

Report on the workshops

held as part of Live Dialogue
in Ottawa on March 3, 2001



Dialogue: Background

Following the tabling of the study *"Des orientations claires, une voix qui rassemble"* in August 1998, the *Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne (FCFA) du Canada* established a steering committee which in turn suggested that a task force be set up to carry out national consultations. The main goal of the task force's cross Canada tour was to collect the points of view of the various stakeholders in the Francophone and Acadian, native, ethnocultural and Anglophone communities on the future of the French community and to develop ties among the various components of Canadian society. The task force was made up of Mariette Carrier-Fraser (Ontario), Marc C. Arnal (Alberta), Isabelle Chiasson (New Brunswick) and the President of the FCFA. Gino LeBlanc held this position until September 2000. He was replaced by Georges Arès, the current President of the FCFA.

From February to June 2001, the Dialogue task force held public and private workshops throughout Canada. More than one thousand individuals from the ten provinces and the three territories were consulted during the tour to:

- Highlight and promote Canada's Francophone and Acadian communities;
- Identify ways of allowing the Francophone and Acadian communities to operate at the provincial, territorial, national and international levels; and
- Build links and strengthen relations among groups within Canadian society.

Live Dialogue

The dialogue that began during the national tour was continued at Live Dialogue, a national conference held in Ottawa on March 2 and 3 of this year. The main objective was to initiate a discussion among the various intercommunity stakeholders in order to:

- Highlight existing links among communities;
- Create a general awareness among Canadians through extensive coverage in the English and French media;
- Highlight the Francophone and Acadian communities;
- Continue developing relations among the various Canadian communities; and
- Make people aware of the Dialogue follow-up process.

The national conference brought together almost 480 participants from the various components of Canadian society. The participants, including members of Canada's Francophone and Acadian communities, Quebec Francophones, Anglophones, members of ethnocultural communities, native peoples and officials of municipal, provincial, territorial and federal governments, dealt with themes in the task force's report "Let's Talk!"

Live Dialogue gave leaders of various Canadian communities an opportunity to share their achievements and their vision, explore project development and funding and shape the future of their communities. Furthermore, to facilitate contact and maximize networking, Live Dialogue offered a dynamic "projects market", a community fair, exchanges with project development resource people and discussion workshops.

These discussion workshops gave participants a chance to speak freely about intercommunity relations based on the "Let's Talk!" report. The workshop leaders used the following questions as guidelines during the discussions:

- How can we develop a vision of a national Francophone community that would include the participation of Quebec society?
- What should be done to integrate francophiles into community life?
- What means can be used to better integrate newcomers into the Francophone community?
- How can we show our support for the recognition of the rights to self-determination and respect for treaties with native peoples?
- What do you think of establishing a Live Dialogue follow-up committee to report on an action plan in the light of the report's recommendations and the Live Dialogue workshops?

The following is a collection of participants' comments on recommendations made by the task force in its report, "Let's Talk!". Please note that the subjects were dealt with differently from one workshop to another. The comments collected are presented in a random format and there was not necessarily consensus on all of them.

The report of the workshops will be submitted to the Dialogue follow-up committee and will be used for reference in its future work. The committee is made up of the following individuals:

- **Georges Arès**, FCFA's President;
- **Ghislain Picard**, Regional Chief of the Assembly of First Nations;
- **Art Hagopian**, President of the Canadian Ethnocultural Council;
- **Joan Netten**, President of Canadian Parents for French;
- **Jean-Claude Parrot**, Executive Vice-President of the Canadian Labour Congress;
- **David Stewart-Patterson**, First Vice-President of the Business Council on National Issues;
- **Germain Desbiens**, President and CEO of the *Fondation de l'entrepreneurship*;
- **Daniel Boucher**, President and CEO of the *Société franco-manitobaine*;
- **Fernand Denault**, President of the *Fédération franco-ténoise*;
- **Roxane Dupuis**, President of the *Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française*;

- **Alcide Gour**, President of the *Association canadienne-française de l'Ontario*;
- **Jean-Guy Rioux**, President of the *Société des Acadiens et Acadiennes du Nouveau-Brunswick*.
- **Marc Arnal**, member of the Dialogue task force
- **Mariette Carrier-Fraser**, member of the Dialogue task force
- **Isabelle Chiasson**, member of the Dialogue task force

Relations among Francophones

1. In order to develop a vision of a national Francophone community, the Francophone and Acadian communities undertake a study of Francophone identity in each of the provinces and territories so as to take stock of the changes that have taken place in recent years and, as they may see fit, adapt their definitions of themselves and their development priorities;
2. The FCFA and its member associations develop tools allowing them to more accurately measure community vitality.

