

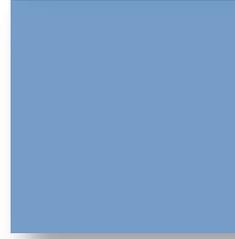
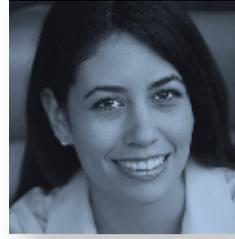
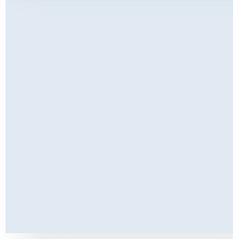
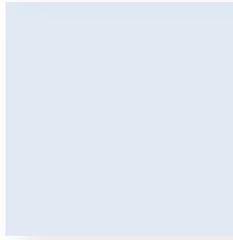
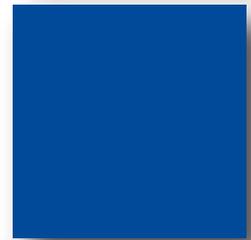
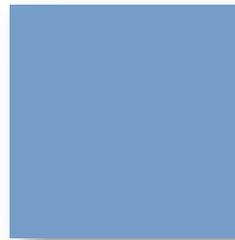
Why are new French immersion and French as a second language teachers leaving the profession?



Results of a Canada-wide survey



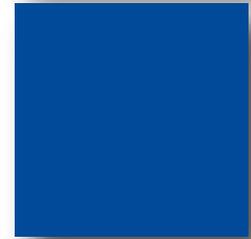
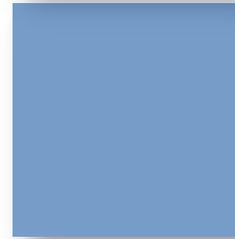
acpi.ca/enquete



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November 2008



We sincerely thank the Department of Canadian Heritage for funding this national survey.

The full survey report is available online at the Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers (CAIT) site: acpi.ca/enquete.

To cite this document:

Karsenti, T., Collin, S., Villeneuve, S., Dumouchel, G., & Roy, N. (2008). *Why are new French immersion and French as a second language teachers leaving the profession? Results of a Canada-wide survey*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers.

Legal deposit:

Library and Archives Canada, 2008

ISBN: 978-0-9811498-4-4

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Use of masculine pronouns throughout the work is done for simplicity and is not intended to be discriminatory or exclusionary.

SUMMARY



Although several provinces have complained about the shortage of French immersion and French as a second language (FSL) teachers, many are also wondering why so many teachers are leaving the profession in the first few years. Ingersoll (2001), who calls this attrition a “revolving door,” was one of the first to blame the teacher shortage on the departure of new teachers and not just the retirement of veterans. Borman and Dowling (2008) present a highly interesting historical overview of perspectives on this phenomenon, which particularly affects new teachers. What’s going on? Are they badly prepared? Are the students too difficult? Has teaching French become such a demanding and time-consuming job that so many are deserting so quickly? What are the main problems that teachers have to deal with? What could school systems do to help retain teachers? Based on these research questions, the Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers (CAIT), jointly with the *Centre de recherche sur la formation et la profession enseignante* (CRIFPE), undertook a Canada-wide survey funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage to explore an issue that is of vital importance to many education ministries in Canada.

We conducted a cross-Canada online survey (n = 201) accompanied by individual telephone interviews (n = 8) and group interviews (n = 5). The online survey comprises a sample of 34 former teachers and 167 key informants, most of whom were involved in French immersion programs. Evidently, there are fewer former teachers than informants, which is no surprise given that teachers who quit are by definition “out of touch” with the teaching profession, and therefore hard to reach. In other words, we know where they aren’t, but we don’t know where they are, which poses a recurrent obstacle to research on departed or “drop-out” teachers. On this issue, we refer to the study by the Canadian Teachers’ Federation (CTF) (2004) in a sample of 25 former teachers. For Kirsch (2006), the problem of tracking down teachers who quit largely explains why few researchers broach this subject. In this study, the problem was compounded because the survey targeted a subsample of former teachers: French immersion and French as a second language teachers.

Also, by including key informants, despite the eventual production of some bias, we could gather more information on a trend for which the primary subjects of interest – the departed teachers – were mostly absent from the study. We should clarify that no significant difference was found between the two groups of respondents, which suggests that perceptions of dropping out are not significantly different, albeit noteworthy in some respects. Moreover, this distribution of participants was useful in that it allowed us to enrich our obtained results by confronting the two groups of respondents to identify convergences and divergences in the drop-out phenomenon.



