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Think, Feel, Act

Empowering Children in the Middle Years

Cultivating a Francophone Identity in French-Language Before- and After-School Programs

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Before- and after-school programs can provide enriching experiences and stimulating environments that contribute to children's learning and development. In Ontario, in the context of a Francophone minority, it is the responsibility of educators[1] in French-language programs to create an environment that encourages children's acquisition of the French language and Francophone culture in all its diversity. These educators can support children on a path to building a Francophone identity while encouraging their development of cognitive, emotional, social, and physical abilities. The objective of this research summary is to raise the

1. The term "educator" has been used throughout this brief to refer to all people who work with children and families in middle years programs (e.g., centre- and home-based child care, before- and after-school programs).

Ontario

awareness of educators in French-language before- and after-school programs regarding their responsibility with respect to building a Francophone cultural identity in children.

Francophone Identity

Children's identity is defined on the basis of a set of factors, including their origins, values, and family, as well as the surrounding environment. The Francophone social identity of individual children develops through their contact with others; it is based on how children perceive, among other things, their French-language skills and abilities to learn, interact, play independently, and make choices and decisions. That identity is also built on children's sense of belonging to various groups, such as their families, peers, and various interest groups at school, and in before- and after-school programs and community, cultural, or other activities.

A person can have several social identities, and sometimes one identity can become more important than another. For example, children may self-identify as Francophones. Their identity may manifest itself as they spend time with friends who speak French, listen to the music of French-speaking artists, and go to Francophone cultural events. The more the children are valued in experiences with their families, peers, and other people in their social network, and the more the contribution of the French language and the Francophone community in children's lives is highlighted, the stronger the children's Francophone identity will become (Alberta Education, 2016; Duguay, 2008).

> "Identity results from the fusion of language and culture. ... Language is the main conveyor of culture and studies show that identity is the result of socialization through language and culture." (loosely translated)
>
> (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 18)

Development of a Francophone Cultural Identity

Before- and after-school programs offered in French are privileged environments that encourage the development of a Francophone identity in children. Such programs provide various types of activities that contribute to children's linguistic and cultural self-determination, and to their feeling of belonging to the Francophonie in all its diversity. Duguay (2008) proposes three types of distinct but closely related activities that can influence the degree to which children affirm their Francophone cultural identity:

1. **Activities that enhance children's exchanges with their parents and friends** and their socialization in French with various groups at school and in their community: for example, enabling children to participate in activities (e.g., board games, movies) in French with their parents and friends, to take part in cultural and sports activities in French (e.g., shows, festivals, sports events), to speak French in public spaces (e.g., stores, restaurants), and to use French through information and communication technologies (e.g., social networks, social media).

2. **Activities that increase children's motivation to act independently** by encouraging them to make choices regarding their learning, discoveries, and creations; by allowing them to address challenges; or by cultivating positive and rewarding interpersonal relations with the people in their social network: for example, allowing children to be exposed to significant models or public figures of the Francophonie, to have important experiences with other Francophones their own age, to make linguistic choices and assume responsibility for their consequences, and to develop pride in belonging to the Francophone community.

3. **Activities that enable children to adapt to their own reality but also to transform it in order to improve it:** for example, enabling children to become aware of being Francophone and of living in the context of a Francophone minority, to fulfil their potential and develop their French-language skills during cultural and other activities in French, to take a position regarding issues about the French language and Francophone culture, to value, through concrete actions, the French language and Francophone culture, to affirm themselves linguistically and culturally in various contexts, and to engage in projects that aim to change a situation.

According to research (Landry, Allard, & Deveau, 2010; Cormier, 2010), children must first understand the social realities of the environment in which they live in order to understand the effect of their choices. This awareness can make children commit to changing the status quo. It is through opportunities for linguistic and cultural acquisition that children will be able to develop feelings of competence, self-determination, and belonging, to understand the social realities of their environment and community, and to become aware of the issues in society in order to engage in changing the status quo.

