



Report on the Education and Vitality Forum

Organized by the Inter-Level
Educational Table (ILET), a committee
of the Quebec English-Speaking
Communities Research Network
(QUESCREN),
And held at Concordia University,
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The full program for the 2021 Forum is available [here](#).

Executive Summary

From November 3 to 5, 2021, researchers, practitioners, community stakeholders, and policy makers from across Quebec gathered virtually for a three-day event entitled Education and Vitality Forum: Supporting English-Language Minority Education in Quebec. This was the second forum convened by the Inter-Level Educational Table (ILET), a committee of the Quebec English-Speaking Communities Research Network (QUESCREN) at Concordia University. Its objective was to encourage mobilization around the development of a healthy and sustainable English-language educational offer in Quebec that supports student retention, access to good jobs in the province, and a strong sense of identity and belonging. This report provides an overview of the Forum and key takeaway messages from it.¹

Key questions addressed at the Forum

- What are best practices for online education in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- How can the English-language education system best address community diversity and disparities?
- How do English-speaking communities, which embody diverse opinions and experiences, build a cohesive voice on education?
- How can we develop sustainable initiatives for Black English-speaking communities?
- What can a plurilingual approach offer for language vitality and identity validation?
- How can literacy services best reach vulnerable populations during the pandemic?
- How can a continuum of English-language education help promote educational success and youth retention in Quebec?
- How can we counter the decline of English-language education in Quebec?
- How can knowledge of education rights and the law help English-speaking Quebec build sustainable relationships with governments?

1 The author acknowledges Celine Cooper, whose report on the first QUESCREN-ILET Forum in 2018 served as the model for the current one. The first forum report is available here: https://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/artsci/scpa/quescren/docs/Forum2018Rpt_EN.pdf

Key takeaway messages

The community must draw on its diversity

The Forum confirmed that English-speaking Quebec is diverse and that it draws on its many assets to confront challenges. Among the populations enriching English-speaking Quebec are First Nations and Black communities, whose cultures, like many others, can be leveraged inside the classroom.

Education must meet communities where they are

This is meant both physically and conceptually. English-speaking communities are vastly different throughout the province. Programs must be tailored to the specific needs of different communities.

No clear way forward in building an inclusive curriculum, but a willingness to listen and work together

There exists a diversity of approaches on key issues around curriculum that need to be considered with respect as we move forward.

The importance of collaboration

The Forum brought attention to collaboration between the education sector, community-based organizations, economic development stakeholders, and various other groups. Through joint action, community institutions show the strength and resilience essential for facing challenges.

Challenges over rights

Quebec's English-language minorities must have a voice and maintain their right to manage their education system and to receive quality public education. This requires collaborative solutions.

A coordinated voice

A cohesive and coordinated voice to speak for the vitality and diversity of English-speaking communities in the context of their education system is needed.

Be strategic and pragmatic

To promote community vitality through education, Quebec's English-speaking communities must identify and pursue long- and short-term goals in keeping with prevailing public priorities and policies.

Find opportunities to collaborate with the majority community

Interaction and cooperation with francophone majority institutions are of strategic importance. The idea that English-speaking communities can or should evolve separately from the majority is neither realistic or desirable.

Break down the silos

The metaphor of the "silo" arose frequently throughout the Forum in reference to many English-language education programs and organizations. Silos need to be broken down not only within the education sector, but also within and across a range of sectors, including business, health, and social services.

Mentorship is key

The importance of mentorship in promoting a continuum of education was mentioned frequently.

Introduction

About the Forum

From November 3 to 5, 2021, participants from across Quebec gathered virtually for a three-day forum entitled ***Education and Vitality Forum: Supporting English-Language Minority Education in Quebec***. This was the second forum convened by the Inter-Level Educational Table (ILET), a committee of the Quebec English-Speaking Communities Research Network (QUESCREN) at Concordia University.

Its objective was to encourage mobilization around the development of a healthy and sustainable English-language educational offer in Quebec that supports student retention, access to good jobs in the province, and a strong sense of identity and belonging.

These three days offered participants the opportunity to hear findings on the impact of the global health pandemic on education, to identify strategies for inclusive and quality English-language education, and to share experiences of current educational challenges and success stories. Researchers, practitioners, representatives of educational institutions, community stakeholders, and policy makers shared knowledge, experience, best practices, and their visions for sustainable futures for the education of Quebec's minority-language communities.

The Forum included 4 keynote lectures, presentations, panel discussions, and a workshop, for a total of 18 events and over 30 presenters.

Over 250 participants registered for the Forum. Average attendance included 39 participants at the keynote presentations (70 for opening keynote), 24 participants for regular sessions, 26 participants for panel discussions, and 31 participants for the workshop and town hall session (consult the full program at <http://tinyurl.com/2021forumprogram>).

Diversity of perspectives

Participants reflected the diversity of Quebec's English-speaking communities and their organizations. Topics of discussion included: educational practices in an online world; mapping the demographics of English-language education in the province; structural barriers in the educational pathways of students from minority communities, including Black students; integrating social diversity in curricula; experiential and work-integrated learning initiatives; professional development for educators, including around Indigenous issues; education rights and the law; and more.

About the organizers

The Education and Vitality Forum was organized by the Inter-Level Educational Table (ILET), which brings together representatives of Quebec's English-language educational institutions and associations, along with community groups and the public sector. ILET is a key initiative of the Quebec English-Speaking Communities Research Network (QUESCREN), a collaborative network of researchers, stakeholders, and educational and other institutions. Established in 2008 and housed at Concordia University's School of Community and Public Affairs, QUESCREN aims to improve how Quebec's English-speaking communities are understood and to promote their vitality.

