

SUMMARY REPORT

Discussion Forum on the Continuum of French-Language
Learning Opportunities in Saskatchewan

Office of the Commissioner
of Official Languages

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Regina, Saskatchewan

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SUMMARY

This summary report outlines the context and recaps the discussions held in Regina in September 2012 regarding French-language postsecondary programs and opportunities in Saskatchewan. About 40 leaders gathered to take stock of the current situation and propose potential action to improve postsecondary education for both the Fransaskois community and non-Francophone youth who wish to continue learning valuable French language skills at the postsecondary level.

Graham Fraser was among those who gave brief presentations on the topic to set the stage for group discussions. Participants had an opportunity to voice their opinions and ideas for progress on this issue, addressing four themes.

1. Information sharing

Information is often shared within organizations or the community. However, more work needs to be done to share information beyond those networks. Community networks should therefore link up with government collaborative circles and vice versa. Participants felt that creating opportunities for dialogue as opposed to simply sharing information would benefit all parties. Often, more information can be exchanged through informal discussions than through formal means. Good leaders are usually very adept at sharing information. It is important to increasingly focus on the complementary objectives of organizations in terms of the need for French-language programs and increased opportunities for learning French at the postsecondary level.

2. Collaboration

Through collaboration, complementary skills come together to create collective strength more conducive to sharing experiences, attaining common objectives and producing positive outcomes. Collaboration should be proactive and not only occur during moments of crisis. With reference to education in particular, participants stated that collaboration should occur all along the continuum and not solely at the postsecondary level. Citizens or community members must always be at the heart of initiatives; leaders must not promote the personal interests of certain individuals or sub-groups.

3. Ideas, initiatives and best practices

There was a general feeling that it is easier to share ideas or propose initiatives when there is an existing relationship of trust between the parties or organizations involved. Any good idea, at some point, requires that a case be made for its benefits if it is to be pursued or implemented. Saskatchewan should pay close attention to examples in Western Canada, which more closely resemble its own reality. These best practices will, however, need to be adapted to the particular context in Saskatchewan.

4. Resource sharing and increasing opportunity

If an ongoing, open dialogue about postsecondary education in Saskatchewan were taking place, there would be less risk of duplicating efforts and resources. An environmental scan should be conducted to obtain a clear picture of the postsecondary programs and opportunities already offered in Saskatchewan and neighbouring provinces to better plan for the future. Fransaskois community leaders are very adamant about ensuring a full continuum of French-language education from kindergarten to the postsecondary level. There should be more opportunities for exchanges between different universities and other postsecondary institutions involving both Francophone and French-as-a-second-language students in different areas of study.

As the person who initiated the Discussion Forum, Commissioner Fraser commends the commitment and hard work that has been accomplished by all participants. In his afterword, he notes how the situation has evolved since these discussions began taking place. Many positive steps have been taken and a process to coordinate efforts is being developed. The Ministry of Advanced Education, in collaboration with the community and institutions, is proposing a coordinated approach called Vision 2030. Commissioner Fraser encourages those with an interest in improving postsecondary education in Saskatchewan to continue their efforts. They have much to gain by deepening the conversations that have begun, and exploring possibilities for collaboration and collective action.

COMMISSIONER'S FOREWORD

Since the beginning of my mandate, I have worked at building bridges between official language communities and ensuring that official languages issues receive the attention they deserve. Canada's official languages policy is federal in nature, but it belongs to all Canadians. Citizens and other levels of governments can play their part in ensuring that both the French and English languages, and the many communities who identify with one or the other, are a vibrant part of our national identity and public discourse.

Official language minority communities have been staunch supporters of linguistic and cultural diversity. They have understood the great advantages of having bilingualism as a building block of our public institutions as well as a personal value. Many English-speaking majority community members and new Canadians also support this value. Great strides have been made in improving proficiency in both official languages among Canadian youth.

However, there remains a gap between the language proficiency attained in high school and the language proficiency required in the practical world of the job market. My office has been very involved with organizations that seek to promote French-language learning opportunities at the postsecondary level. One of the results found in our studies is that immersion and postsecondary programs for the English-speaking majority do not fully take advantage of the potential contribution and vibrancy of local Francophone communities.

I was thrilled at the opportunity to discuss these issues with interested parties in Saskatchewan. The Fransaskois community has highlighted the importance of French postsecondary education. It has rallied around the Institut français at the University of Regina and Collège Mathieu. However, it is also important to engage the majority community's organizations and postsecondary institutions in order to progress. Many partners are interested in improving French-language postsecondary programs and opportunities.¹

This forum is, I hope, one of many opportunities for the Fransaskois community and its partners to come together on the issue of postsecondary education and linguistic duality. We have much to gain in ensuring that Francophones and Francophiles alike can have access to quality postsecondary education in French. We should not have to choose between bilingualism and postsecondary education. Constructive dialogue on the challenges and opportunities for collaboration is the key to success.