Cormier (2010) proposes seven "axes of intervention" that can help children have enriching and stimulating linguistic and cultural experiences. These axes anchor, complete, and overlap one another, forming a coherent whole that guides educators' choices of significant activities. The seven axes of intervention for educators are as follows:

- Actualization of learning potential – the children master their learning
  - Example of direction: Develop significant activities on the basis of children's knowledge, needs, history, fields of interest, and learning preferences.
- Positive relationship with the French language – the children have a feeling of competence regarding their language abilities in French
  - Example of direction: On the basis of their knowledge, develop children's French vocabulary with significant activities that encourage a communicative approach.
- Cultural acquisition – the children discover Francophone culture
  - Example of direction: Create a learning process (e.g., game, survey) in which children can discover Francophone public figures and persons important in a field of activity (e.g., athletes, politicians, authors, environmentalists, scientists).
- Development of self-determination – the children demonstrate independence, a feeling of competence and a sense of belonging
  - Example of direction: Encourage teamwork on an area of common interest (e.g., Francophone leaders in various fields, such as science, medicine, arts, sports, business) that requires cooperation.
- Identity negotiation – the children think about a way to define themselves in relationship to the French language and Francophone culture
  - Example of direction: Create activities (e.g., sports competition, art exhibition) that show the Francophone identity in a positive light.
- Awareness and engagement – the children have experiences that require critical thinking and making a change
  - Example of direction: Encourage debates on subjects related to minority groups in society (e.g., English-language notices in a hospital in a region

designated under the (Ontario) French Language Services Act,[2] racist comments against Francophones) and discussion about the children's commitment to change the status quo.

- Community leadership – the children contribute to the vitality of the Francophone community while developing their leadership skills
  - Example of direction: Create a project (e.g., organizing the Ontario Francophonie celebration day, promoting French-language services in the community) that engages the children, in partnership with Francophone public figures, business people, or community organizations.

Learning experiences in French-language before- and after-school programs contribute to the creation of a climate that fosters children's acquisition of Francophone culture. These axes of intervention are closely related to the four foundations described in *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years:* belonging, engagement, expression, and well-being. "These foundations, or **ways of being**, are a vision for all children's future potential and a view of what they should experience each and every day" (Ontario, Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 7).

Francophone Identity and a Sense of Belonging

According to the model for the acquisition of Francophone culture (Ontario, Ministry of Education, 2009), Francophone culture has two aspects: the collective culture and the individual culture.

Francophone culture has distinct, dynamic, and progressive characteristics that are derived from the history of Francophone communities in Ontario and are recognized implicitly or explicitly by its members. This culture is based on a set of values, beliefs, traditions, customs, and ways of living together that evolve with the people that build it. It is the **collective culture**.

2. More information on the French Language Services Act is available on the website of the Office of the French Language Services Commissioner at csfontario.ca/en/loi.

Individuals have a unique cultural background that includes their personal history shaped by the influence of their family, friends, neighbourhood, school environment, and ethnic origin. This background is the known universe of the child. It is the **individual culture**.

Figure 1 below (available only in French) shows these concepts and highlights the relations between the individual culture (represented by the circle in the centre) and the collective culture (represented by the outer circle), illustrating the constant interactions between the two cultures. Thus, individuals know the cultural referents of the collective culture and participate in it by enriching it with their individual culture, while the collective culture contributes to the construction of the identity of individuals by enabling them to acquire cultural referents from the collective culture.[3]
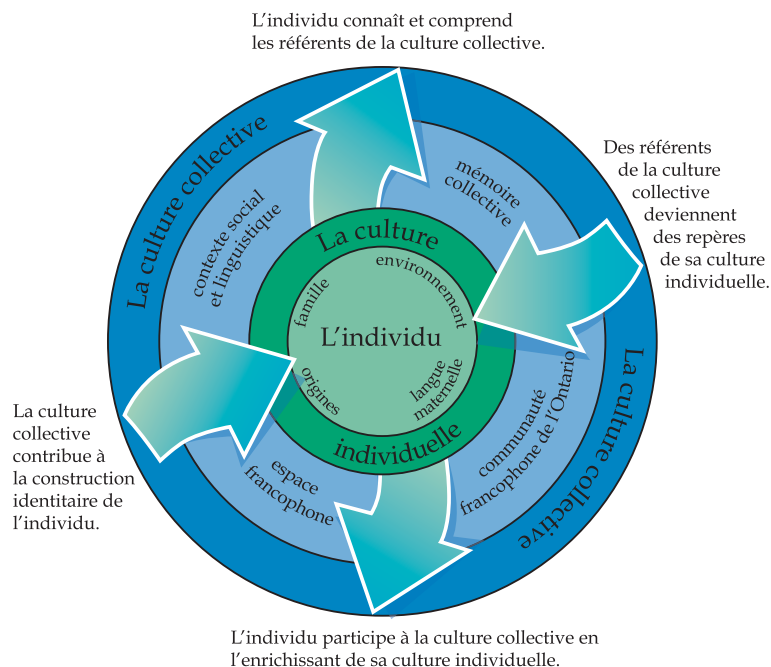
L'individu connaît et comprend les référents de la culture collective.