Digital participant engagement and Forum promotion

For the 2021 Forum, the organizers implemented online platforms to allow participants to engage with the material and share knowledge through a Grenadine conference platform, Twitter page (<https://twitter.com/QuescrenForum21>) and the Agora, a virtual space for conversations and networking (via the Wonder platform). To encourage participation on the Twitter page, the organizers offered a giveaway of *La Charte. La loi 101 et les Québécois d'expression anglaise / The Charter: Bill 101 and English-speaking Quebec*, a 2021 book edited by QUESCREN.

Additionally, promotion of the Forum reached close to 2,000 people via the QUESCREN newsletter; targeted emailing to individuals, groups, and organizations interested in the themes of the Forum; posts on Facebook and the LinkedIn social media platform; and two bilingual press releases featured in Concordia University's NOW magazine and on its Faculty of Arts and Science social media.

Key questions

Over three days, participants engaged in wide-ranging discussions centred on the following key questions:

- What are best practices for online education in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- How can the English-language education system best address community diversity and disparities?
- How do English-speaking communities, which embody diverse opinions and experiences, build a cohesive voice on education?
- How can we develop sustainable initiatives for Black English-speaking communities?
- What can a plurilingual approach offer for language vitality and identity validation?
- How can literacy services best reach vulnerable populations during the pandemic?
- How can a continuum of English-language education help promote educational success and youth retention in Quebec?
- How can we counter the decline of English-language education in Quebec?
- How can knowledge of education rights and the law help English-speaking Quebec build sustainable relationships with governments?

The purpose of this document is to reflect notable themes and ideas that emerged from the 2021 Forum. The report provides a selection of key takeaway messages that may serve as a foundation for future ILET forums and events.

This document does not aim to be exhaustive or conclusive. It does not represent a consensus statement and may not reflect the views of all participants. The views expressed in this report reflect events up to November 5, 2021.

The Big Picture

Major themes, challenges, and successful approaches

This section provides a brief overview of major themes that were raised and discussed throughout the three-day forum. Supporting case examples from the Forum of challenges and successful approaches to the major themes are included. Relevant and supporting content, where indicated, is also derived from the report of the first ILET Forum held in October 2018.²

Many projects presented at the 2021 Forum served as direct examples of best practices. Participants shared stories of projects embedded in marginalized communities or in communities facing challenges, including examples of what works and what could be improved upon, as a way to address systemic issues that pose challenges for English speakers.

Youth retention in Quebec

Retention in Quebec of young people (and, in some cases, families) is critical to the health and sustainability of the English-speaking minority communities in the province. Forum participants noted that students play an important role in shaping and improving the vitality of the community. They **revealed key factors determining whether young English speakers stay in Quebec, including their ability to speak French, get a job, and contribute to society in Quebec.**

Looking back at the 2018 Forum, many participants at the time identified the need for more French second language (FSL) teachers and for a recruitment strategy to find them. While not a strong determinant overall, French proficiency does improve youth retention: you are more likely to stay in Quebec and integrate if you increase your interactions in French.

During the 2021 Forum, as in 2018, participants said that retaining English speakers in Quebec's rural areas is even more challenging than for urban ones. Participants reflected on the importance of supporting, mentoring, and encouraging young people, as well as providing job opportunities for them.

² 2018 forum report:
https://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/artsci/scpa/quescren/docs/Forum2018Rpt_EN.pdf

Supporting Case Example

The 2021 Forum session on "Retaining College Students" featured **Constance Crossland, Education Advisor, and Douglas Brown, Dean of Career Programs, both from John Abbott College**, presenting on challenges to retaining college graduates in Quebec. In 2019 and 2020, with funding from Dialogue McGill and the Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise, John Abbott College surveyed all students in the health and social services programs offered at six public English-language CEGEPs. The goal was to determine factors influencing students' post-graduation intentions to remain in Quebec.³ The programs surveyed were: Nursing, Biomedical Laboratory Technology, Dental Hygiene, Diagnostic Imaging, Nursing Intensive, Paramedic Care, Physiotherapy Technology, Radiation Oncology, Respiratory & Anaesthesia Technology, Community Recreation Leadership Training, Social Service, Special Care Counselling and Youth and Adult Correctional Intervention.

A total of 2,439 survey responses resulted in these findings:

- 70% of students living within the Census Montreal Area (CMA) preferred to work in the CMA; 15% were unsure, 12% preferred to work outside Quebec, and 2%, in Quebec outside the CMA
- 43% of students living in Quebec outside the CMA preferred to work in Quebec outside the CMA, 26% were unsure, 17% preferred to work outside Quebec, and 13%, within the CMA
- 56% of students living outside Quebec preferred to work outside Quebec, 31% were unsure, 9% preferred to work within the CMA, and 4%, in Quebec outside the CMA
- The top five reasons that influenced choice were family/friends, possibility of employment, proximity to home, lifestyle, and community
- The top five factors that could encourage working in Quebec outside the Montreal CMA were possibility of employment, financial reasons, family/friends, lifestyle, and nature
- You can view the [full report here](#).

Opportunities to improve community vitality include providing additional French-language training for those at the weakest levels while in CEGEP, and support for Montreal CMA students to do internships in other regions and in French. This approach would require professional support from the college, personal support from the community, linguistic support from internship providers, and financial support to help students with room and board if away from home.

3 Session video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8qZDhKRhLHQ&list=PL0iUepvZGB-vGjQccel9LjDDHZPEd-0b08&index=4>

Retaining students in programs

Another retention issue for Quebec's English-speaking students involves the degree to which students, notably males, persevere in their CEGEP educational programs. **Graduating with a diploma contributes to student success in life and employment, a major factor in their capacity to thrive and create futures in the province.**

Supporting Case Example

At the 2021 Forum, **Susan Regan, Pedagogical Counsellor at John Abbott College**, presented a study that examined gendered differences in program success rates.⁴ The study was developed as a response to concerns about lower male student graduation rates across the CEGEP network. Graduation rates at John Abbott vary widely by program.