General reactions

- One group agreed with the recommendations, but expressed concern at repeating the process undertaken by renewing minority official language community development funding agreements.
- As the report notes, it is important to examine the situation closely before doing anything.
- According to one group, those responsible for implementing these recommendations should be: the FCFA, provincial and territorial associations. It would be important to include the ethnocultural component – communities and individuals. Some participants also wondered whether the federal government has a role to play in developing Francophone identity.

Identity

- We have to take another look at our values.
- It would be useful to extend the definition of "Francophones" and not limit it to "pure laine" Francophones.
- The definition of "the French-language community" should be revisited because too often the subconscious Canadian perception of being Francophone is being Quebecois. This perception must be corrected.
- We must show pride in our cultural heritage, particularly by creating pride in the French language among young people, highlighting our heroes and modernizing the use of the French language.
- Participants believed it important that the FCFA talk about the French language community. In their opinion, we have to stop talking about the different communities: that only serves to perpetuate isolation, misunderstanding and separation. Rather, we have to talk about the French language community as a great world community with several faces, and including all Canadian Francophones. It is important that the FCFA be able to show that the French language community, because of the nature of its language, now has a decisive role to play in the world and that this role goes well beyond politics. The FCFA must show who Francophones are, how they are different and what their particular contributions in daily life and within the world community are.

Links among Francophone communities

- Francophone communities do not know each other well, whether they live in British Columbia, Manitoba, Quebec or Nova Scotia.
- We must build bridges by increasing inter provincial exchanges and promoting cultural tourism – while respecting regional differences, language levels and local colour.
- We must find funding to bring Francophone communities together, sometimes within the same province.
- It is important to develop a means of communication to publicize local experiences at the national level.

Other comments

- Francophones must innovate, and break away from the traditional framework. In particular, they must expand the range of activities already planned, establish a communications network and organize more neighbourhood parties to which locals are invited.
- The ethnocultural communities do not feel that they are part of the identity process. They say they are consulted only after the fact.
- Priority must be placed on health care in French.
- The putting in place of social services managed by Francophones in partnership with other groups must also be encouraged.
- We must take responsibility for developing our own communities.
- We could adopt local community development tools such as the PATH program and the Prairie Conservation Action Plan.
- We must strengthen rural communities.
- We must target young people more – meetings, exchanges, correspondence, exchange programs – and integrate them into the Live Dialogue follow-up.
- Communities must use new technologies more. For this, the examples from various groups are to put interactive means of communication in place that allow people who share common interests to exchange views on the problems they face and success stories. It is also recommended that a short film or a CD-ROM be produced on the world French community which would include the various faces of Canadian Francophones.
- Citizens must be better informed and take part in these activities.
- We must take the migration of Francophones to large urban centres into account.

Relations with Quebec Francophones

3. The Francophone and Acadian communities adopt a vision of the national Francophone community that includes and fully encourages the participation of Quebec society.

General reactions

- One group found it ironic that there is only one recommendation concerning Quebecois compared to the great number of recommendations on francophiles.
- Another group thought that the word "include" for Quebec is not acceptable.

Other comments

- According to several participants, it is important to develop an awareness program aimed at Quebecois, the Quebec government and provincial media to increase their understanding of the situation, and in particular the accomplishments of Francophone communities outside Quebec. It was noted that the Quebec media has an important role to play at this level.
- It was recommended that pressure be put on the CRTC to ensure that communities are better represented on television, for example, by demanding better broadcast times.
- The importance of removing politics from relationships between the two communities was mentioned. Elsewhere, it was said that we must work on what divides us.
- Canadian Francophones should not be afraid of their Quebec roots, however distant they might be.

Relations with Anglophones

4. The Francophone and Acadian communities take concrete measures to incorporate and promote full participation and to recognize the contribution of francophiles and of opinion leaders who are sympathetic to the Francophone cause within their decision-making and community organizations;
5. Efforts to develop closer ties with Anglophone organizations that promote linguistic duality and the use of the French language be initiated and/or continued by the Francophone and Acadian communities;
6. The Francophone and Acadian communities take a greater interest in school immersion programs, fostering closer ties with the Anglophone community;
7. The Francophone and Acadian communities take concrete measures to promote the use of French in various areas of human activity, including the workplace, cultural and artistic activities, and leisure.