Des référents de la culture collective deviennent des repères de sa culture individuelle.

La culture collective

mémoire collective

La culture

environnement

contexte social et linguistique

famille

L'individu

langue maternelle

origines

communauté francophone de l'Ontario

individuelle

La culture collective

espace francophone

La culture collective contribue à la construction identitaire de l'individu.

L'individu participe à la culture collective en l'enrichissant de sa culture individuelle.

Figure 1. The Acquisition of Culture

Source: Ontario, Ministry of Education. (2009). *Une approche culturelle de l'enseignement pour l'appropriation de la culture dans les écoles de langue française de l'Ontario*, p. 25.

3. A summary of the foundation of *Une approche culturelle de l'enseignement pour l'appropriation de la culture dans les écoles de langue française* (2009) is available on the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada website at cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/312/Document-de-synthèse_EN.pdf.

In order for children to develop a sense of identity and of belonging to the Francophone community, they must become aware of the cultural referents[4] specific to the collective culture, recognize themselves in certain referents, and make them their own. This experience may help children feel they are part of the collective culture and participate in its renewal. This is a manifestation of the feeling of cultural belonging and of having a Francophone cultural identity.

The integration of Francophone cultural referents in before- and after-school program activities enables the anchoring of learning. The integration of such referents in activities should be planned globally and strategically. A vast range of activities that highlight knowledge, know-how, and existential skills encourage the transmission of Francophone culture and individual development. Educators should, however, avoid giving only a "traditional folklore" character to the notion of culture.

Cultural referents exist in all sectors of human activity. They can be selected from the children's daily life experiences and environment, and can reflect the cultural aspects of the regional, provincial, national, and global communities. They can also be found through historical research or scientific experiments. Together, these significant cultural referents for the Francophonie nourish collective memory and account for its modes of communication and its values, beliefs, ways of life, customs, achievements, and symbols (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2011, 2012).

The Banque pancanadienne des référents culturels signifiants pour la franco-phonie was created to support frontline workers (educators) in integrating Francophone culture in learning activities. This resource has over a thousand Francophone cultural referents that contribute significantly to the development of children's cultural identity and to the sustainability of the Francophone community, here and elsewhere. This database, as well as other resources that support the acquisition of Francophone culture, can be accessed on the page titled *Une approche culturelle de l'enseignement pour l'appropriation de la culture dans les écoles de langue française* on the Ressources éducatives de l'Ontario (REDO) website at redontario.ca/app_cult.aspx.

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4. Cultural referents significant for the Francophonie include public figures and characters; traditions, ways of life, and customs; demonstrations and gatherings; institutions and organizations; legislation and jurisprudence; achievements and works; and historical, linguistic, and contemporary heritage.

Cultural Role of Educators

Educators who are present in children's social network have a definite influence on children's cultural path. Given the frequency and continuity of the interventions of educators, their influence is a deciding factor in helping children to understand the importance of culture and establish a positive relationship with it. Educators have the responsibility to provide, on a regular basis, activities that enable children to engage with and become an active cultural actor in the Francophone community.

Educators play various cultural roles expressed through specific pedagogical attitudes and approaches that vary from one situation to another. Consequently, in order to fulfil their cultural mandate, educators can offer diverse experiences and provocations that can help children learn how to adapt to the context, cultural objects, and people.

The cultural roles that educators play can be described as **cultural model**, **conveyor of culture**, and **cultural mediator**. The observation and analysis tool in the text box below associates each of these three roles with concrete examples of ways that educators can include the cultural dimension in their professional life. This tool has various uses, including the following:

- observing pedagogical practices closely related to integration of the cultural aspect
- individual reflection on adopting cultural attitudes
- planning activities that include the cultural dimension
- implementing pedagogical practices focused on the integration of the cultural dimension

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Cultural Roles of Educators

I act as a cultural model:
- I show the value I give culture by communicating my interest in the French language and Francophone culture.
- I update my knowledge continuously, and I explore its cultural reach.
- I increase and diversify my cultural practices.
- I exchange cultural practices with others.
- I express my actions and thoughts about culture.
- I am open toward other cultures, including children's culture.

