

Letter to the Editor

We were both astounded and disappointed by your statement that some parents are seeking to send their children to English schools because the quality of English instruction in French schools is mediocre (Sunday, May 4, 2003, *New look at Bill 101*). We consider this an attack on the professionalism of English Second Language teachers implying that, at worst, they are not competent and, at best, that they are not doing the job they were hired to do.

Had you done your homework, you would have discovered two important facts about the teaching of English as a second language in Quebec. The first is that it is taught mainly by qualified specialists. The second is that English instruction is provided starting in grade three (not four as you stated) at the rate of one hour per week, sometimes less, – a grand total of 36 hours a year! Even the best of teachers cannot guarantee successful learning, let alone functional bilingualism, with so little time.

Here are some more facts:

- Research demonstrates that 1200 hours of instruction are necessary for the basic knowledge of a language, 5000 hours to master it.
- In French schools in Quebec, students at the primary level receive a total of 144 hours of English over four years, students at the secondary level receive 500 hours over 5 years, and at the end of 9 years the total is 644 hours of English instruction.
- The average ESL teacher has over 400 students, no classroom, no up-to-date textbooks, teaches in more than one school and must carry everything on a trolley.

It's not the quality of English instruction that is lacking so much as enough concentrated time and adequate teaching and learning conditions.

Over 75 % of Francophones parents want more and better English instruction for their children. Those parents should use the power they have at the level of the school Governing Boards to ask for more.

The position of SPEAQ is that there should be 2 compulsory hours a week of English as a second language for every level of primary starting in grade 3 with a possibility of Intensive English in grade 6 for those who wish to have it. A very successful model of Intensive, for example, is 5 months of English and 5 months of intensive teaching of other subjects.

We believe that, instead of blaming teachers for the situation, a way of improving the learning of English in French schools is to support requests for more time for English instruction and better working conditions for the specialists.

Micheline Schinck, president
SPEAQ (La Société pour la promotion de l'anglais, langue seconde au Québec)
www.speaq.qc.ca