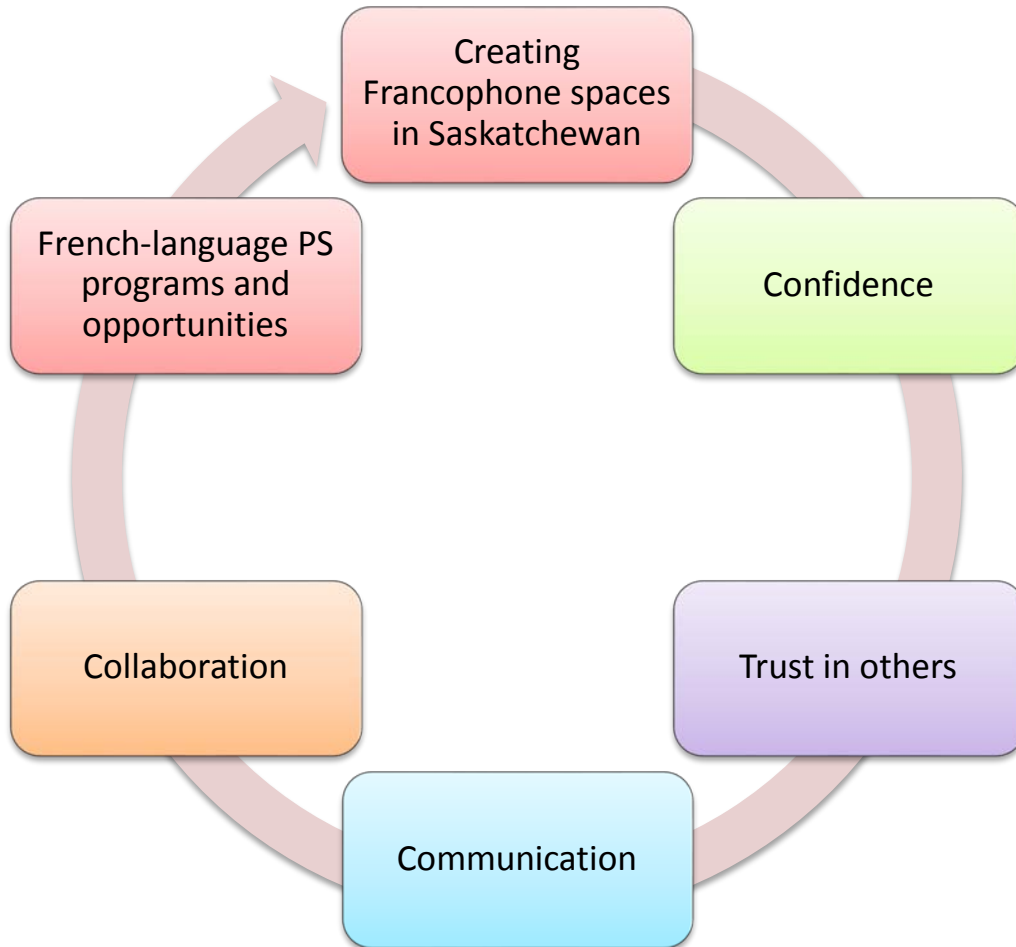
¹ Throughout this report, we will refer to postsecondary programs in French. We mean that these programs and most, if not all, the courses are given in the French language. As well, we will also refer to learning opportunities of French or in French. This usually means that Anglophones, but also Francophones, registered in an English-language program may have access to learning opportunities. This can be a refresher course or opportunities to converse or socialize in French.

In my closing remarks after fruitful discussions, I expressed a vision of moving forward on the issue of French postsecondary education based on what I had heard. (See Diagram 1 below.) The members of the Fransaskois community, the postsecondary institutions and their partners merit recognition for achieving success after their hard work on this front, and I am happy to have played a small part in this worthwhile undertaking.

Much has happened since the forum and the situation in Saskatchewan will continue to evolve. I therefore refer you to the afterword at the end of this report for a succinct update.

Graham Fraser

Diagram 1: Virtuous circle to improve French-language postsecondary (PS) education in Saskatchewan



As the day's discussions wound down, Commissioner Fraser made a few observations regarding the work accomplished by the participants. He suggested that some practical steps could be taken to improve French-language programs and learning opportunities at the postsecondary level.

While linear explanations might not take into account the many challenges or possible setbacks that happen on occasion, it is nonetheless clear that certain actions or attitudes lead naturally to others. This may produce better results. The Commissioner has, in the past, referred to this as the virtuous circle of collective action.

Explanation of Diagram 1

Creating Francophone spaces is the starting point and the ultimate goal. Confidence in yourself and in the community as a whole is an important factor for success. Confidence will increase the likelihood of progress on an issue. When trust is established and maintained over time, the resulting mutual respect leads naturally to collaboration. Frequent communications between organizations or groups can lead to collaboration. This collaboration should have a focus. It should not have the goal of simply sharing views. Collaboration must have a purpose or an aim.

In the case at hand, the ultimate outcome being sought is to improve French-language programs and learning opportunities at the postsecondary level in Saskatchewan. This should reinforce and increase the many spaces where the use of French is relevant and vital to social and academic relations. These Francophone spaces are varied: the school yard, public celebrations, virtual spaces on the Internet, the workplace, social media, day care settings, artistic and cultural expressions, local print media, community and public radio stations, French-language services in the public (health care) and private (restaurants) spheres, home life and social interactions, etc. They benefit both the Fransaskois community and the increasing number of youth, workers and immigrants who use both official languages or recognize their importance as a fundamental Canadian value.

INTRODUCTION

On September 12, 2012, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages organized a discussion forum in Regina titled Continuum of French-Language Learning Opportunities in Saskatchewan. The forum was an opportunity to bring together leaders and interested parties, including postsecondary institutions, community organizations and governments, to discuss postsecondary opportunities in French in Saskatchewan and the Office of the Commissioner's 2009 study *Two Languages, a World of Opportunities: Second-Language Learning in Canada's Universities*. Two previous forums had been held to look at the recommendations of this study. The report on the discussions in the Atlantic provinces was released in August 2010 and the report for the Winnipeg forum was released in May 2011.²

The Regina forum's main objective was to bring interested parties together in a common space to discuss common issues and gain a better understanding of the current situation with regard to postsecondary education opportunities for both native French speakers and French-as-a-second-language students in Saskatchewan. This was achieved by providing an opportunity for leaders in this field to discuss past successes, current challenges, best practices, common experiences and possibilities for collaboration. The forum brought together a diverse group of participants to discuss their expectations, perspectives and experiences regarding postsecondary education opportunities in Saskatchewan.