(continued)

I act as a conveyor of culture:
- I help children have experiences that enable them to discover, acquire, or enhance Francophone culture.
- I use resource persons, objects, and knowledge that have cultural legitimacy.
- I take advantage of the context, and I plan learning activities that help children:
  - engage in a process, reflection, or production with cultural reach;
  - acquire Francophone culture and its cultural referents here and elsewhere, past and present;
  - have exchanges in order to create meaning about cultural practices, objects, and knowledge.
- I establish a relationship between the targeted cultural elements and the suggested learning situations.
- I explain how the learning situations have a cultural, intercultural, or transcultural reach.
- I guide children so they are able to:
  - apply the cultural elements in other contexts;
  - be aware that Francophone culture contributes to the understanding and interpretation of the world and to building a Francophone cultural identity.

I act as a cultural mediator:
- I take into account the children's culture to guide them toward the acquisition of Francophone culture.
- I help children put in perspective their individual culture and the collective culture to which they belong.
- I encourage exchanges with people from my own culture and from other cultures.
- I help children speak in order to:
  - explain the sense and value they give cultural practices, objects, and knowledge;
  - interpret the world using their cultural referents;
  - establish connections between their prejudices, their values, and their opinions;
  - compare their representation of the world with that of their peers.
- I support children so they take into account cultural referents when they make a critical judgment.

(Adapted from the working document *Intégration de la dimension culturelle en salle de classe. Outil d'observation et d'analyse.* [*Integration of the cultural dimension in the classroom. Observation and analysis tool*] (Ontario. Ministry of Education, and Quebec. Ministry of Education, Recreation and Sports. 2015 [unpublished])

In the context of a Francophone minority, building a Francophone identity in children is based on experiences that enable children to develop their feelings of competence, self-determination, and belonging. Educators in before- and after-school programs should act as cultural models, conveyors of culture, and cultural mediators by creating and providing children with authentic learning experiences that enable them to acquire the French language and Francophone culture, as well as the feeling of belonging to the Francophone community. Thus, educators contribute to the creation or expansion of a Francophone environment that reflects the dynamism and pluralism of the Francophone community and promotes the development of children's Francophone identity, well-being, and school success.

French-language before- and after-school programs can truly constitute an environment in which children acquire solid French-language skills and improve their knowledge of Francophone culture, here and elsewhere, past and present. In them, children can acquire a set of cultural referents that enable them to interpret the world and discover the distinct characteristics and expressions of the Francophonie, on a material, emotional, cultural, and intellectual level.

Questions for Reflection

Cultural roles

Consider the three cultural roles described in the text box on the previous page.

- What is the cultural role you are most at ease with? How does this role manifest itself in your daily professional practice? How can you better perform this role?
- What is the cultural role you are least at ease with? What will help you improve your performance of this cultural role in your daily professional practice?

Francophone cultural referents

Consider that cultural referents exist in all sectors of human activity, at the local, regional, provincial, national, and world level. Select ten Francophone cultural referents that you wish to include in your professional practice.

- How did you select these cultural referents? What problems did you face?
- What means will help you recognize Francophone cultural referents representative of the Francophone community here and elsewhere?

Practical application

On the basis of the cultural acquisition model presented in this summary, identify, with the children, a cultural referent of the Francophone community. Explore activities to include this cultural referent in a way that is meaningful for the children.

- How did you prepare the activity so that children were able to participate throughout the process? What problems did you face?
- How do you describe your cultural role in this experience with the children?
- How will this experience support the children's feelings of competence, self-determination, and belonging?

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Paulette Rozon began her career as a teacher at the secondary level, teaching at two schools in eastern Ontario over a period of twenty-two years. She has a PhD in Educational Administration from the Université de Montréal and, since 1983, has been teaching part-time at the Faculty of Education of the University of Ottawa. From 1999 to 2014, she worked as an education officer for the French-language Education Policy and Program Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Education. She was responsible for several files related to the Ontario curriculum as well as for the implementation of the cultural pedagogical initiative, the Aménagement linguistique policy, in French-language schools.