

Teachers' Identity in English-Speaking Schools in Québec

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Official Linguistic Minorities in Canada: their Educational Rights

- The 1982 *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* is a bill entrenched in the Constitution of Canada that guarantees certain rights, such as the instruction in the official minority language in the province or territory of residence (except in Quebec).
- The *Québec French Language Charter* (Bill 101) also guarantees English language education to the anglophone minority in this province.

The Expected Role of the School in Official Linguistic Minorities Settings in Canada

- Transmit knowledge
- Socialize students to society's values
- Contribute to the maintenance of the minority language and culture – to develop a sense of belonging to the minority group (collective identity)

English Minority Language Education in Québec

- Almost 600,000 Anglophones live in Québec (13 % of the total population of the province)
- Education in the official minority language (English) is a legal right under the Québec French Language Charter (Bill 101)
- 9 Anglophone school boards in Québec (English as first language (elementary, secondary schools))
- The school population is linguistically and culturally diverse
- The school does NOT have the official mandate to assist in the linguistic and cultural survival of the Anglophone community in Québec

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the identity paths (*parcours identitaires*), both at the personal and professional levels, of teachers working in English minority language schools in Québec
- To get a better understanding on how these identity paths influence the way that teachers make sense of their role as agents of linguistic and cultural reproduction in English minority language settings

Conceptual Framework

Critical Sociology of Education

- Identity is understood as a social construct, influenced by social practices, which are themselves embedded in relations of power
- Teachers' personal identity trajectories impact on their professional paths
- Particularly, within the context of the 2 official linguistic minorities in Canada

Methodological Framework

A Mixed Methods Approach

- *Survey* on teachers' linguistic practices - participants from two Anglophone teachers' associations in Québec
- *Life histories* of a small group of those participants
- *Group semi-structured interviews* with the life history participants' family members and with their friends

The Survey

- Administered to over 800 participants at the start of the study
- Used mostly as an exploratory tool, for the selection of 10 participants for the life histories component of the study
- Used also to collect demographic information on the respondents
- Explored specific areas of linguistic practices:
 - Family life
 - Professional life
 - Social life

The Life History Approach

1. Often used in History, this approach can also be a useful tool in Social Sciences, because individual life experiences take place within social practices that, consequently, will come to influence those experiences.

2. This approach is also about a life experience that a participant chooses to tell ... The story will be about what the participant remembers, or what he/she will choose to share with the researcher (Atkinson, 2001).

3. Life History came back to life with postmodernism and poststructuralism :

«The current focus on acknowledging the subjective, multiple and partial nature of human experience has resulted in a revival of life history methodology. What were previously criticisms of life history, its lack of representativeness and its subjective nature, are now its greatest strength» (Munro, 1988, p. 8)

The Life History Approach – its Appropriateness when Examining Teacher Identity

- Examining teachers' work in the context of linguistic minorities, the life history approach allows a better understanding of how teachers develop their professional identity as teachers and how they position themselves as agents of linguistic and cultural reproduction working with students belonging to one of the 2 official linguistic minorities in Canada
- Slicing the participants' life histories in « moments » of their life allows :
 - The opportunity to develop, over time, a relation of trust between the participant (the teacher) and the researcher (the notion of trust being an essential element of the life history approach)
 - The opportunity to do a more in-depth analysis, because of the possibility of revisiting some particular aspects of those teachers' discourses that need further discussion
 - The opportunity to witness the evolution of those teachers' discourses over a period of three years

Preliminary Results

- Teachers as agents of knowledge transmission
- No official mandate at the government level to preserve the minority English language and culture in Québec
- The « threat » of the majority French language and culture in Québec not always present in the school personnel's discourse

Teachers as Agents of Knowledge Transmission

- *A teacher is a model, a facilitator, you have to know how to inspire and to get things rolling, and you have to know how to withdraw, and you have to know how to reinsert yourself at the right time, you have to, for some kids you have to be everything that anybody needs. So a listener, you have to be able to talk as well and inspire, you have to know a lot, you have to provide links to the future and you know, future learning, and get the sense of where it is all supposed to be going, you have to have a sense of child development, you have to recognize warning signals for kids who are in trouble, and you have to have a bag of tricks, and you have to think on your feet. (Shirley, fourth interview, 2011)*

Teachers as Agents of Knowledge Transmission (cont.)

- *I teach science, so it's to be scientifically literate, you know. You don't need to remember everything you learn in science class, but you need to be able to think critically about science concepts and know basic science concepts, so when you hear about science in the news you can know what it means, that kind of stuff. (Melanie, fourth interview, 2011)*

A Different School Mandate for the Two Official Linguistic Minorities in Canada

We have a mandate from the Ministry of Education which is to socialize, to instruct and to qualify, not to protect the culture.

(Director of Education, Montreal Roundtable, December 2007)

- *French-language schools also have a mandate to protect, enhance, and transmit the French language and culture. French is the school's language of instruction and communication, and it animates the social and cultural life of the school community.*

(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005)

School Mandate (cont.)

- *There's no message about that at all, which, again in Ontario when I was teaching in the French school it was the opposite. If my principal had overheard us speaking English to one another in the staffroom, repeatedly, he probably would have said something, you know. And here, the administrator would speak in French, you know, and there's no, there's no perception of that at all, there's no concept, they don't get it. And I, you know, when I get passionate about something like this letter from the ministry, people look at me funny, it's like okay, well I'll just keep that to myself then I guess. (Melanie, fourth interview, 2011)*

The « Threat » of the Majority Language (French) in Québec

The Anglophone community, for the most part in Quebec, I know there are exceptions, but for the most part, don't feel the same threat [as the Francophone minority outside Quebec]. Maybe it's because we live, I think it's because we live in such an international society in the North American context where English has such prominence. There is not the same fear, the same fear of loss. And I think you see it by people in schools, that (if) they are speaking French, there isn't the same fear that if you don't speak English and if you happen to speak French that somehow your culture and your language are threatened.

(School District Administrator, Roundtable, December 2007)

Conclusion

- The minority English language in Québec is not presented as minoritized in the teachers' discourse nor as being threatened by the majority French language in Québec
- Teachers define their professional identity as mainly knowledge transmitters, not as also agents of linguistic and cultural reproduction in the context of their work in Québec