The day was divided into two parts. The morning session included a speech from the Commissioner and presentations from different vantage points on the issue. The afternoon was structured as a discussion forum and provided an opportunity for participants to express their points of view. The facilitators used a discussion tool known as the Interview Matrix. The discussions addressed four themes relating to postsecondary education in Saskatchewan:

- 1) Information sharing;
- 2) Collaboration;
- 3) Ideas, initiatives and best practices;
- 4) Resource sharing and increasing opportunity.

² The reports on each of these activities can be found on our Web site: www.officiallanguages.gc.ca/html/stu_etu_082010_e.php and www.officiallanguages.gc.ca/html/rmfc_rfmc_e.php.

PARTICIPANTS

A total of 39 people attended the forum. Leaders in postsecondary education and interested parties from Saskatchewan representing universities, educational organizations, community organizations and governments as well as language experts were invited to take part.

Those participating either worked in or had an interest in postsecondary education in Saskatchewan. The University of Regina and the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan's two largest universities, as well as Collège Mathieu were represented. In addition, there were participants from organizations supporting French or French-as-a-second-language education and Fransaskois community development, and from the provincial and federal governments. The Office of the Commissioner was represented by the Commissioner as well as four employees who assisted by facilitating sessions, giving presentations and taking part in discussions.

The participants shared a common interest in expanding postsecondary education opportunities in French in Saskatchewan. The introduction of participants at the beginning of the day and subsequent networking revealed common expectations: a better understanding of one another's perspectives, an interest in initiating or continuing dialogue and a desire for collaboration where appropriate.

OPENING REMARKS AND PRESENTATIONS

As a lead-up to the discussions, the Commissioner of Official Languages, Graham Fraser, presented his opening remarks, which were followed by three presentations.³ The first outlined the findings of the Office of the Commissioner's 2009 study, *Two Languages, a World of Opportunities: Second-Language Learning in Canada's Universities*. Presentations on "Postsecondary Education and Minority Language Communities" and "Bilingualism and Identity: Well-being or Assimilation?" came next. An overview of these presentations follows.

³ The Commissioner's speech can be found on our Web site:
www.officiallanguages.gc.ca/html/speech_discours_12092012_e.php.

Graham Fraser

Commissioner Fraser started by noting that linguistic duality is an important value for Canada, the citizens of Saskatchewan and the Fransaskois community. Canadian youth and members of the Francophone community wish to play a greater role in strengthening linguistic duality. Decision-makers and community leaders should help expand the opportunities for individuals to become bilingual and should strive to improve the quality of French-language education in the province.

He noted that the discussion forum could serve as an opportunity for engaging in an open dialogue and for suggesting ways of moving forward on both fronts: postsecondary education in French and opportunities to continue learning French. The Commissioner also highlighted the importance of collaboration between communities and the majority. He encouraged decision-makers to ensure that the quality of postsecondary programs in French responds to the needs of immigrants and strengthens linguistic duality. He also emphasized the importance of universities becoming more active in French-language learning.

The Commissioner noted that, while English and French are international languages, we should acknowledge that French is a Canadian language and not a foreign language. Bilingualism, and even plurilingualism, is increasingly required as an integral part of knowledge-economy professions in Canada and abroad. The federal government comes to mind as well as major companies such as Bell Canada and Rogers that require a bilingual workforce.

This model of linguistic duality where both Anglophones and Francophones, born in this country or not, become more proficient in both languages is a vital part of who we are and who we aspire to be. The Commissioner encouraged all partners at the forum to work together to

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Graham Fraser

provide a true continuum of postsecondary education in both official languages. Measures are needed to ensure the quality of postsecondary education and to assist English-speaking students in improving their language skills in the context of their postsecondary studies.

Carsten Quell

Carsten Quell, Director of Policy and Research at the Office of the Commissioner, presented the highlights of a study conducted by the Office of the Commissioner to document existing measures in Canadian universities that provide assistance to students who wish to continue learning their second language. *Two Languages, a World of Opportunities: Second-Language Learning in Canada's Universities* was published in October 2009.⁴

Mr. Quell described the context and the methodology used in the study carried out with the assistance of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. Globalization,

Canada is losing out as many high school graduates are unable to continue learning in their second language while pursuing a degree in their chosen field.

the knowledge economy and the needs of the federal public service as Canada's largest employer drive the need for improved official languages skills. Canada is losing out as many high school graduates are unable to continue learning in their second language while pursuing a degree in their chosen field. The study sought to identify challenges, best practices and opportunities for improvements.

In 2008, in the first phase of the study, 84 out of 96 institutions answered a survey. Their responses revealed that the vast majority of institutions offer second-language programs but some gaps remain. Collaboration is limited and minority-language institutions are underutilized. There are not enough opportunities for exchanges within Canada. In the second phase, 15 focus groups and 20 key-informant interviews were conducted. Everyone interviewed agreed that,

This inventory of postsecondary institutions allows students to make informed decisions and encourages universities to better respond to an increasing demand for improved language skills both in French and in English.

Please consult the interactive map that is referenced below.

above all, there must be real-life opportunities to use one's second language. The study also identified a number of success factors such as content-based learning and the whole range of learning supports. The Office of the Commissioner has identified some of the key issues and opportunities to progress in terms of second-language learning at the postsecondary level.

⁴ The study can be found on our Web site: www.officiallanguages.gc.ca/html/stu_etu_102009_e.php.

One of the by-products of this study was an innovative tool, an interactive map on the Web that indicates opportunities offered by universities across the country to support students wishing to maintain and improve their second-language skills.⁵ This inventory of postsecondary institutions allows students to make informed decisions and encourages universities to better respond to an increasing demand for improved language skills both in French and in English. Response from the public has been enthusiastic and the information is updated regularly.