The study examined ten years of data to gain a better understanding of comparative male and female student retention rates and graduation timeliness at John Abbott College. It compared male and female student success at the college in terms of three standard student success markers: graduation rates with a diploma in a minimum time, in minimum time plus two years, and graduation to date.

The data showed that the 20 programs surveyed tend to be highly gendered. John Abbott's large Social Science and Science programs are balanced between males and females, but other programs are either predominantly female (e.g., Information and Library Technology) or predominantly male (e.g., Engineering Technology). There are significantly more programs that appear to appeal more to female students than there are programs that appear to appeal more to male students.

Overall, this study presented a complex gendered landscape. It highlighted the importance of considering gender when developing educational programming and pedagogical support to improve success and retention of both male and female college students. Future research might be able to gather further data on non-binary sexualities, as well as ethnicity, language, and race.

In their recruitment strategies, programs are becoming more aware of gender issues. Some are making more focussed efforts to attract both males and females. They are also thinking beyond gendered stereotypes when considering how to best interest students in non-traditional academic programs and career paths. For example, to recruit more young women, recruitment sessions for Police Technology programs included showcasing a female police officer.

The study authors also questioned whether admissions standards might work against males in some programs if they are coming into the CEGEP with lower secondary school leaving averages. However, the current secondary school leaving averages of male and female students admitted are comparable, while this was not the case in the past. Factors here may include differences in private and public, and English and French, secondary school trajectories.

In terms of obtaining a diploma in the minimum required timeline, the gender differences, usually to the advantage of female students, vary between 2% and 40% across the different programs.

The study also considered student achievement by looking at average marks. A significantly high proportion of females earned higher marks than males in courses such as English, Humanities, and French.

This study's findings inspired the development of three future projects. One is to support male nursing students. Another is to contact students who dropped out of the Graphic and Web Design program to learn about their decision and develop future student success interventions. The third project involves measures to recruit and retain more female students in Computer Science.

4 Session video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8qZDhKRhLHQ&list=PL0iUepVZGB-vGjQccel9LjDDHZPEd-0b08&index=4>

The need for institutional control by minority language groups

Presentations, panel discussions and keynote talks from both the 2018 and 2021 forums supported the notion **that institutional control is needed by minority language groups to maintain and assert their development within public and private institutions.** Building a positive relationship with the provincial government was identified as a key element of this and a priority for community vitality.

This notion and related factors were presented in three of the 2021 Forum sessions: a keynote by Raymond Th  berge called "The Future of Education in an Official-Language Minority Setting: Demographic Change and New Points of View"⁵ and sessions called "Adult Education, Vocational Training and Work-Integrated Learning"⁶ and "Education Rights and the Law."⁷

There is a lot to say about the evolution of language tensions within Quebec. A key turning point was when the *Charter of the French Language* (Bill 101, 1977) restricted access to English-language schools. Bill 101 had the effect of drastically reducing the size of the English-language school system from 256,000 pupils in 1971 to only 96,235 pupils by 2018.

There are currently no access restrictions to Quebec's English CEGEPs. However, in 2021, the Quebec government tabled Bill 96, which proposed to put a cap on the growth of English-language CEGEPs. According to Forum presenter Dr. Richard Bourhis, this would have the effect of reducing the size of such CEGEPs from 17.1% of students in the system in 2019 to 13.4% in 2029. French CEGEPs under this plan will grow from 130,972 places in 2019 to 173,665 in 2029. These education language laws have negative effects on the institutional vitality of the English-speaking communities of Quebec.

The Commissioner of Official Languages of Canada, Dr. Raymond Th  berge, gave a keynote on the evolution of Canada's demographic landscape since the federal *Official Languages Act* was first adopted in 1969. He noted that growing diversity has impacted official language minority communities in Canada. Given this change, he argued for new perspectives on education. Commissioner Th  berge underlined the fundamental importance of inclusion at this moment when the *Official Languages Act* is under revision and official language minority communities and their needs are at the forefront. He also promoted a continued emphasis on research, which we will look at in the next section of this report.

- 5 Session video:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahNYmEZMh_c&list=PL0iUepVZGB-vGJQcceL9LjDDHZPEd-0b08&index=18
- 6 Session video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZGNo-1G1CRU&list=PL0iUepVZGB-vGJQcceL9LjDDHZPEd-0b08&index=11>
- 7 Session video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F3CL7afxIFA&list=PL0iUepVZGB-vGJQcceL9LjDDHZPEd-0b08&index=9>

Supporting Case Examples

1. The value of inclusion was also made evident in discussions on equitable work-integrated learning (WIL). **Maria Giammarco, Senior Lead, Research and Development, at Business + Higher Education Roundtable (BHER)**, a not-for-profit organization, said the COVID 19 pandemic has made it difficult for students from equity-deserving communities to gain access to these same opportunities.⁸ She argued that **efforts are needed to create more accessible and inclusive WIL opportunities**. This can be done by lowering barriers to WIL access, implementing inclusive community engagement and student-centric approaches, and building employer capacity. BHER aims to create 44,000 WIL opportunities across Canada through funding and capacity support to partnership organizations. An increased focus on WIL allows students to launch careers; helps bridge the gap and strengthen pathways out of post-secondary education; and helps students to build skillsets, gain experience, learn through mentorship, and grow their networks to build equity among students from different backgrounds, ethnicities, and academic fields. This approach supports underrepresented students and employers that may not have access to a WIL experience by providing them with a suite of tools and resources built to help develop the capacity to deliver these opportunities.
2. How can we build the capacity of administrators and teachers to reduce the inequities that already exist for disadvantaged students? Who are the influential players that can help support and better prepare students to live together in a democratic society and reach their full potential? **Lucie Roy, Assistant Director of Riverside School Board**, shared an example that shed light on the answer.⁹ Roy explained that empowering adult learners requires adapting guidelines, rules, regulations, and practices from a perspective of equity and inclusion that takes into account the realities and sensitivities of students.