Openness to Anglophones

- Overall, participants said that ties between Francophones and Anglophones should be strengthened. They believed that we must counter isolationist – even xenophobic – tendencies and find ways of increasing exchanges in order to help each other.
- It is important to look for common interests in ties between Francophones and Anglophones.
- More space should be given to francophiles in the Francophone and Acadian communities and an action plan could be developed to improve integration. Here are some of the major suggestions made by the various groups:
 - Research and awareness work should be carried out within Francophone communities to make them more welcoming and open to francophiles;
 - Experience in living in French should not be limited to Quebec. Exchanges should be expanded. Moreover, it would be useful to organize exchanges not only among students, but also among adults;
 - The creation of a virtual "projects market" or "idea fair" was suggested, that is, a forum for electronic exchanges that would become a focal point for sharing and cooperation;
 - Common ground must be found for action that goes beyond language issues;
 - Partnerships could be developed with francophiles to influence local governments;
 - Leadership could be shared with francophiles in our rights claims;
 - It would be useful to identify the role bilingual Anglophones might play in Francophone organizations;
 - In general, young Anglophones who are favorable to the French fact should be involved in the process since it is they who will implement ideologies.

Immersion schools

- Several comments were made about immersion schools. From the discussions, the following major recommendations emerged:
 - Give more support to students who attend or have attended immersion schools;
 - Particularly in environments where communities are fragile – increase resource sharing between immersion schools (francophiles) and Francophone communities so as to reinforce their respective institutions and solidify the links between them;
 - That exchange programs administered by the CMEC open up their doors;
 - Increase the number of intercultural exchange activities outside school.
 - Add cultural programs to immersion programs;
 - Expose young Anglophones more to Francophone culture (theatre, cinema, songs, etc.)

Other comments

- Some people stressed the impact of the national question in Quebec on relations between Anglophones and Francophones in this country. They would like to find a *modus vivendi* that

would make it possible to attenuate the effects of this national polemic on relationships among individuals and communities on a smaller scale. Several people said that the FCFA should exercise leadership in order to promote, or better still, to make Anglophone Canadians aware of the situation of Francophones outside Quebec so that they won't always bear the backlash caused by Quebec government actions on the language question. Francophones outside Quebec feel they are in a good position to build bridges between Quebec and English Canada (an expression many did not like).

- The myth that Francophones are dying out must be put to rest.
- Politicians should be able to speak both of Canada's official languages.
- It is important to identify ourselves as Francophones to allow francophiles to make their feelings known and say what they think.

Relations with the ethnocultural communities

8. The FCFA and its member associations set up a national committee to develop an immigration action plan;
9. The FCFA and its member associations consider the implications of the open community concept in order to suggest courses of action for improving the integration of newcomers;
10. The Government of Canada review its official languages and multiculturalism policies and programs so as to ensure better coordination and complementarity, and that the FCFA be one of the partners involved in this exercise;
11. The FCFA and its member associations actively participate in various anti-racism campaigns.

General reactions

- Several speakers found the report very paternalistic, even condescending, on this question. It was, according to them, saturated with an air of superiority. According to some, an inclusive, respectful and participative approach must be adopted.
- Likewise, it was thought that the ethnocultural issue was too easily reduced to the unique issues of newcomers. It was felt that too little effort has been devoted to dealing with the problems of people who have been living here for a long time or who were born here, but who are from ethnocultural communities. Likewise, things are often simplified too much by saying that "native-born" Francophones make up a homogeneous block. That is not the case... Therefore, we cannot simplify relations between Francophones and ethnocultural groups as the Dialogue report seems to do.
- It was thought that the FCFA should apply recommendations 8 and 9, but that recommendation 10 is unacceptable (unanimity in one of the workshops).

Reflection and action within the Francophone communities

- Several observers felt that Francophones and their institutions should show openness to these communities.