Ricky G. Richard

Ricky G. Richard, Manager of Policy Analysis at the Office of the Commissioner, addressed a number of issues relating to postsecondary education in French in Canada as they applied to Saskatchewan. The presentation, entitled “Postsecondary Education and Minority Language Communities,” stressed the strong links between a community’s sense of vitality and the existence of a strong postsecondary institution or adequate programs. It is up to the community and its university and college partners to decide on the particular configuration of postsecondary education in French to be adopted in Saskatchewan.

There has been a gradual but unmistakable shift in perceiving communities as builders of society rather than victims of fate.

All communities aspire to greater vitality even if they are small or in a precarious state at times. There has been a gradual but unmistakable shift in perceiving communities as builders of society rather than victims of fate. Official language minority communities in Canada are better at mobilizing and empowering themselves now than they were in the past. This holds true for the Fransaskois community. Postsecondary institutions are viewed as part of the community’s institutional support network. These institutions are highly instrumental in enabling the community to maintain its identity.

Successful postsecondary institutions are usually rooted in and reflective of the community they serve, and Francophones have understood this.

Francophones have traditionally been active in defending rights to education and the postsecondary level is viewed as an extension of this path for youth. The Fransaskois community is striving to find or increase Francophone spaces that can provide a safe haven to speak and live in French. Colleges and universities can provide such a space.

⁵ The interactive map can be found on our Web site:
www.officiallanguages.gc.ca/twolanguages_deuxlangues/index_e.

They can also transfer important practical knowledge and share research that enlightens youth and gives them the tools to earn a living.

Postsecondary institutions are shaping the leaders of tomorrow. Successful postsecondary institutions are usually rooted in and reflective of the community they serve, and Francophones have understood this. We should also recognize that the pride that Francophones exhibit with regard to their community and culture is a part of their Canadian identity and benefits the broader society. Canada has historically respected and fostered diversity, and it has done so in both official languages. Strong official language communities and increased bilingualism are important added values for Canada.

The road ahead for the Fransaskois community and its postsecondary partners may have obstacles, but citizens and the community are up to the challenge. The key is to build strong and enduring partnerships through dialogue.

Richard Clément

Richard Clément, a professor at the University of Ottawa and Director of the Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute, presented his ongoing research on bilingualism and identity in official language minority communities. Entitled “Bilingualism and Identity: Well-being or Assimilation?” his presentation looked at the issue of bilingualism in a minority context to see if bilingualism enhances a sense of identity or if this new hybrid bilingual identity is a stepping stone to assimilation.

Using comparative data looking at minority Francophones, majority Anglophones and Chinese students, he describes the different contexts and consequences of linguistic contact. For minority Francophones, the importance of media and involvement is shown to increase confidence in one’s own identity and leads to a Francophone identity. However, without support in French (such as associations) or with the increasing influence of majority media, Francophones may come to identify with the English-speaking community and develop a completely Anglophone identity.

One particular study involving over 7,300 Francophone adults across Canada showed that the region had an influence on the bilingual Francophone becoming either English-dominant, bilingual or French-dominant. Characteristics of bilingual Francophones living in the lowest vitality environment show they are more similar to their

Data shows that bilingualism among minority Francophones is not necessarily a stepping stone towards assimilation.

French-dominant than to their English-dominant peers. Data shows that bilingualism among minority Francophones is not necessarily a stepping stone towards assimilation. Rather, understanding identity formation in bilingual individuals must take into account the cognitive processes through which identification is contrasted and manipulated.

GROUP DISCUSSION

To facilitate group discussion for the rest of the afternoon, the bilingual facilitators used a tool called the Interview Matrix. This tool promotes focused dialogue and can be an efficient way to get everyone engaged, since it provides equal airtime for all participants. This tool also prevents anyone from making a mini-speech to others around a table or in a plenary session. As a result, groups can quickly reach consensus. The Interview Matrix is based on units of four, using four themes or questions for discussion and starting with groups of four people.⁶

Jennifer Wessner and Melanie Gerhardt Peters guided the participants through the discussion and provided instructions on how to share their thoughts on the issue being discussed. Each participant had an opportunity to express his or her thoughts in a small group, which maximized the exchange of ideas and information. The information was compiled and discussed in small groups and then key points were outlined during the closing plenary session. The main comments and input from participants were reflected. The following sections of the report provide a synthesis of the discussions and ideas generated.

Theme #1: Information sharing

The theme of the first discussion session was information sharing. Participants were asked two questions. The first was whether information was shared between organizations and interested parties. A follow-up question was put to participants based on how they answered the first. If they responded in the affirmative, they were asked how that information is shared and what type of information is shared. If they responded in the negative, they were asked how information could be shared, and what information should be shared. Most of the participants stated that information is often shared within organizations or the community. However, more work needs to be done to share

Information is often shared within organizations or the community. However, more work needs to be done to share information beyond those networks. Community networks should therefore link up with government collaborative circles and vice versa.

⁶ This tool, taught by the National Managers' Community, is available on-line: www.managers-gestionnaires.gc.ca/tools-outils/tools_for_leadership-trousse_du_leadership-eng.php#toc35.

information beyond those networks. Community networks should therefore link up with government collaborative circles and vice versa.

Participants felt that creating opportunities for dialogue as opposed to simply sharing information would benefit all parties.

Most participants said that information is shared, while a few thought that it is not. All seemed to agree that simply sharing information back and forth was not sufficient to be useful. Participants felt that creating opportunities for dialogue as opposed to simply sharing information

would benefit all parties. Such opportunities for reflection and discussion would help build relationships in which individuals trust one another enough to share information and explore possibilities for collaboration. Some participants expressed appreciation of the format of the forum and suggested that it serve as a model for future discussions and collaboration among the community, citizens, postsecondary institutions and governments.