While findings are based on adult and vocational centres, lessons learned from Roy are transferable to other types of institutions. Few know that when students reach the age of 16, they have the right to study in English in Quebec in adult education and in vocational training. In these learning environments, students should be able to express their goals and feel safe to share their perspectives. This is a priority for Riverside School Board, as evident in their academic, guidance, and student support services. The school board's comprehensive approach prioritizes dignity and empathy, and helps ensure that students understand the services and programs offered. Students can also have their courses or programs adapted to meet their learning needs, and students at risk are helped to feel supported and accountable.

One of the challenges in adult education is students resisting a return to school. They do so because of a number of different factors, among which are negative experiences, lack of knowledge provided by the centres, and/or family and financial obligations that might limit the time they can devote to their studies. To minimize these factors, the school board ensures that its support services are available in both English and French. It develops a network and awareness of who the students are, and makes their needs known in the local community. **External community relationships help to support learning centres and alleviate factors that might negatively impact students' learning paths**. It is crucial to collaborate with local organizations to create connections and foster program awareness. This ultimately increases the availability of guidance and support services to students in both languages, and positively impacts the students' learning experiences in adult and vocational centres.

8 Session video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZGNo-1G1CRU&list=PL0iUepVZGB-vGJQcceL9LjDDHZPEd-0b08&index=11>

9 Session video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZGNo-1G1CRU&list=PL0iUepVZGB-vGJQcceL9LjDDHZPEd-0b08&index=11>

A need for research on English-language education

At the 2018 Forum, Commissioner Th  berge said there was increasing acceptance that schools and school boards have some responsibility for community vitality. He found this to be a sign of growing political maturity and policy sophistication. He proposed that **“good, evidence-based research is vital** to the development of good policy and community development.”

This notion was echoed in the 2021 Forum, which featured many sessions presenting quantitative data-driven research. Two worth highlighting here are “Mapping the Demographics of English-Language Education”¹⁰ and the “Workshop on QUESCEN’s Educational Research Briefs.”¹¹ They help answer the following questions: Why is research on English-language education important? What can it tell us?

Supporting Case Examples

1. **D’Arcy Springate-Floch and Caroline Dufour, Data Analysts from Playfair Statistics**, shared their data-driven research in two presentations in one session.¹² They presented the location of English-language schools in Quebec and compared this with census data on Quebec’s English-speaking population by age category. This highlighted regions that were under-served in light of their English-speaking student population, such as Laval, Lanaudiere, and Mont  r  gie. The Quebec region with the largest increase in its English-speaking youth population between 2011 and 2016 is Laval. However, this has not been met with a corresponding increase in the number of English-language schools. The availability of and access to English-language education warrant further consideration. They are essential to meet the needs of changing demographics.

The presentations also helped to shed light on employability. They explored the relationship between the highest level of education and unemployment across Quebec in relation to language. Data was broken down by gender, age group, visible minority status, and region. According to Statistics Canada, unemployment rates for English speakers in Quebec are higher than for French speakers at all levels of education. By gender, the data finds that the general unemployment rate for women is lower than for men, but also that unemployment rates for English-speaking women and men are higher than for their French-speaking counterparts. By age, the data finds that English speakers are more likely to be unemployed than French speakers for all age groups except for those 65 and over. By visible minority status, the data finds that higher education levels are associated with higher likelihood of employment except for those identifying as members of a visible minority. Unemployment rates across all levels of education for those who do not identify as a visible minority are higher for English-speaking members, while unemployment rates across most education levels for those who identify as a visible minority are lower for English-speaking members as compared with French. Therefore, English-speaking members of a visible minority have a lower unemployment rate than French-speaking members of a visible minority. There are also regional differences. In the C  te-Nord region, unemployment among anglophones is more than twice as high as among francophones, while in Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean, unemployment among anglophones is relatively lower. Ultimately, the data reveals that anglophones are more likely to be unemployed than francophones. This is true even when considered by levels of education, gender, and age (except for 65+), but varies by region.

10 Session video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ph6R4664H4k&list=PL0iUepVZGB-vGJQcceL9LjDDHZPEd-0b08&index=3>

11 Session video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfqYZ7gkwrS&list=PL0iUepVZGB-vGJQcceL9LjDDHZPEd-0b08&index=13>

12 Session video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ph6R4664H4k&list=PL0iUepVZGB-vGJQcceL9LjDDHZPEd-0b08&index=3>

As noted in the 2021 Forum, unemployment and low-income cut off rates in Quebec are higher for English-speaking than French-speaking youth. Although these youth are more bilingual and educated than in the past, they not only earn less than their francophone counterparts, but they also seem to have a harder time finding employment in their field. As was similarly pointed out in the 2018 Forum, access to jobs is important. Without it, educated young people leave the province. Those with lower levels of education and fewer opportunities may be more likely to remain, but to live in poverty.

