

The Domino Effect: Québec's Language Legislation and its Effect on Music Teacher Education in the Anglophone Sector

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The game of Dominoes involves a number of small rectangular tiles; each divided into two sections and stamped with a different pattern of dots. Tiles are placed adjacent to one another according to matching patterns. Another, arguably more popular, use of the domino tiles is to stand each tile on its end, in a line or in another more intricate shape. Then, when the first tile is knocked over, all the subsequent tiles will fall down, one after another. This is known as the “domino effect.” In a political context, the domino effect is a useful term that describes the ways in which a political decision can set off a chain of events that have far-reaching social consequences traceable to the initial decision. These consequences may not always have been perceived at the time of the initial decision, but they become apparent as time goes by.

How does this relate to music education in English-speaking Quebec? As in the rest of Canada, government policies on education have had significant and far-reaching implications for teacher education in Québec. This paper addresses some of the long-term effects that Québec's language legislation has had on the music teacher education program at McGill University—the only English university in Québec that offers a music specialist program of any significant size. McGill is the main source of certified music teachers for elementary and secondary teaching in the English schools in Quebec

For ten years I have been the Director of Music Education at the Faculty of Education,

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McGill University. My students include preservice generalist teachers, music specialist teachers, and, occasionally, students from the Faculty of Arts. I am, or have been, involved in all aspects of the program including program design, approval and accreditation processes, advising, admissions, delivery of courses, student teacher supervision, and liaison with the schools. Graduates of our program are now becoming our cooperating teachers. I am intimately acquainted with the Ministry requirements for the Bachelor of Education in Music, and with the goals, expectations, and day-to-day policy issues that arise in connection with music specialist teacher education. More specifically, I am deeply involved with issues around their field placements of student teachers. As a result, I have had ample opportunity to witness the domino effect on education as a result of political decisions.

The Impact of Bill 101

In order to discuss music education in the province, it is first necessary to understand the political history and environment of education in Québec. Before 1977 the English-speaking population in Québec was composed of immigrants from English speaking countries, as well as immigrants from non-English speaking countries, who identified themselves with the existing English-speaking population. There are historical reasons for this alignment. French Québec society prior to the 1960s was strongly Roman Catholic and state schools were divided along religious lines—Catholic or Protestant. Catholic society, through the control of its schools, was closed to non-Catholics. The children of immigrants who were neither French-speaking nor Catholic were directed to English language schools. And so, the English school system built up a culturally diverse clientele whose ties to one another developed through the English language and through English-language mainstream social institutions. The desire to protect and promote

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the French language and culture in Québec from a perceived threat of cultural assimilation¹ led to the adoption of Bill 101—the Charter of the French Language by the Assemblée Nationale du Québec—in 1977. With the passing of Bill 101, Québec became the only officially unilingual—French—province in Canada.²

Since then, the population in Québec has divided itself linguistically into three groups: Francophones, Anglophones, and allophones. Francophones are those who are French-speaking Québécois, Anglophones refer to those who claim English as their mother tongue, or language of use. All others have come to be known as “allophones.” Then there are the so-called “monolinguals” (rare), the “bilinguals” (common), and the “multilinguals” (also common). And so, when speaking about education in Québec, the issue of language is ever-present, and the rich mix of languages and cultures is one of the things that makes Montréal, at least, an exciting, diverse, and dynamic city.

Bill 101 is a law governing the language of government, business, and education. It stipulates when, and how, and for whom, the English language may be used. One of the most contentious features of Bill 101 the English-speaking population, or for those wishing their children to learn English, is the element that defines who may attend English schools. This is no longer a matter of parental choice. Families must apply to the Ministry of Education for a Certificate of Eligibility, which will allow their children to attend an English school. They have to provide documentary evidence of their children’s eligibility; without such evidence, the

¹ Perceived and actual threats included a drastic reduction in the birth rate among French speaking families—coincidental with the reduction of the role of the Catholic Church and the migration from rural areas to the city—assimilation of immigrants into the English language sector, and the prevalence of English language media—especially from the US.

² The issues surrounding this legislation are too complex to go into in this forum. However, for a review of some of the fascinating, and inescapable influences of language, culture and religion on the evolution of music education in Québec, see Russell (2000) in Betty Hanley & Brian A. Roberts (Eds.), *Looking forward: Challenges to Canadian Music Education*, Canadian Music Educators Association.

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children must, by law, attend a French language school. During the 1970s this law led to a cohort of so-called “illegals”—children of non-English speaking immigrants (mostly Italian and Greek)—attending English schools that agreed to accept them “under the table.”³ The affected schools and school boards collaborated in this deception by keeping the students’ names off the school rolls. Because the allocation of government funds is based on school enrolments, this collaboration between non-English speaking immigrants and the English schools meant the schools made a financial sacrifice.