It was mentioned that the reflex to share information that could be useful to others in advancing their goals does not currently exist. Often, one group is completely unaware of what information another might require or could benefit from. Some participants indicated that effective mechanisms for information sharing or dialogue are not in place. However, there was some recognition that there are consultative committees or horizontal working groups for certain files. Participants noted that these types of platforms are essential to facilitating an exchange of information in the case of a vast range of key files. These types of committees, of diverse composition, allow different perspectives to be presented and potential courses of action to be discussed, rather than a simple exchange of information. One weakness is that horizontal working groups and various committees work well within the community but in the absence of governments and other partners. More frequent contact among the community, the majority and governments is needed. Opportunities for meaningful dialogue between different organizations must be created.

Some concern was expressed about information sharing in a digital age. Information is shared quickly, but it is often incomplete or the information is presented without the proper context. On occasion, there can be information overload, for example, when a barrage of e-mails is sent to many people at once. It is important to strike a good balance. The objective is to share complete and accurate information in a timely fashion to achieve clearly defined goals. Often, more information can be exchanged through informal

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discussions than through formal means. It was noted that more frequent informal communication across existing networks is vital.

According to participants, information sharing remains organized primarily in certain sectors that can evolve into silos in the long run. In addition, individuals can become very selective about who gets what information; information is often seen as power; there is a reluctance to share certain types of information. Good leaders are usually very adept at sharing information.

Relationships and trust in others must be built to cultivate a willingness to share information, have discussions, and explore potential opportunities for collaboration.

Good leaders are usually very adept at sharing information.

Another challenge discussed is that information is often shared between individuals who trust one other and not necessarily between organizations in and of themselves. Ideally, given that many different organizations and groups have a role to play in the success of an initiative, silos should be broken down and information shared more horizontally to facilitate progress on an issue. When organizations and groups respect each other and share a common cause, productive dialogue may ensue. It was noted that the forum's participants had very similar objectives and should work more closely together for the benefit of young students. The Fransaskois community seeks to encourage Francophone students to remain in the community after high school, other organizations want to provide more French-language learning opportunities for the majority, postsecondary institutions want to increase enrolment and governments are generally committed to linguistic duality.

It is important to increasingly focus on the complementary objectives of organizations in terms of the need for French-language programs and increased opportunities for learning French at the postsecondary level.

Many participants agreed that there must be a reason for sharing information; however, when it comes to postsecondary education opportunities in French, information should be available to all so everyone

can benefit. It is important to increasingly focus on the complementary objectives of organizations in terms of the need for French-language programs and increased opportunities for learning French at the postsecondary level. Though each organization has a specific mandate, some of their objectives intersect. Generally speaking, organizations represented at this forum want to empower youth so they can achieve their life goals. Some organizations want to instil pride among young people in their Francophone identity; others seek to increase proficiency in both official languages. The French-speaking community, organizations and individuals who want to improve their language skills would benefit from

joining forces and working together to ensure and enhance the provision of French-language instruction at the postsecondary level.

Theme #2: Collaboration

The second theme proposed for discussion was collaboration. Participants were asked the following questions: What are the barriers to collaboration? When should collaboration be sought? What value is added through collaboration?

Participants identified a number of barriers to collaboration. For some, there was the fear of the language barrier, of not being understood or of being misunderstood. There is often a lack of trust between parties, especially among individuals who do not know one another personally. Some felt that, in certain situations, individuals are too attached to their personal agenda to engage effectively in collaboration. A number of participants expressed concern that many individuals interpret collaboration as giving something up or losing rather than gaining something. Other obstacles mentioned were personality conflicts, misperceptions, organizational culture differences, lack of resources and physical distance. A lack or fear of collaboration can perpetuate itself and even lead to avoidable misunderstandings. It is important to overcome this isolationist tendency where individuals and groups do not feel it important to collaborate with all potential partners on a regular basis.

Through collaboration, complementary skills come together to create a collective strength more conducive to sharing experience, attaining common objectives and producing positive outcomes.

Participants generally agreed that collaboration is both desired and vital to collective action. Collaboration leads to the sharing of ideas and the development of synergy between groups and individuals, and to positive results. Through collaboration, complementary skills come

together to create a collective strength more conducive to sharing experience, attaining common objectives and producing positive outcomes. The abilities of different individuals may counterbalance the possible gaps in a particular aspect of the work at hand. The general consensus among participants was that the benefits of collaboration far outweigh the barriers.

Participants felt that, whenever possible, and, when it makes sense, all citizens should collaborate to have a collective impact on French postsecondary education. Some, however, were of the opinion that collaboration should occur only when there is a concrete project to work on and not exist just for aimless discussion. There was consensus that collaboration

should occur when there are issues common to different groups so that they can be discussed and addressed in a spirit of partnership.

Collaboration should be proactive and not only occur during moments of crisis. . . . When referring to education in particular, participants stated that collaboration should occur all along the continuum and not solely at the postsecondary level.

Collaboration should be proactive and not only occur during moments of crisis, according to those at the forum. One participant remarked, however, that we should not let a crisis go to waste. In other words, when adversity or an obstacle is encountered, the situation can serve as a good opportunity to redefine the issue and forge stronger partnerships. When

referring to education in particular, participants stated that collaboration should occur all along the continuum and not solely at the postsecondary level. School boards and their administrators, as well as high school teachers, staff and parents, must be informed and engaged to prepare students to make the leap and to excel at the next level. To maintain and create French-language postsecondary programs and opportunities, it is crucial that four key groups work together:

- 1) the federal government, mainly Canadian Heritage;
- 2) the provincial government, primarily the Ministry of Advanced Education;
- 3) Francophone community organizations and their representatives, as well as citizens, parents and student organizations; and
- 4) postsecondary institutions, their leadership and the student clientele.