2. Another 2021 Forum activity that helped highlight the value of research was a workshop on QUESCREN's Education Research Briefs.¹³ The workshop was led by the **Leading English Education and Resource Network (LEARN)**. LEARN presented eight briefs that QUESCREN published in the Spring of 2021. The briefs focus on priority issues and challenges within Quebec's English-language education sector, including the decline of enrolment in English-language schools; representation of English speakers in Quebec's education ministries and curriculum development; challenges around resources and services; provision of services to special needs students; school demography; issues of bilingual education; outmigration; and Community Learning Centres.¹⁴

The workshop identified **three overarching themes emerging from the research briefs: 1) the increasing vulnerability of English-speaking communities; 2) the diversity of English-speaking youth and challenges of identity and inclusion; and 3) innovations in English-language education.**

The workshop discussion shed light on serious problem areas including:

- Limited resources for schools in remote areas with isolated communities
- Small school populations, which negatively impact funding and make schools more vulnerable to closure
- Poor access to support services and a lack of available English-speaking professionals
- Insufficient funding for students with special needs
- A need for greater flexibility in curricula for Indigenous populations
- The poor status of physical and structural environments: 30% were considered subpar in 2017

On the other hand, the workshop also presented innovations to the education system that positively affected Quebec's English-speaking communities. They include:

- The community-driven introduction of French immersion programs in the mid-1960s
- Sharing school buildings with French-language schools
- The Community Learning Centres (CLC) approach, an innovative model for schooling in minority language settings
- Partnerships in CLC schools with the Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN), which increase access to health and wellness resources for students and families
- The CLC schools' promotion of recognizing Indigenous peoples and reconciliation

13 Session video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfqYZ7gkwrS&list=PL0iUepVZGB-vGJQcceL9LjDDHZPEd-0b08&index=13>

14 These are available online in English https://www.concordia.ca/artsci/scpa/quescren/resources/research_education.html and in French https://www.concordia.ca/artsci/eapc/quescren/ressources/research_education_fr.html.

Engagement with bicultural and plurilingual approaches

The [QUESCREN Research Briefs](#) also touch on the topic of biculturalism and plurilingualism. Students have identities influenced by multiple linguistic, ethnic, and regional backgrounds. Over a third of students in the English-language school sector do not have English as their mother tongue. Most bilingual youth have a sense of belonging to either the French- or English-speaking communities of Quebec, regardless of high-level competence in both languages.

There has also been a notable change in the composition of school personnel, where high-level French language skills are needed to teach French language and grammar as well as subjects taught in French, such as history. Many such teachers are native French speakers.

More English-speaking families are sending their children to French-language schools. They hope this will lead to strong French proficiency and youth retention. **English-language schools should provide strong skills in biliteracy and biculturalism** to provide the same positive effects.

Supporting Case Example

Supporting this topic was the Forum keynote called "Importance of a plurilingual approach in English-language higher education for language vitality and identity validation."¹⁵ **Angelica Galante, Assistant Professor in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University**, delivered it. She noted that speakers of two or more languages develop "language repertoires." When drawing on their repertoires, speakers do not use their languages entirely separately. They instead draw from the full repertoire and adjust according to factors including their interlocutors, the sociocultural context, and their emotional state.

In her research, Galante conducted two mixed methods studies in English-language universities. The first study gathered data from 250 students in a Montreal university to examine the relationship between language, identity, and language use. Of this sample, 92.9% identified as plurilingual, and 88.2% identified as pluricultural. Reasons for this identification included having a rich linguistic repertoire, ample lived experiences, awareness of differences and similarities of languages, transculturalism (moving from one cultural community to another), adaptation and integration (across communities and languages), translanguaging (using languages flexibly) and openness (to learning new languages). Also, a positive correlation emerged, with a higher number of languages resulting in a higher plurilingual and pluricultural competence scale score.

These results have implications for language vitality and identity validation in higher education. They lead to new ways of envisioning sustainability of languages and language pedagogy, as seen in Galante's second study. She collected data from 129 students in a Toronto university to examine their perceptions of monolingual and plurilingual approaches to teaching and learning.¹⁶ The research showed that **a plurilingual approach in higher education offers benefits that a monolingual approach may not.**

15 Session video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLG74XiSMNA&list=PL0iUepVZGB-vGJQcceL9LjDDHZPEd-0b08&index=1>

16 For more information, see: www.breakingtheinvisiblewall.com.

Issues around diversity including Indigenous and Black communities

A strong conversation thread prevalent in both the 2018 and 2021 forums was the diversity of English speakers in Quebec, and how it intersects with education and community vitality. Different kinds of diversity were explored throughout the Forum: cultural, racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and religious, as well as regional diversity in rural and urban contexts.

English-language schools are as diverse as the English-speaking minority population. Urban schools, for example, are often spaces with a range of cultural groups with diverse needs, abilities, talents, and so forth. In rural areas, the school is often the central—if not the only—minority language institution in the community.

In the 2021 Forum, many educational initiatives to sustain and strengthen Quebec’s Black English-speaking communities and Indigenous populations were presented. Keynotes on the topic included Manon Tremblay, “Celebrating Indigenous Languages in Academia,”¹⁷ and Alix Adrien, “Online Education: The Experience of the Quebec Board of Black Educators.”¹⁸ Panels on the topic included: “Celebrating the Black Contributions to the History of Quebec from Mathieu da Costa to the Honourable Marlene Jennings: 1608-2021,”¹⁹ “Sustainable Initiatives for the Future of Quebec’s Black English-Speaking Communities,”²⁰ “Current Research: The Experiences of Black Students,”²¹ and “Education Issues and English-Speaking Indigenous Communities.”²²

- 17 Session video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EbDAznZPMhc&list=PL0iUepVZGB-vGJQcceL9LjD-DHZPEd0b08&index=14>
- 18 Session video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GBEA3Dr1jPY&list=PL0iUepVZGB-vGJQcceL9LjD-DHZPEd0b08&index=7>
- 19 Session video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKdJ3F4f9Pg&list=PL0iUepVZGB-vGJQcceL9LjD-DHZPEd0b08&index=12>
- 20 Session video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BAGDvvGmkkk&list=PL0iUepVZGB-vGJQcceL9LjD-DHZPEd0b08&index=5>
- 21 Session video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dpGSdQXPz64&list=PL0iUepVZGB-vGJQcceL9LjD-DHZPEd0b08&index=8>
- 22 Session video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2cdWlpcHJOM&list=PL0iUepVZGB-vGJQcceL9LjD-DHZPEd0b08&index=15>

Black English-speaking communities

Related to this topic, the 2018 Forum noted that Black English-speaking communities found themselves in a position of exceptional disadvantage as a double minority. Participants noted a need to look at how the Canadian and Quebec history narratives are constructed, and the impact narratives have on community vitality and identity. Additionally, they noted that schools play an important role in increasing a child's self-esteem: Black history must be included in the school curriculum.

