

Vital communities and critical institutions for the transmission of English- speaking Quebec's cultural, social, and historical identity

Educational institutions within a Minority Language Context
TOWNSHIPERS' ASSOCIATION

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Introduction

For 40 years now Townshipers' Association has been a leader in community engagement, pursuing its mission to promote the interests of the English-speaking community in Quebec's historical Eastern Townships, strengthen its cultural identity, and encourage the full participation of the English-speaking population in the community at large. We work on behalf of over 46,000 English-speakers who are spread across a region that is larger than Belgium, stretching from Philipsburg in the west to Megantic in the east, and from Inverness in the north to the U.S. border in the south. This paper will demonstrate how the role of education in a minority language context is much more comprehensive than simply ensuring academic success or instruction in English and is inherently linked to the transmission of its collective history and culture over generations with particular emphasis on the English-speaking community of Quebec (hereafter referred to as the ESCQ), who are struggling to sustain their vitality (Gonsalves, Kueber, Langevin, and Pocock 2014).

Review of the literature

A minority language group's vitality can be gauged by examining how different variables present within multilingual environments impact the resilience of that language community (Bourhis and Landry 2012; Hunting 2015). With mechanisms in place enabling the language community to strengthen its overall well-being, its ability to maintain itself and flourish as a collective body increases; minority language communities who lack vitality stand to disappear completely (Bourhis and Landry 2012; Jedwab 2012; Hunting 2015).

Important factors contributing to OLMC vitality include:

- Opportunities for education, recreational, and cultural activities in the official minority language;
- Institutions offering services in the official minority language;
- Opportunities for participation in the economic and social expansion of the OLMC
- Support and cooperation between language communities, including a recognition and respect for language rights
- Opportunities to influence authorities within majority community institutions (Canadian Heritage 2013; Hunting 2015).

The concept of *institutional completeness*, referring to the number of diverse institutions that are specific to a minority community (schools, places of worship, community centers, etc) that serve as important community hubs providing opportunities for minority group members to meet and interact, is particularly relevant for individuals belonging to minority language communities given the increased barriers they report when attempting to access the education, health and employment sectors (Breton 1964; QCGN 2009; ESSP 2015; Hunting 2015). When applied to the English-

speaking minority community in Quebec (ESCQ) the link between the concept of institutional completeness and a vital OLMC becomes evident; a community that has access to its own cultural and linguistic institutions can transfer its identity and continue making contributions to its history (Landry, Allard, Deveau 2013; Hunting 2015). Access to institutions wherein OLMC members can affirm their individual and collective identities, access resources, and experience their culture in a concrete way is fundamental for those trying to negotiate Quebec society in this context, especially when one accounts for the diversity of Quebec's English-speaking community and how it is scattered across the province (Lamarre 2008; QCGN 2009; Hunting 2015).

In Quebec, English-language educational institutions are not just schools where the language of instruction is English or libraries where English resources are housed; when belonging to an OLMC, these institutions are revealed as critical meeting places for the communication of the cultural, social, and historical identity of one of the founding peoples of the province (QCGN, 2009).

Educational institutions are an important foundation of institutional completeness for OLMCs due to the impact of their contribution in the development of the next generation of social actors equipped to influence the future social organization of the minority community (Landry et al 2013; ESSP 2015). These institutions also make important contributions to language socialization and ethnolinguistic identity development (Landry et al 2013; ESSP 2015). Historically, OLMC educational institutions have been recognized as important players in ensuring that the educational opportunities available for their minority language communities reflect community and regional values and priorities (Sheppard, Galway, Brown and Wiens 2013; ESSP 2015).

Educational institutions for OLMCs across the province are as diverse as the communities they are found in (QESBA 2006; ESSP 2015). Public institutions include one-room school houses on Entry Island in the Magdalen Islands, regional schools in smaller, more rural environments such as the Eastern Townships, and large schools in dense urban centers such as those found on the Island of Montreal (QESBA 2006; ESSP 2015). Post-secondary educational institutions offering programs for English-speakers tend to be concentrated in areas far removed from members OLMCs who reside in the more remote rural parts of Quebec; this reality contributes to retention issues faced by OLMCs in rural regions and further illustrates the important role smaller community-based learning opportunities play for members of those communities (QCGN 2009; ESSP 2015).

Demographic and socio-economic trends among English-speakers in the HET

The HET is home to approximately 40 000 individuals who identify their first official language spoken (FOLS) as English (JPocock 2018). Youth retention continues to challenge the renewal and vitality of our communities; the proportion of English-speakers aged 45 and up outweighs the proportion of those 0-44 (52.5% to 47.6% respectively) (JPocock 2018).