It was noted that collaboration also involves promoting understanding and working together to find win-win solutions. Collaboration also fosters a creative environment, where different and often complementary ideas can emerge to produce innovative approaches to tackling sometimes difficult issues.

A number of participants also indicated that, in a province like Saskatchewan, where there are fewer numbers and resources, collaboration is essential to maximize existing potential. The point was made that collaboration facilitates the sharing of both financial and human resources and prevents competition for these resources; duplication of work that has already been done can also be avoided.

Citizens or community members must always be at the heart of initiatives; leaders must not promote the personal interests of certain individuals or sub-groups.

Collaboration assists in eliminating the confrontational scenario of “us” versus “them.” Citizens or community members must always be at the heart of initiatives; leaders must not promote the personal interests of certain individuals or sub-groups.

Theme #3: Ideas, initiatives and best practices

The third theme for discussion was centred on ideas, initiatives and best practices. Participants were asked who they would go talk to if they had a new or innovative idea to suggest, and who they would talk to in order to bring initiatives forward. Participants were asked to identify initiatives and best practices in Saskatchewan or elsewhere that could be useful.

There was a general feeling that it is easier to share ideas or propose initiatives when there is an existing relationship of trust between the parties or organizations involved.

Most felt that new ideas should be shared with the leaders within key organizations, which would provide as the greatest likelihood that the ideas would be heard and pursued further.

There was a general feeling that it is easier to share ideas or propose initiatives when there is an existing relationship of trust between the parties or organizations involved. Some felt it was important to have existing structures in place to facilitate the process of sharing ideas and initiatives and to provide a platform for pitching new and innovative possibilities.

Some participants indicated that they would bring their ideas or new initiatives to the person within their own organization who is responsible for that file. Many participants said they would share an idea first with a colleague to get feedback on the idea, before taking it forward to a person in charge or for future action. It would then be important to see if there would be a marked interest in that particular idea and to share it with others or specific organizations active in that field. It becomes important to promote the idea to others or to achieve a consensus on a given issue. Any good idea, at some point, requires that a case be made for its benefits if it is to be pursued or implemented.

Any good idea, at some point, requires that a case be made for its benefits if it is to be pursued or implemented.

Mention was made that new ideas need to be malleable and that it is preferable to put personal interests aside. One participant offered the opinion that good ideas must belong to everyone to avoid a sense of personal ownership of one particular idea or vision. Innovative ideas can be a collective undertaking where many different people put their stamp on the ideas or improve them as they move forward. Participants highlighted a number of best practices and

initiatives with regard to postsecondary opportunities in French, citing examples at the University of Regina, the Université de Saint-Boniface, the Université Sainte-Anne, Campus Saint-Jean at the University of Alberta, Simon Fraser University and Collège Mathieu.

In terms of best practices, it is safe to assume that if an initiative has been put into practice somewhere, it can also be implemented in another community if it is properly adapted. In the specific case of postsecondary programs and opportunities to learn French, Saskatchewan

In terms of best practices, Saskatchewan should pay close attention to examples in Western Canada, which more closely resemble its own reality.

should pay close attention to examples in Western Canada, which more closely resemble its own reality. The specific ideas for working together across different institutions or provinces mentioned during the forum will be presented in the next section.

Generally speaking, a best practice can be based on a valued personal experience or expertise that individuals may in turn contribute towards collective goals for the organization or the community. While participants agreed that numerous best practices exist, many believe that there is no effective mechanism for sharing and showcasing these practices. No inventory of these practices is available to those who seek to improve postsecondary learning in and of French.

Introducing best practices from elsewhere is one possible approach. However, communities and postsecondary institutions must take into account their specific context. Hence, postsecondary institutions should examine existing successes and build on them. Reinforcing existing programs can be a springboard to developing new opportunities.

Introducing best practices from elsewhere is one possible approach. However, communities and postsecondary institutions must take into account their specific context.

For example, Collège Mathieu is a member of the Réseau des cégeps et des collèges francophones du Canada and has collaborated with a number of CEGEPs and colleges across the country to be able to offer more opportunities for postsecondary study in French in Saskatchewan in diverse subject areas. The Baccalauréat en éducation at the University of Regina trains teachers for both French Immersion programs and Francophone schools in Saskatchewan. During the four-year program, students have an opportunity to complete two semesters at the Université Laval in Québec City through a direct partnership developed between the two institutions.

Postsecondary programs tailored to the needs of specific communities can become powerful tools to heighten their sense of identity and collective self-worth. The First Nations University of Canada is an example that the Fransaskois community can look to. As well, the dialogue with and research on the Metis community spearheaded by the Centre canadien de recherche sur les francophonies en milieu minoritaire should be commended and pursued in the future. Thorough research on the Fransaskois community is also needed to understand the trends and practical issues influencing its welfare.

Theme #4: Resource sharing and increasing opportunity

The fourth theme for discussion was resource sharing and increasing opportunity. Participants were asked the following question: How do we maximize or share resources to expand postsecondary opportunities and avoid duplication? They were also asked to reflect on ways to improve postsecondary programs and opportunities at the postsecondary level. The vast majority of participants at the forum shared the objective of achieving results on these issues.

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Many participants felt that if an ongoing, open dialogue about postsecondary education in Saskatchewan were taking place, there would be less risk of duplicating efforts and resources. One party would know what the other was doing, and strategically

they could explore options for partnering, rather than competing. These participants also felt that underfunding leads to competition among organizations. Stable funding would encourage these organizations to work together. At present, there is no specific mechanism for this dialogue. A number of participants stated that this forum was a starting point that they hoped would lead to the reflex to have such conversations and effective dialogue in the future.