In the 2021 Forum, participants expanded on our knowledge base of education and Black English-speaking communities. Tya Collins, PhD candidate, Université de Montréal, presented research on **systemic and structural barriers to educational pathways of Black students** placed in special-needs schools in the English-language sector. In a panel on Black contributions to the history of Quebec, four presenters stressed the value of highlighting Black contributions both during Black History Month in February and throughout the year. They included Brian Rock, Chairman, Committee for the Enhancement of the Curriculum of the History of Quebec; Marlene Jennings, President, Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN); Linton Garner, Director of Blacbiblio; and Dorothy Williams, historian and creator of the *ABCs of Canadian Black History Kit*. The kit is a prime resource to **increase historical knowledge of Black contributions** in the country.²³ Furthermore, two speakers looked at how institutional archives can support the community: Clarence Bayne, Professor Emeritus, Concordia University, and President of the Secretariat of the Black Community Forum of Montreal; and Désirée Roachat, researcher-in-residence at Concordia University Libraries and Program Director, Quebec Black Communities Observatory. Their work is discussed below.

23 Information on this resource here: <http://dorothywilliams.ca/my-work/abc-project/>

Supporting Case Examples

Two presenters discussed how the Black community of Montreal has collected, over the years, a considerable number of documents, photos and records, private and institutional. Many have been donated to Concordia University's archives centre. In their panel discussion, Clarence Bayne and Désirée Rochat shed light on using such archives as instruments for the storage and creation of knowledge.²⁴ They said that archives institutions had to become more aware of race-based issues and more inclusive.

1. **Clarence Bayne, President of the Secretariat of the Black Community Forum**, touched on the complex adaptive system as a theoretical framework for knowledge management. He discussed a system that includes a belief space (where knowledge is stored) and a population space (physical space and related resources provided in this space). The belief space is where data is collected, processed and stored, and becomes the knowledge and wisdom that help solve problems. The purpose of the physical operation of the population in this system is survival, reproduction and security, and to maximize social and psychological well-being. Bayne considered Montreal and Quebec as a human and social ecosystem. He mapped communication flows and planned linkages of the knowledge hub currently managed by a program called Blacks in Quebec. The program stems from a community archive alliance featuring the Black Community Resource Centre, the Institute for Community Entrepreneurship and Development, and the Black Studies Centre. It helps to support decisions of the organizations and their members in the emerging Black community ecosystem.
2. **Désirée Rochat, Observatory of the Sommet pour le développement socio-économiques des jeunes des communautés noires**, also discussed knowledge management as it relates to Black communities. She presented an integrative approach, whereby knowledge preservation-transmission-production are part of a cyclical process of information management. Black communities in Montreal have historically created institutions to address their educational, professional, social, and political needs and services. The institutions also provided access to knowledge that Black communities could not access or find elsewhere and that spoke to their realities, histories, and aspirations. This included knowledge obtained in Black community libraries, archives, and research, and by building repertoires of Black authors and perspectives. Rochat said that access, production, and preservation of such knowledge was a political process to exercise rights and actively participate in the formal and informal life of the communities.

Rochat discussed 1970s projects of knowledge creation on topics including housing integration and employment. A more recent initiative was the creation of the Black Communities Observatory by the Summit for the Socioeconomic Development of Black Community Youth. The Summit supports and represents fifty Black-related organizations, and helps them put forth actionable and concrete solutions to community challenges. In regard to research, the Observatory will help document issues facing Black youth to support development of such solutions in relation to education, economy, justice, health, and culture.

24 Session video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BAGDvvGmkkk&list=PL0iUepVZGB-vGJQcceL9LjDDHZPEd-0b08&index=5>

Indigenous communities

Also discussed in the 2018 Forum was the connection between Indigenous languages and locating oneself and one's community. Presenters critiqued the lack of knowledge about Indigenous communities. They said that Indigenous peoples need to be supported by policies for language promotion, preservation, and revitalization. These can address the tragic fact that Indigenous communities have the highest school dropout and suicide rates. Participants agreed that addressing this would involve transforming mindsets. Questions of "who is part of this community" then become part of an ongoing conversation. Schools can be welcoming sites of community vitality, but they can also deny people access and belonging to communities. Self-reflexivity at all levels of our education system is important.

The 2021 Forum expanded on these reflections. In a keynote address, Manon Tremblay, Senior Director of Indigenous Directions at Concordia University,²⁵ said that, while some post-secondary institutions seek to reconcile with Indigenous peoples and decolonize the academy, they afford Indigenous languages little attention. **Universities can foster a learning environment where Indigenous languages are welcomed and celebrated** to advance language revitalization and development. It is important to ensure that academic integrity is maintained while also building institutional capacity and fostering excellence in teaching, learning, and communicating in Indigenous languages on campus.