In 2016, just over half (53.2%) of English-speakers in the historical Eastern Townships held a high school certificate or less and their tendency to have a low income was elevated (40%) when compared to French-speakers (32.9%) in the region (JPocock 2018). Levels of unemployment were also higher among English-speakers (7.1%) in the HET when compared to their French-speaking counterparts (6%) (JPocock 2018). Provincially in 2016, 38.5% of English-speakers found themselves in a low-income bracket compared to 31.8% of the majority community. Low income is higher among English-speakers living in the Historical Eastern Townships (40% vs. 32.9%); the percentage of English-speakers in the HET who earn more 50K or more per year also falls below that of French-speakers in the same region (18.9% vs. 23.5%) (JPocock 2018).

In September 2016, the Centre intégré universitaire de santé et de services sociaux de l'Estrie – Centre hospitalier universitaire de Sherbrooke's (CIUSSS de l'Estrie-CHUS) Direction de santé publique (DSP) published a report citing data collected through the 2012 Québec Survey of Child Development in Kindergarten (QSCDK) measuring the proportion of vulnerable children in various areas of development. The 2016 DSP Estrie report showed that children in Estrie whose mother tongue is English are proportionately more likely to display a vulnerability in every stage of their development than children who have French as a mother tongue (CIUSSS de l'Estrie-CHUS 2016). In fact, the proportion of English-speaking children in Estrie identified by the region's public health institution as vulnerable is greater than that of their counterparts in the rest of the province in every stage of development (CIUSSS de l'Estrie-CHUS 2016). The proportion of schools tagged as disadvantaged in the Eastern Townships School Board is comparable to schools throughout Québec (31%) however, the attendance of childcare service before school is markedly lower for children enrolled in the ETSB (32.8%) than in both provincially (80.9%) and in the French school boards in the region (between 73.3 and 88.6%) (CIUSSS de l'Estrie-CHUS 2016). The lack of English-language childcare services and programs available for children aged 0-4 that are linked to the English school board system is an important factor to be considered in explaining the vulnerability of English-speaking children in Estrie (CIUSSS de l'Estrie-CHUS 2016).

Newcomers form a greater proportion of the English-speaking population in the HET compared to majority population sharing the same territory; a much higher proportion of the HET's English-speaking population was born outside the province or country (25.4% vs. 4.1%) (Pocock 2015). Mobility trends within the HET's English-speaking community show a significant proportion of newcomers to this region have moved here from another MRC within the province followed by those arriving from outside of Canada, and those moving from another province respectively (Pocock 2015).

Political and Legislative Context of the ESCQ

The *Official Languages Act*, as enacted in 1969, had the purpose of recognizing the equal status of English and French at the federal administrative level in order to ensure that Canadian citizens could access federal services in the official language of their choice (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages 2018). As a federal act however, the *Official Languages Act* only applies to federal institutions and not provincial governments, municipal governments, or the private sector (OCOL 2018). While many provinces and territories have enacted their own policies and legislation to protect languages and the Francophone communities within their boundaries it is important to acknowledge that Quebec's English-speaking minority community remains unrecognized through policy and legislation as being a linguistic minority with specific needs; the only provincial language legislation being Quebec's *Charter of the French Language* (OCOL 2018).

For Quebec's linguistic minority community to feel considered a vital part of Quebec society the OLMC must be able to see its reflection in the make-up of its own public administration; steps to improve the significant lack of English-speakers at work in Quebec's public service are essential (Jedwab 2012). The truly detrimental effects of the historic underrepresentation of the English-speaking community in Quebec's public service on the OLMC's vitality are revealed when one accounts for the province's jurisdiction in the administration of social sectors that are critically important to the minority language community's growth, specifically: education, immigration, and employment (Jedwab 2012). Continued underrepresentation of Quebec's English-speaking community not only impacts its members' sense of self in relation to the majority, but it also serves to erode its right to manage its own institutions as they are administered almost entirely within the public service (Jedwab 2012).

Jurisprudence

The Constitutional provisions for minority language education rights in Canada are outlined in Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (a non-exception clause) and since its creation, several cases relating to Section 23 Constitutional Rights have appeared before Canada's highest court; as a matter of practice, the legislative history of Section 23 is considered when making new rulings (ESSP 2015).

As noted by Canada's Supreme Court, the broad scope of Section 23 can actually result in disparities between Canada's linguistic minority groups and as such it recommended in 2003 that cases pertaining to this Section could typically be resolved by referencing the jurisprudence of three principal cases: *Mahe v Alberta*, *Reference Re Public Schools Act*, and *Arsenault-Cameron v Prince Edward Island* (ESSP 2015).