Some participants indicated that an environmental scan should be conducted to obtain a clear picture of the postsecondary programs and opportunities already offered in Saskatchewan and neighbouring provinces to

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better plan for the future. These programs, initiatives, and processes should be evaluated to ensure they are effective and that they respond to client needs. As well, there may be

resources currently underused or not even tapped into. For example, it would be useful to obtain data on the professors in English-speaking universities who understand and can teach in French. As well, we should find out how proficient university and college students are in both official languages.

Several participants indicated that a key element to success in terms of resource sharing and increasing opportunity is the use of new technologies to encourage improvements in distance and on-line education. Distance education is synchronous, just like any other class with a professor speaking “live” to students. On-line education refers to a “diachronous” approach where students can advance at their own pace by accessing electronic materials and instructors remotely. The first approach, for example, would enable professors from other institutions to teach to a broader audience and would increase opportunities for students. The Association des universités de la francophonie canadienne has been active in this field. Since the Institut français is a member of this network, it seems natural to explore possibilities with other members.

Collaboration with other Francophone postsecondary institutions outside Quebec is essential, as Saskatchewan does not have the enrolment numbers to support a multitude of programs on its own. Inter-university and inter-college agreements could be developed. When developing postsecondary programs in French, it is important to be cognizant of the programs being offered regionally in neighbouring provinces to avoid duplication of efforts and resources. Ideally, these universities could develop complementary specialities to maximize their reach among Francophones and Francophiles in Western Canada.

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community recognizes efforts among the majority community to learn French and would certainly welcome immersion clientele into the fold as a way to ensure long-term sustainability of French programs. However, when communities have small populations, they can be hesitant to open up too quickly to the majority for fear of being overrun or dispossessed of their key institutions. The development of a clear vision for postsecondary education in French that is shared by all—governments, citizens, the Fransaskois community, students and certainly postsecondary institutions themselves—is essential. There is strength in numbers and there should be a concerted effort by all to build a better future for postsecondary learning in French and of French.

Many participants felt that collaboration must also occur within the province between the University of Regina and the University of Saskatchewan to ensure increased opportunity and to better serve Saskatchewan clients. Neither university may be able offer the full spectrum of programs, but if they collaborate there could be a meaningful range of programs in French. It was also mentioned that discussions between Collège Mathieu and the universities will be vital to ensuring that postsecondary programs complement each other. As was the case in Manitoba, college programs could function as a ramp up to a university degree with proper linkages and planning. Provincial representatives, with their federal counterparts, will play a key role in coordinating the overall approach to postsecondary learning in French and of French in Saskatchewan.

The point was made that any effort to pool resources or offer complementary programs at the postsecondary level should include the target clientele: postsecondary students themselves. French-language programs and support provided to new learners should be based on the needs of the student clientele. Another participant added that we often forget the importance of the

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process that leads to collaboration. A structure or framework within which to operate is crucial to ensure effective communication among the parties involved and to focus everybody's efforts towards the goal at hand.

Finally, most participants felt that there should be more opportunities for exchanges between different universities and other postsecondary institutions involving both Francophone and French-as-a-second-language students in different areas of study. Exchanges should be better funded both provincially and federally to provide students with a greater variety of opportunities.

CONCLUSION

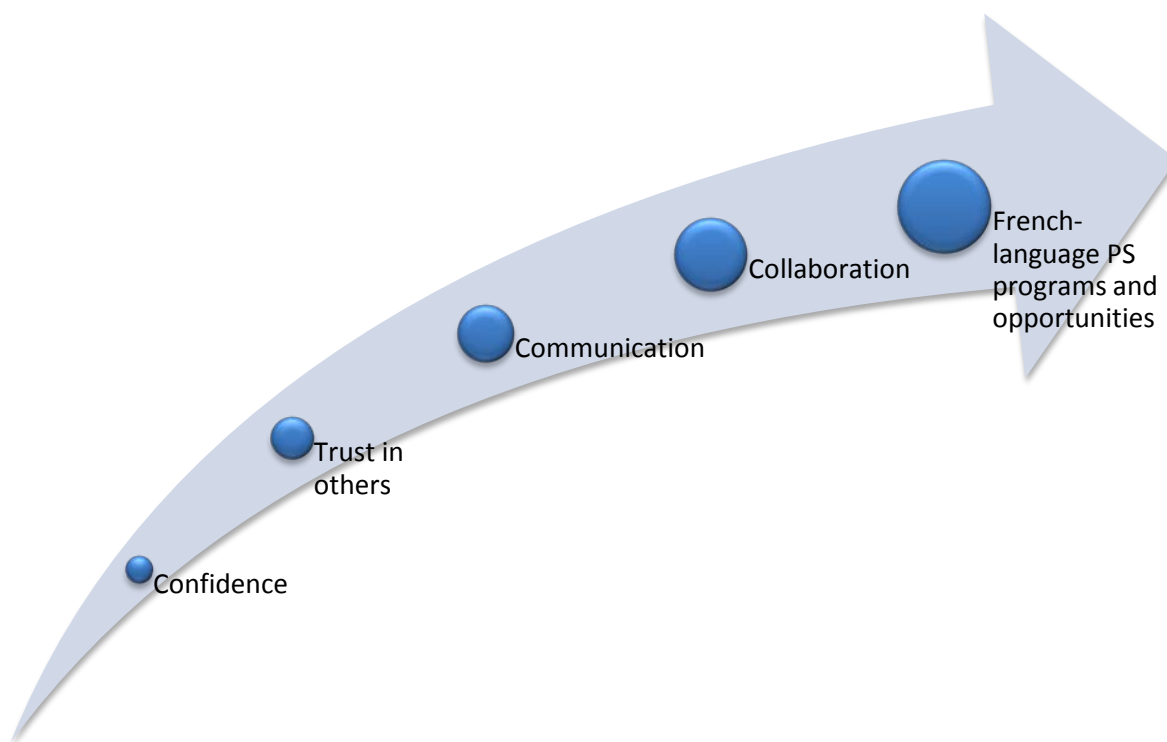
At one point during the discussion forum, a participant observed that there seemed to be an elephant in the room and that no questions were being asked specifically about the Institut français at the University of Regina. Indeed the same could be said of Collège Mathieu, the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology, the University of Saskatchewan, French-language schools and immersion programs. It was pointed out that the tools used and the themes discussed were versatile enough to accommodate discussions on a wide variety of topics and that the four themes and the line of questioning were fairly generic.