Tremblay noted that universities can do much to help Indigenous communities revitalize, maintain, and even develop their languages. This includes offering courses and entire programs in Indigenous languages, and summer institutes that bring communities together and train people to use tools that help revitalization efforts. Community expertise can be leveraged to create grammars, dictionaries, and school curricula to help preserve precious language archives. Indigenous languages can be celebrated by making them more visible on campus through signage, and by encouraging Indigenous students to speak their languages in school, possibly even when defending their theses. However, Tremblay added, there are important considerations to reflect on. Beyond beginner, intermediate, and advanced courses, there should also be courses that teach literacy in the written form. Also, which of the ten Indigenous languages spoken in Quebec should be used? There are also considerations of quality control. Teachers should be fluent speakers and have the necessary professional support to develop effective teaching and learning methods. Support should be provided for fluency testing, training in pedagogy and second-language teaching.

25 Keynote here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EbDAznZPMhc&list=PL0iUepVZGB-vGJQcceL9LjDDHZPEd-0b08&index=14>

Supporting Case Examples

1. **Dr. Cathy Martin, Independent Consultant, presented the First Nations Education Administrators Association (FNEAA)** that was established in 2019.²⁶ It provides capacity-building through peer learning and networking. The FNEAA is a gathering place for its members to discuss issues that First Nations education administrators encounter when advocating and delivering First Nations education. Members include principals, directors of education, and other educational authorities both Indigenous and non-Indigenous who interact with First Nations students and education systems. They work to implement best practices for Indigenous-language education across Quebec and to share information, collect and share ideas and enhance capacity in education, certification, professional development, partnerships, systems development and services, mentoring, and conferences.

With a unique design approach, this program focuses on First Nations control of First Nations education, providing courses and webinars to enhance the knowledge and skills of First Nations education administrators working with First Nations schools and communities. FNEAA is a new organizational initiative, and it addresses a lot of Indigenous education issues. With the current big push for reconciliation in Canada, it is important to embrace supportive partnerships and community relationships.

FNEAA course and webinar topics include negotiating contracts for First Nations education agreements, enhancing reconciliation with a First Nation and external governments, achieving personal excellence in education through the use of emotional intelligence, First Nations education governance and leadership to help enhance the administration of First Nations education, finding and hiring talent and taking corrective action from a human resources perspective, and how to start a school from the ground up for communities that may not yet have their own schooling community.

2. Another case example was presented by **Loretta Robinson, Naskapi Curriculum Coordinator at the Jimmy Sandy Memorial School**.²⁷ She discussed Indigenous language and identity in the classroom and focussed on an intergenerational project done in Kawawachikamach, a remote community in northeastern, subarctic Quebec. The project reflected the **importance of plurilingual pedagogies for First Nations language learning**. Project participants included Elementary 3 students with a strong oral use of the Indigenous language Naskapi. This project showed that a learning community can in fact create space for “translanguaging” and critical literacy skills. Students produced identity texts in multiple languages, and used Naskapi and English simultaneously. This helped to increase their feeling of ownership over their learning and their metalinguistic awareness. The intergenerational project revealed that intersecting language, culture, power, and identity in the school setting can be leveraged to benefit Indigenous students.

Key findings from this research touched on aspects of translanguaging and codeswitching as important resources for success, metalinguistic awareness, supported intergenerational work and the presence of collaborative learning communities. Often, school administrators question how holistic lifelong learning (Naskapi vision) will fit into the Quebec education system. To this question, Robinson expressed that the Naskapi vision should not shrink to fit into the Quebec system. The better approach considers how elements of the Quebec system might fit into the Naskapi framework.

26 Session video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2cdWlpcHJOM&list=PL0iUepVZGB-vGJQcceL9LjDDHZPEd-0b08&index=15>

27 Session video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2cdWlpcHJOM&list=PL0iUepVZGB-vGJQcceL9LjDDHZPEd-0b08&index=15>

COVID-19 and reliance on technology

A final major discussion thread in the 2021 Forum was the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on education. It brought attention to community experiences and the pandemic's impact on education, including changes to related methods of teaching and learning. In particular, the **importance of education technology** was underlined. This theme was addressed in several panels, including: "Overcoming the Distance: Practices in Education in an Online World"²⁸ and a keynote by Alex Adrian called "Online Education: The Experience of the Quebec Board of Black Educators."²⁹

Michael Canuel, CEO of the Leading English Education and Resources Network (LEARN), shed light on online education during the pandemic.³⁰ He said that, in general, online education can serve a vital role in supporting learning for students at all levels. He noted, however, that Quebec's Education Act does not meet current needs. Unlike most other provinces, Quebec does not have a set policy on virtual schooling or a provincially sanctioned virtual school system. This is because of adherence to old myths about distance education being ineffective, impersonal, and unhealthy for students in comparison with their attending a brick-and-mortar establishment.

Canuel said that this creates challenges for the English-language education community. **A more robust virtual school system in the province would benefit English-speaking students in urban, rural, and remote areas.** It would address current challenges in the English-language school system. These include the issue of relatively big distances between English-language schools, which lead students to opt to go to French schools closer to them. As well, numbers of students in homeschooling have been increasing as a result of general dissatisfaction with public schooling. A public English-language virtual school system could be a viable option for such students. It would be practical and feasible if created within a context of openness and willingness to move forward. Such a system would require flexibility and recognition from the government and the Ministry of Education of the special conditions that exist for the English-speaking community.

28 Session video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkulQAJE4GU&list=PL0iUepVZGB-vGJQccl9LjDDHZPEd-0b08&index=2>

29 Keynote video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GBEA3Dr1jPY&list=PL0iUepVZGB-vGJQccl9LjDDHZPEd0b08&index=7>

30 Session video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkulQAJE4GU&list=PL0iUepVZGB-vGJQccl9LjDDHZPEd-0b08&index=2>

Supporting Case Examples

1. **Emilie Bowles, RÉCIT Consultant from Riverside School Board**, expanded on this topic to discuss the use of educational technology for adult education teachers.³¹ RÉCIT is a network focused on developing students' skills through the integration of information and communication technologies. Bowles presented preliminary research based on interviews with eight adult education teachers in the English-speaking community. The teachers offer different types of instruction: whole class and individualized. During the pandemic, they adopted either hybrid or online teaching methods.

