLISH]

I'm convinced that the story of Canada will never be complete—and that's a good thing! Each generation works to re-examine the past and question the present, with a view to reimagining a brighter future.

Right now, we are at a pivotal time where we're taking a good hard look at Canadian identity (and, in Quebec, at Quebec identity, as well) and figuring out how to “vivre ensemble,” as we say in French.

In closing

In closing, I'd like to commend you for focusing this forum on diversity and education, because by talking about education, we

are essentially talking about our youth, and by talking about our youth, we are talking about our future.

The English education system in Quebec has **always** been a fertile ground for trying new ideas and approaches in education. Your willingness to innovate will continue to be important, going forward.

And so will your research. I look forward to the research that will be coming out on bills 21, 40 and 96. QUESCREN is a well-placed hub for research in Quebec, and I'm pleased to see that there's a growing pool of researchers who are getting more opportunities to contribute their expertise on issues relating to education, language and culture within Quebec's English-speaking communities.

[FRANÇAIS]

C'est un grand honneur pour moi de servir en tant que commissaire, durant cette période à la fois stimulante et passionnante, et d'avoir l'occasion de contribuer à façonner la politique sur les langues officielles pour les années et les générations à venir.

[ENGLISH]

Thank you for your attention. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask them in the official language of your choice.

[FRANÇAIS]

Merci de votre attention. Je serai heureux de répondre à vos questions dans la langue officielle de votre choix.