

## French Immersion

In the last decade bilingual French immersion schools have proliferated.

The immersion programs were almost non-existent in 1970, but by 1979 there were 281 schools outside Quebec offering varieties of subjects in French to 26,000 English-speaking students. Ontario, which pioneered the concept of French immersion, had 160 with 15,042 students. New Brunswick had 35, British Columbia 24 and Manitoba 21.

Immersion programs vary from school to school. A typical one offers instruction totally in French from kindergarten through the first few grades, with the gradual introduction of courses in English as the children become more fluent in French, until an approximate balance of courses in the two languages is reached. In Ontario, for example, French is used seventy-five per cent of the time at the elementary level and sixty per cent at the secondary level.

Immersion presents problems of curriculum and teacher training, but the system appears to be working. The students have performed on achievement tests as well as their English-taught peers.

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## Quebec's Quiet Revolution

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Quebec's system of education was traditionally controlled by Catholic teaching orders. Nuns taught in the elementary schools, Brothers in the upper schools for boys.

Higher education followed the European tra-



dition, with emphasis on Latin and Greek at the classical colleges and on law and medicine in the universities.

The province had no compulsory attendance laws until 1943.

The institutions of the province began to change drastically in the late 1950s, with the most spectacular changes occurring in the style of education and the role of the Church.

In 1960 the Liberal Premier Jean Lesage launched the "Quiet Revolution." In the spring of 1961 a Royal Commission of Inquiry on Education began operations; and after hearing witnesses, examining briefs, and visiting some fifty institutions, it recommended that school enrollments be greatly expanded. "Education is essential in a democratic society," it concluded, "and it must be equally accessible to all."

The response was extraordinary. The classical colleges were largely replaced by two- or three-year colleges called *Collèges d'enseignement général et professionnel*, and some were integrated into the public system as secondary schools. The CEGEPs offered two-year courses to those preparing for university, and three-year "terminal" courses in business administration, auto mechanics, secretarial sciences and other vocational fields.

In 1951 only 29.9 per cent of Quebecers had nine years of school; by 1971 more than 45 per cent had.

In 1961 some 74 per cent of 15-year-olds and 7.3 per cent of those age 20 were in school. Ten years later 91 per cent of the 15-year-olds and 12.4 per cent of the 20-year-olds were under instruction.

In its 1976 survey of education in Canada, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development said that in Quebec, "it is already possible to speak of an almost complete accessibility of educational opportunity regardless of the student's geographical location."

In 1961, according to the Economic Council of Canada, Anglophones in Quebec earned fifty-one per cent more than Francophones. By 1977 the disparity was down to fifteen per cent. In 1961 only forty-four per cent of the persons in the top fifteen per cent bracket of income-earners were Francophones; by 1977 the percentage of Francophones had climbed to seventy per cent, and it is still rising.

Once a gifted French-speaking young man aspired to be a priest, a doctor or a lawyer. (Gifted young women had narrower options.) Today Quebec has one-third of all business students in the country, and the University of Montreal has more qualified business applicants than it can readily enroll.

Francophones have also gained access to the traditional English-language schools, such as McGill University in Montreal. According to Dr. E.J. Stanbury, vice-principal of planning at McGill, the number of French-speaking undergraduates has increased four per cent in two years, and they now represent twenty per cent of the full-time undergraduate enrollment.