- We must eliminate our racist problems by educating people not to judge but to understand.
- Integration committees and support programs should be set up to promote Francophone immigration.
- We must review access to French schools in our communities. Moreover, in school, we must promote non-discrimination processes from childhood.
- There is some catch-up to be done with immigrants who are already here.
- Cultural awareness events should be set up, such as an international food festival, exchanges, etc.
- It is important to recognize the contribution of ethnocultural groups in our communities.
- Seats should be reserved for immigrants on various Francophone and Acadian community committees and councils.
- We must stress commonalities to allow real dialogue to begin and develop.
- One challenge is to show newcomers that it is advantageous to know both official languages.

Reflection and action within the FCFA

- On the question of racism, the FCFA should avoid reinventing the wheel by forming associations with other players who have been active in this area for some time.
- It was thought that the FCFA should work towards making Francophones better known within ethnocultural communities.
- It was suggested that ethnocultural communities be given membership in the FCFA.

Reflection and action at the national level

- It was thought important that a lobby be active everywhere in Canada to ensure that more Francophone immigrants are welcomed and invited to settle in the various provinces and integrated into the local Francophone communities.
- One participant thought it important to review our Canadian symbols, including the flag, to base them more on the four major pillars of the new Canadian society: Anglophone, Francophone, native and ethnocultural groups.
- We must make all Canadians and immigrants aware of the fact that is not only French in Quebec and English elsewhere.
- Our immigration policies must be updated to make newcomers aware of what their language choices and possibilities are.
- It is important to show certain immigrants our linguistic similarity by pointing out our common Latin roots.
- It is important to bring Quebec and French Canadian ethnocultural associations closer together.
- We must ensure that young Canadians of different origins are included in national and international delegations.

Relations with native peoples

12. The FCFA and its member associations help defend and promote the rights of native peoples, the principle of their self-determination within the Canadian federation and respect of the treaties and agreements to which they are signatories;
13. The FCFA and its member associations make a commitment, jointly with associations representing native peoples, to establish awareness of and public education programs on the social, political and legal situations of their respective communities.

General reactions

- It was pointed out that there should have been a recommendation on the preservation of native languages.
- On this subject, some people again thought that the report is paternalistic. Many participants expressed the wish that we get away from the idea of two founding peoples, of linguistic duality, and that we adopt a more inclusive formula, based on solidarity and reciprocity.
- This is one of the most important subjects, but it is badly understood. The group agreed with the recommendations – dialogue is necessary.

Cooperation and exchanges

- Even if relations between Francophones and natives have not always been the best in the past, we believe that both have much to learn from each other. There are community development experiences that no doubt could be beneficial to everybody.
- We must make room for exchanges, cooperation and respect based on the principle of relationships among equals.
- British Columbia Francophones pointed out that there is regular cooperation between Francophones and natives in their province, on treaty issues among other things.
- We must become partners with the native nations.
- Here, as with the two other major subjects discussed, it was thought important to set up cultural and linguistic exchange programs.
- It was suggested that joint tourist programs be set up by natives and Francophones.
- Partnerships could be set up by exchanging radio air time and newspaper space.
- It was proposed that community development expertise (health, education, culture, cooperatives) be exchanged in a spirit of mutual respect.
- Concrete action must be taken with native communities, for example, providing educational materials in French to native communities where French is spoken or learned.

Respect for native peoples, their rights and treaties

- On several occasions, participants expressed the wish that prejudices and stereotypes concerning natives be dropped.

- We have to respect native rights and treaties – it's as simple as that.
- It was recommended that provincial and territorial organizations build bridges between natives and Francophones with regards to ancestral claims.
- We must recommend that the government negotiate treaty and self-determination issues with greater good faith and integrity.

Dialogue and better understanding of each other

- The fundamental differences between the Metis and the First Nations must be brought out. There are great differences between these two peoples.
- There should be a dialogue among the representatives of our groups and associations.
- Provincial situations differ. Therefore, solutions must differ.
- Awareness work should be carried out. According to some participants, it is up to native elected officials to educate the population.
- The importance of including native history in education was stressed.
- The organization of a get-acquainted meeting between the FCFA and the Assembly of First Nations was proposed. It was also recommended that the AFN be consulted on the way to include natives in FCFA discussions on its vision of Canada and how to approach the notion of "founding peoples".
- Natives could be invited to come and talk about their claims at the Annual General Meetings of the FCFA and its member organizations.
- It is important to look for positive historic ties between the Francophone and native communities.