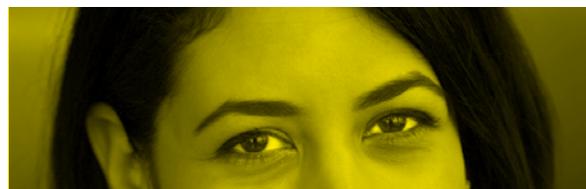
The results of the study show that departures from the profession by both French immersion and French as a second language teachers are primarily explained by the following five factors:

1. Difficult work conditions inherent in French immersion and French as a second language teaching.
2. Lack of instructional materials (particularly for immersion).
3. Inherent challenges in the relational aspects of teaching.
4. Underlying problems of classroom management and sometimes difficult clientele.
5. Initial training and career choice of the drop-out teacher.

Rather than addressing each factor group separately, the following paragraphs consider them in relation to each other. First, it is worth noting that a large proportion of the departures reported in the survey occurred in the first five years of service (with 50 % in the first two years), which appears to confirm the idea that the induction phase is particularly conducive to teacher attrition (Guarino, Santibañez & Daley, 2006; Hammerness, 2008; Hanushek, Kain & Rivkin, 2004).

In terms of problems encountered by former French immersion and French as a second language teachers, excessive workload outside the workplace (at home, etc.), frequently overloaded schedules and consequent lack of time are the main points associated with teaching conditions. Although it comes up, it seems that low salary is not a predominant factor in dropping out, a finding that has been suggested previously (Brill & McCartney, 2008; OCDE, 2005; Ondrich, Pas & Yinger, 2008).

Lack of instructional materials is also mentioned as a reason to leave the teaching profession. This is particularly true for immersion, because the language of teaching does not always correspond to the language of the community. The fact is, in English Canada, the instructional materials made available to immersion teachers are, unsurprisingly, in English (e.g., a history textbook), which means they cannot be used as French immersion materials in the classroom.





Classroom management and difficult clientele are also major challenges to new teachers, no matter what the subject. In fact, novice teachers usually go through a “survival”

period (Kirsch, 2006) during which the ability to manage a classroom is a major teaching issue.

Relational aspects of teaching constitute a further problem that beginning teachers must face. Difficult relationships with some parents of students is repeatedly mentioned as a pressure that drives future teachers to drop out, especially by the key informants. On the other hand, drop-out teachers report more problematic relationships with the school management/administration and colleagues. Lack of support in this respect, especially when problems with parents and

students arise, is the most recurrent theme cited by respondents, as corroborated by recent studies (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Chaplain, 2008; Gonzalez, Brown & Slate, 2008; Hudson, Beutel & Hudson, 2008; OECD, 2005). Management/administration is generally the first point of contact and appeal for teachers having difficulties, and the results seem to indicate that drop-out teachers seldom get the help they expect. Colleagues are also important contacts when problems occur. The two types of support appear to be linked: drop-out teachers either turn to the management/administration and, when they feel that help is not forthcoming from that quarter, turn to their colleagues; or else they turn first to their colleagues and afterwards to the management/administration if the problems persists. In either case, the support they receive does not appear to meet the expectations or address the problems of drop-out teachers. Besides a perceived lack of support, the respondents also report a fear of being judged as incompetent, which points to a lack of trust between drop-out teachers and school actors, particularly management/administration. Family and friends provide a last line of support that counteracts the fear of being judged.



Paradoxically to the lack of support cited, the departed teachers appear to have had opportunities to work jointly or in collaboration with their colleagues, which suggests a possible differentiation between collaboration with other teachers and support for drop-out teachers – two themes that appear relatively independent in this study. In concrete terms, this means that new French immersion and French as a second language teachers appear to be able to collaborate with their colleagues, but not necessarily to ask for help in dealing with a problem.

The choice of teaching as a career and professional aspirations of becoming a teacher show two inverse trends. In the first case, drop-out teachers report a lack of initial keenness for the profession, which at least partly explains their departure. However, an equal proportion of drop-out teachers were motivated to become teachers. In this respect, two main explanations are proposed to account for the connection between initial motivation and subsequent departure: either it is due to idealization of the teaching profession, a point that is raised in other studies (Hammerness, 2008), or it is attributable to poor teaching skills. In both cases, initial training is regularly blamed in that it inadequately prepares teachers, thereby increasing the risk for eventual departure.

So what could be done to prevent French immersion and French as a second language teachers from leaving the profession? How can we help future teachers? Some courses of action are proposed at the end of the report. Consistent with logic, better overall support, and particularly administrative support, combined with a more skills-preparatory university training, are mentioned, as well as more instructional materials and the establishment of specific teaching conditions for interning teachers (especially schedules) as well as strategies to help them deal with problems. But first and foremost, the most frequently stated need by the respondents is an aspect of professional induction: **mentoring**. Although it is a promising strategy to counter drop-out (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Guarino, Santibañez & Daley, 2006; Hudson, Beutel & Hudson, 2008; Martineau, 2008), mentoring is currently underused in the French immersion and French as a second language teaching profession.