Bowles's research revealed the increased use, benefits, and challenges of educational technology practices while teaching during the pandemic. Initial barriers included institutional obstacles (access to devices and connection issues) and a lack of digital resources for learning. There was also a lack of computer skills; teachers had to teach these, which took time away from the curriculum. On the positive side, the research also revealed that **hybrid learning environments can be used to increase adult learners' engagement and academic success**. The new learning environment acted as a catalyst for changes to teaching methods, and to merge old and new approaches; learning materials were more organized and accessible, and it was easier to communicate and share with other staff, not only within their own centre but also across the province. They also identified new opportunities for digital feedback and formative assessment, and for students to increase their digital competencies.

2. The 2021 Forum also touched on other areas of transformation during the pandemic, such as the need for adapting literacy services to reach vulnerable populations in times of crisis.

Alix Adrien, President of the Quebec Board of Black Educators (QBBE), presented in his keynote an example of the **challenges around online learning during the pandemic for Black English-speaking communities**.³² Citing research, he said that low-income and racialized communities, particularly Black populations, were the most negatively impacted by COVID-19 in Canada and Montreal. They bore the highest impact economically, in their health, and academically.³³ As schools transferred to online platforms during the pandemic, a lot of children within these communities did not have the means to continue their education. To counter the digital divide, in April 2020, the Summit for the Development of Black Community Youth launched the 4C program. This program aimed to meet the challenges caused by school closures by equipping disadvantaged families with access to computers, the Internet, and digital skills support. The QBBE partnered with the Summit and created the "No Students Left Behind" project. It provides online classes and academic support services in line with the QBBE innovation strategy. It was made possible through Black community organizations coming together, via the Summit, to support the needed adaptation to a new technological reality.

The QBBE also brought its onsite Da Costa Hall summer school program online. This represented a positive transition to distance learning that included elementary, secondary and CEGEP students. Teachers' development was an essential element to the overall success of the online school. The three factors promoting student success included pedagogical design, the use of breakout sessions, and regular assessments.

31 Session video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkuLQAJE4GU&list=PL0iUepVZGB-vGJQcclL9LjDDHZPEd-0b08&index=2>

32 Session video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GBEA3Dr1jPY&list=PL0iUepVZGB-vGJQcclL9LjDDHZPEd0b08&index=7>

33 Rocha R., Shingler B., Montpetit J. "Montreal's poorest and most racially diverse neighbourhoods hit hardest by COVID-19, data analysis shows." [Online]. Toronto (ON): CBC News; June 11, 2020. Consulted Feb. 25, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/race-covid-19-montreal-data-census-1.5607123>

Key takeaway messages from the Forum

The community must draw on its diversity

The Forum confirmed that English-speaking Quebec is diverse and that it draws on its many assets to confront challenges. Among the populations enriching English-speaking Quebec are First Nations and Black communities, whose cultures, like many others, can be leveraged inside the classroom.

Education must meet communities where they are

This is meant both physically and conceptually. English-speaking communities are vastly different throughout the province. Programs must be tailored to the specific needs of different communities.

No clear way forward in building an inclusive curriculum, but a willingness to listen and work together

There exists a diversity of approaches on key issues around curriculum that need to be considered with respect as we move forward.

The importance of collaboration

The Forum brought attention to collaboration between the education sector, community-based organizations, economic development stakeholders, and various other groups. Through joint action, community institutions show the strength and resilience essential for facing challenges.

Challenges over rights

Quebec's English-language minorities must have a voice and maintain their right to manage their education system and to receive quality public education. This requires collaborative solutions.

A coordinated voice

A cohesive and coordinated voice to speak for the vitality and diversity of English-speaking communities in the context of their education system is needed.

Be strategic and pragmatic

To promote community vitality through education, Quebec's English-speaking communities must identify and pursue long- and short-term goals in keeping with prevailing public priorities and policies.

Find opportunities to collaborate with the majority community

Interaction and cooperation with francophone majority institutions are of strategic importance. The idea that English-speaking communities can or should evolve separately from the majority is neither realistic or desirable.

Break down the silos

The metaphor of the "silo" arose frequently throughout the Forum in reference to many English-language education programs and organizations. Silos need to be broken down not only within the education sector, but also within and across a range of sectors, including business, health, and social services.

Mentorship is key

The importance of mentorship in promoting a continuum of education was mentioned frequently.

Wrapping up and feedback

This forum engaged participants in thinking about how to build community vitality through education in the context of a world pandemic.

To view the full program for the 2021 Forum, go to this link: <http://tinyurl.com/2021forumprogram>

Participants from the 2021 Forum provided the following feedback that highlighted program strengths:

- The quality and presentation of diversity in topics, speakers, and perspectives from a variety of stakeholders in the English-speaking education network
- Good representation of Indigenous and Black communities
- Gender parity of speakers and diversity of industry perspectives
- The review of the legal aspects of English-language minority rights and related history
- The successful introduction of Twitter and knowledge mobilization among participants
- Impactful opportunities for exchange and networking as part of the live event

Participant suggestions for the next forum included the following:

- Provide more Indigenous voices and concerns
- Invite pre-service teachers and alumni from Concordia, McGill, and Bishop's universities, and in-service teachers
- More networking and workshop-style events for greater knowledge mobilization
- Activities to elicit discussions from individuals and groups present
- Provide presentation skills training for speakers



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