Mahe:

- refers to independent School Boards as a mechanism through which the Minority Language Communities can exercise their rights to the management and control of their education;


- notes that this is not always an appropriate way to fulfill this right
- defines a minimum of decision-making areas that fall to right-holders including
 - expenditures of funds provided for such instruction and facilities;
 - appointment and direction of those responsible for the administration of such instruction and facilities;
 - establishment of programs of instruction;
 - recruiting and assigning of teachers and other employees;
 - creating agreements for education and services for minority language pupils
- applies the sliding scale approach embraced in that case and all Section 23 cases that follow it to argue that English School Boards are protected from government intervention (ESSP 2015).

 *Arsenault-Cameron:*

- supports the application of the sliding scale approach (ESSP 2015)

 *Reference Re Public Schools Act:*

- considers demographic weight and geographic territory;
- implies the presence of facilities for instruction *and* for management and control (ESSP 2015).

 *Act to Amend the Education Act, the Act Respecting School Elections and Other Legislative Provisions [Linguistic School Boards Act]:*

- shifted from denominational to linguistic based School Boards;
- Québec's ESC a universally-elected and democratic level of direct accountability to their members (ESSP 2015).

Supporting OLMCs across Canada

Since being elected in October 2018, Quebec's government has expressed a desire to support the rights of Francophone communities living in the rest of Canada (ROC) with the Premier stating that "...we have to show the example...That's what I will continue to do" when questioned as to whether English-speakers in Quebec could expect a backlash against their minority language community following legislative decisions made in Ontario that cut services to Franco-Ontarians (Authier 2018). The following recent examples demonstrate the potential ripple effect of legislative decisions impacting one of Canada's minority language communities:

- The concern among Canada's minority language communities around how legislative decisions made in one province impact those made in others was demonstrated recently in Quebec in 2015 when plan to merge some boards and abolish school board elections introduced by Quebec by former Liberal Education Minister François Blais "prompted school board association presidents from Quebec, Ontario, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia to co-sign a letter expressing support for school democracy in

Quebec” (Plante 2015). One president expressed fears around how the erosion of democratic rights vis à vis minority language education in Quebec could lead to the same for Francophones in the ROC (Plante 2015).

- In the spring of 2016, representatives from two Canadian School Board Associations participated during the Committee on Culture and Education’s *Special consultations and public hearings on Bill 86, An Act to modify the organization and governance of school boards to give schools a greater say in decision-making and ensure parents’ presence within each school board’s decision-making body*. The Canadian School Boards Association (CSBA) and the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones (FNCSF) focused their arguments around how New Brunswick had scrapped school boards altogether in 1997 and brought back elected bodies four years later (Plante 2015).
- Recent discourse and legislative moves around the abolition or amalgamation of school boards from education ministers across Canada led Alberta’s current Minister of Education to publicly reaffirm his government’s belief that school boards and “having local decisions on the ground actually makes life better for kids and makes life better for Alberta families today” and the province’s United Conservative Party to pass a policy declaration “affirming, maintaining and protecting the existence and role of local, democratically elected school boards” and citing the “important role [they play] in providing local representation” (French 2018).
- Public outcry prompted the Saskatchewan Party government to abandon a 2017 proposal to amalgamate that province’s public-school boards (Catholic boards would have remained untouched) (Martin 2017).

Concluding remarks and recommendations

A central concern for Townshippers’ Association is current public discourse positioning Quebec’s Education Ministry in such a way that it will retain much of the decision-making power at the provincial level, particularly in areas related to curriculum. A close examination of the administrative structures at the Ministry of Education is required to ensure the constitutional right of the English-speaking communities of Quebec to have the primary say in running its schools. With planning for student success as a major orientation for both Townshippers and Quebec’s government, a minimum desired outcome of any proposed legislation would be to ensure that the curriculum prescribed for the English-language education sector receives a much higher and more hands-on level of input from the community it serves. The intention is not to challenge the authority of the Ministry but rather to encourage ongoing cooperation and involvement of our community in an area that is crucial to our future as fully participating members of Quebec Society.

Since the English-language school boards are the last remaining institutions that English-speaking citizens of rural Quebec can call their own, public discourse around their abolition is not only a community vitality issue, but an identity issue which must be taken seriously in any upcoming debates surrounding education in Quebec. English-language

schools are not just places where our children are educated; they are meeting places for the transmission of the cultural, social and historical identity of one of the founding peoples of Quebec. It is in this context that the question of how our community governs these schools becomes an issue that touches the vitality and identity of the English-speaking minority language community in the regions of Quebec in a very significant way. The maintenance of the community-based governance of our English-language educational institutions is critical to our community. Moreover, since the Canadian constitution provides for minority language communities to have independent governance of their schools, Townshippers' Association expects the government of Quebec to accept its moral obligation to recognize that English-language school boards are a vital extension of the English-speaking community. As such, they must remain within the control of that community at large, rather than in the exclusive domain of parent representatives.

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