

I see that Mr. McMartin recycled with a considerable degree of zest a number of old arguments against French Immersion in his article of February 1. I'd like to offer a few corrections and comments before addressing the last point in his article, the rise of a new lingua franca and the need for readers of the Vancouver Sun to prepare their children for it.

1. It is not a fiction that parents choose French immersion for their children because they embrace our country's linguistic duality. Whenever I meet parents – CPF members or not – they almost invariably state a passionate belief in the reality and viability of our two official languages, and their desire for their children to take part in our linguistic duality through personal bilingualism. Of course, there are parents who send their children to French immersion for other reasons - real or perceived, but that holds true of any program of choice or choice of school. In addition, with one out ten children in British Columbia attending private school - and the percentage is even higher in Vancouver - our public school system has to offer programs of choice just to remain competitive.
2. The educational needs of Vancouver's Francophone population are primarily met by School District 93 schools and not by any of the 19 French immersion schools run by the VSB. By the way, it's a bit misleading to call a dual-track school, which most of these schools are, a French immersion school as the term suggests that the school is dedicated to a single program.
3. Edmonton does not offer Mandarin immersion programs as we understand Immersion. The Alberta programs are bilingual programs, with Mandarin never going beyond 50% of program content. Incidentally, schools in 17 American states and the District of Columbia offer French immersion, so French appears to be holding its own south of the border.

As for McMartin's hope that French loses its favoured second-language status within the school system in favour of another language (one assumes Mandarin on the basis the rest of the article), it strikes me that world geopolitical concerns have suddenly invaded the schoolyard. Let me explain.

French immersion is a response to a domestic reality: a country with two dominant language groups. Whether you like it or not – and many people in the West are too ready to parrot the Bloc Québécois line of a French Québec and an English Rest Of Canada – this is our national reality.

Mandarin immersion is primarily a response, I believe, to the expected rise of China as the dominant world economic power. Setting aside the whole issue of the equally swift rise of India (where English is still a language of instruction) as an economic power, we have to ask ourselves

two questions: is it necessary (as opposed to desirable) for Canadians to learn Mandarin at a time when China has more English- language learners than the US? Secondly, do we wish to contribute to China's rise by learning Mandarin in the first place? Like any other imperial power, China knows that culture (language in this case) is a powerful tool – which is no doubt why the Chinese government invests so heavily in supporting second language Mandarin instruction in North America.

The moral of this story is that over the decades we have moved from unilingualism to plurilingualism as a desired outcome for Canadian youth. Plurilingualism is a response to globalization and the changing face of Canada through immigration. But, because we are Canadians, and because we want our children to be able to participate fully in our country's life no matter in what part of the country they happen to settle, then official language bilingualism should be the first stop on a child's path to learning a third or fourth language. For that reason alone, French should remain the favoured second language in our public school system.

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