This approach had been deliberately taken since experience has taught us that there is no easy solution to the complex issues of official languages and community vitality. But certain approaches and practices tend to produce effective results. The virtuous circle presented at the outset outlined the means to achieve results. The goal of this process is clear. How can all parties work together to improve French postsecondary education to benefit both the Fransaskois community and youth in the English-speaking majority who wish to have more opportunities to become more fluent in French?

The diagram presented in the Commissioner's foreword would suggest that the objective of creating spaces for the French language and the community may require ongoing efforts. Through hard work, these spaces may grow or multiply in various areas of our daily lives. As in many spheres, more work can always be done.

From this perspective, small steps and minor successes may lead to future collaboration and renewed efforts that reinforce themselves along the way. Each step builds on the previous one and brings us that much closer to achieving our goal. We could say that each step is a building block that leads to improved postsecondary programs and opportunities in French. This objective is closely linked with the overarching goal of creating a wide variety of Francophone spaces, for the Fransaskois, new Canadians, Francophiles and citizens who recognize that official languages reflect a fundamental value. Diagram 2 conveys the idea that certain actions reinforce each other and that building blocks allow us to make more progress for a better future.

Diagram 2: The building blocks to create Francophone spaces in Saskatchewan



Collaborating on complex issues is not always easy, but the Canadian experience has shown that true and lasting progress can be achieved when established and newly-arrived Francophones and Anglophones choose to collaborate in a spirit of openness towards a shared purpose.

COMMISSIONER'S AFTERWORD

Since this initial Discussion Forum was held, excellent work has been accomplished by community organizations and university administrators alike. Along with their partners, they have forged ahead. In fall 2012, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Advanced Education convened a series of meetings aimed at exploring ways to strengthen collaboration on French postsecondary education in the province. I was pleased to be able to meet and discuss with the members of the Deputy Minister's Working Group on French-Language Postsecondary Education. A collaboration model, called Vision 2030, is being developed and shared with all the interested parties. Vision 2030 "calls for a co-ordinated French language postsecondary experiential education to foster active citizenship on local and global levels through education, research and service."

Some of the key players who attended the forum organized by my office and others have continued discussing these issues in order to coordinate their efforts. I applaud such initiative as it is the precursor to innovative and coordinated action that may ensure that all postsecondary institutions maximize their clientele and take into account community concerns. Both postsecondary institutions and Saskatchewan's Francophone community should think of the future and of the benefits for members of this community and for young English-speaking Canadians who wish to enhance their language skills.

Postsecondary education covers many aspects of the job market. We should not forget the vital role of colleges and trades in the workforce. Collège Mathieu has had success in recruiting Francophones, both Fransaskois and immigrants. Popular programs in early childhood development and in other areas benefit not only the community but the province as well.

Another key initiative was undertaken at the University of Regina to review and renew the mission and role of the Institut français. The President and Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Vianne Timmons, asked Judith Woodsworth to chair a task force made up of university and community members. The task force studied the Institut's mandate and the means to achieve the key goal of improving French-language programs or courses in the current context. A report was submitted to the President in March 2013. At a gathering of the community and interested university personnel on May 22, 2013, the President recognized the important work that had been done. She congratulated all the members of the task force, who worked by consensus. She endorsed, in principle, all 35 recommendations put forward by the task force. She added that a working committee will be mandated to operationalize the recommendations. A crucial objective will be to find a director of the Institut français as soon as possible while respecting due academic process.

I expect that the community, governments and administrators in postsecondary institutions will continue to work together to improve French-language programs and learning opportunities after high school. I have no preconceived view as to the configuration or the type of postsecondary programs needed in Saskatchewan. These, as seen elsewhere, will be the result of joint action involving postsecondary institutions, the communities they serve and government partners.

I would nonetheless like to make some observations based on my experience with official languages and other Francophone communities. In promoting bilingualism to majorities, I have always been mindful of particular circumstances and of the impact that these efforts have on the official language minority community. As efforts are made to create more opportunities for Canadians who live in a majority situation to become bilingual, we must take into account the vitality of Francophone communities. Challenges vary greatly across the country but I have observed the same desire to pass on language and heritage to future generations as a way of maintaining Canada's linguistic duality. Many individuals and organizations work hard at creating and broadening these *espaces francophones*. I view these efforts to promote bilingualism and to support Francophone communities as being very effective contributions to the future of the French language in Canada and the bilingual proficiency of our youth.

I will follow the issue with great interest and would be happy to contribute, if this were considered helpful. I am encouraged by the goodwill shown by the University of Regina and the Fransaskois community. The innovative approach at Collège Mathieu, and the work of organizations within the majority society, such as Canadian Parents for French, are some of the keys to success. I encourage those with an interest in postsecondary education in Saskatchewan to continue their efforts and deepen the conversations that have begun, and to explore possibilities for collaboration and collective action.