Relations with governments

14. The Government of Canada show more leadership in promoting linguistic duality and reiterate its commitment by adopting a comprehensive development policy for Canada's Francophone and Acadian communities;
15. Provincial and territorial governments show leadership by enacting legislation guaranteeing the active provision and delivery of high-quality services in French;
16. Municipal governments recognize and assume their responsibilities towards the Francophone and Acadian communities by guaranteeing to actively provide and deliver high-quality French services;
17. The various levels of government reiterate their commitment to the various components of Canadian society.

- Participants asked that there be funds available as transfers to municipalities to provide services in both languages.

Towards a Vision of Canadian Society

Citizenship can be defined in different ways. It is influenced by many realities: historical, linguistic, geographic, socio-political, legal, economic, and others. In light of its findings during the national tour, the task force proposes a vision of Canadian society based on three interdependent principles: equity, diversity, and community.

Equity

Respecting the principle of equity means offering Canadian citizens, no matter what their circumstances, all possible opportunities to reach their goals. The principle of equity leads to the idea of 'equal opportunity': the system of equalization payments and the universality of health care are examples of the application of this principle.

Diversity

Supporting the principle of diversity means recognizing that interaction between the different groups within a society brings about better results. It also means encouraging the idea that different perspectives can result in more just and enlightened decisions with regard to specific racial, linguistic, cultural, religious, regional or other situations. In Canada, diversity is enshrined in the Constitution, in particular by the articles dealing with official languages, multiculturalism, and native peoples.

Community

Community is the coexistence of diversity and equity. It means that citizens adhere to common social values and assume collective and individual responsibilities in contributing to the development of Canadian society. The principle of community is constantly being redefined.

For us in the national Francophone community, being a Canadian citizen means living our Francophone identity to the full while respecting and being open to others and remaining aware that official languages are an integral part of the Canadian identity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

18. The FCFA propose that a permanent foundation be created whose main goal would be to promote dialogue between the Francophone and Acadian communities and all other components of Canadian society by developing cooperative projects and by carrying out research;
19. The FCFA and its member associations incorporate the Dialogue project approach into their procedures and actions;
20. Canada's Francophone and Acadian communities promote the French fact while encouraging diversity, in collaboration with the other components of Canadian society.

Comments on the vision

- Several participants agreed that the principles underlying the vision (equity, community diversity) are essential. Some asked that the following principle: French is an added value in their milieu and in the world – be added and explained concretely and in a "visionary" way.
- However, some participants believe that the vision should be expressed more concretely to give direction to the communities. They ask that the follow-up committee address this.
- Some of the changes suggested were:
 - The word "integration" should not be used in the sense of "assimilation";
 - Among the issues discussed, education should be added (the number of institutions and the educational services available in a region might determine the condition of a community);
 - A fourth principle – partnership – should be added. A partnership motivated by passion.

Comments on the follow-up committee and a foundation

- Most participants were convinced of the need for a Dialogue follow-up committee.
- Some participants were not in favor of the committee or even of follow-ups since they could interfere with local initiatives and even dilute the funding available, thus endangering them.
- The need for a committee that would encourage the four groups (Anglophone, Francophone, native and ethnocultural) to come together to continue the dialogue was stressed.
- In most of the groups, the importance of ensuring follow-up at the regional and local levels by associations and participants was noted.
- Several people also put forth the idea of repeating the Live Dialogue event in 2, 5 or 10 years since the event meets a need. However, it was pointed out that the four pillars of Canadian society should be better represented if we want a real action plan that can mobilize people.
- One group suggested that a committee composed of representatives of all the communities be set up to continue to manage Live Dialogue and organize a biennial forum on national dialogue. It was thought that Canadian Heritage should fund this initiative with participation by all provincial and territorial governments.
- Another group insisted that the follow-up committee and proposed actions must take regional and local realities into account. They would like – based on real problems experienced by the Francophone communities – the committee to provide ideas or project models or initiatives based on partnerships with other communities that encourage sustainable solutions.

Implementation of the recommendations

- Some participants indicated that the way in which the report recommendations are implemented will assure the success of the exercise. This committee should now get inspiration from the philosophical and political discourse of the report to allow communities to set to work.
- It is important that the recommendations be accepted in our communities before proceeding to put them in place.

Establishment of a foundation

- Not all groups were able to discuss the relevance of a foundation. However, among those who did discuss the subject, it was thought that the project should be studied in detail so as not to interfere with local initiatives, especially at the funding level.