After the 1976 election of the Parti Québécois there was a large-scale migration of English-speaking people and businesses out of the province. In the first 24 months after the enactment of the Charter of the French Language, approximately 50,000 people left the province. In the ensuing time period of some 20 years this emigration has continued to drain the province’s English-speaking population, especially of its population of young adults. This migration has had a number of consequences for Anglophone schools including a huge reduction in the size of the student population. A recent estimate puts today’s English school population at about 60% of what it was prior to the passage of Bill 101.

There has always been French language instruction in English schools. However, since the passage of Bill 101 the Anglophone sector has stepped up its French programs in an attempt to ensure that all students emerge—at a minimum—functionally bilingual. Parents can enroll their children in bilingual programs where a portion of the curriculum is taught in French, and French is taught as a second language, or in French immersion programs, where the entire curriculum is French. Communicative competence has replaced the study of French as a grammatical system, with its memorization of conjugations and tenses, irregular and regular

³ See, for example, Konidaris (2004) “Self-reports from portraits of six Greek adult trilinguals: Growing up as ‘Bill 101’ Allophone children.” Doctoral dissertation, McGill University.

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verbs. The need satisfy both the graduation requirement of proficiency in French, and the need to prepare English-speaking citizens to function in the French language for fuller participation in Québec society captures a portion of the time, money, and scheduling that schools would previously have used for items such as art, music, physical education, and library support. Instruction in French begins no later than Grade 1. Schools have to be creative if they want to satisfy their French language requirements *and* at the same time offer students the benefits of instruction by a music specialist teacher.

Music Teacher Education at McGill

The Charter of the French Language set off a domino effect that continues to affect McGill's music specialist teacher education program and that is having an impact on our ability to find suitable placements for students who need to satisfy the ministry's field experience (student-teaching) requirement. There are a number of reasons for this, many of which can be traced back to the enactment of Bill 101 and the subsequent chain of events. To satisfy the field experience requirements for teacher certification, students in the Bachelor of Education in Music spend, over the course of the program, 700 hours in elementary and secondary classrooms under the supervision of a cooperating teacher who is certified to teach in Québec. Although the program is small—our quota for graduation is approximately 15 per year—it is often a struggle to find a suitable field placement for each student. This struggle is related to a reduction in both the teacher candidate pool and the recruitment of students.

In most teacher education programs the applicants are from schools within the jurisdiction offering the program. In the case of Québec, applicants to the Bachelor of Education in Music would normally be drawn from the cohort of students graduating from the Anglophone

sector schools in the greater Montreal area.⁴ However, the pool of English-speaking students is not large enough to fill the spaces available. At McGill, generally more than half of the students who are accepted into the B.Ed. in Music or the Concurrent B.Ed./B.Mus. are from out of province, and one or two each year come from the United States.

Music teaching in French

To satisfy the French language requirement, some English schools that have music specialists hire teachers who can teach music in French. Therefore, only student-teachers capable of teaching in French can be placed in these schools. Moreover, speaking the language is not enough; student teachers must also have French-language music repertoire. Few of our out-of-province students are able to teach in French.

Getting to the field placements

Middle-class schools are a rich resource for student-teacher placements in music. They are more apt than downtown, inner city schools to have music teachers. Also, most of the schools that have music programs are in the suburbs, and are not easily reached by public transportation. Getting to some of these schools by bus requires lengthy travel time, which winter's snow and ice only increases. Our out-of-province students tend to live in the downtown core, where, except for the private sector schools, (which we also use), there are few schools. As a result, we are sometimes unable to take advantage of excellent placements simply due to lack of public transit access. Schools that have music teachers are not obliged to take our students. Usually they accept them; sometimes they do not.

⁴ While there are small English-speaking communities outside the Montreal area, they are insignificant as a source of potential teachers.

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After graduation

Many of our graduates return to their home provinces to begin their professional careers. As a result, we end up with a shortage of qualified teachers, and schools—both public and private—that would like to have music programs cannot find teachers.

Within the province, some of the positions offered aren't 100%. However, some of our graduates don't want to teach a full load, and would prefer instead to combine teaching with other musical activities such as performing, or pursuing advanced studies. It is often possible for a motivated music teacher hired on a part-time basis to work that position up to a fuller load. Despite this, a music teacher shortage persists. I've had calls over the years from principals—both in Montréal and from other provinces—looking for music specialist teachers, and I haven't always been able to supply them with names. All the graduates I know who want to teach are already teaching.

And so, the consequences of the Charter of the French Language discussed in the earlier section of this chapter has had both foreseen and unforeseen effects on the ways that music specialist teacher education is unfolding in Québec.

I'd like to conclude by saying that I get a little nervous when writing about "music education in Canada" because it seems to me that each province is unique in the ways that music education has evolved historically. Even within each province there are differences between rural and urban culture, and in the experience of citizens according to the language they speak. In Québec, the two major linguistic groups—English and French—have evolved quite differently, and today, because of the social legislation and the consequent changes in the education sector, as well as in other sectors of the province, that have taken place over time, one can't even

generalize about “music education in Québec.”

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