

In 2002, Canadian Parents for French Prince Edward Island celebrated 25 years of service in the Island community: "*Promoting Opportunities for Young Canadians to Learn and Use French*". I was hired, at this time, to plan and organize activities to help commemorate this special occasion. One such project that was given to me was to compile and write a history of CPF - PEI. This project began in January 2002 and took many months to complete. Data and information was collected through interviews with past and present CPF members and French Immersion administrators. Data was also extracted from old CPF newsletters, archives and periodicals. This information was then compiled into the following, a documentation of CPF PEI throughout the years.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those who have contributed to this history: Donnie Doyle, Beth Doyle, Jean Collins, Jerry Upkirk, Pat Kinnear, Linda Lowther, Mary Lou Morrison, Miles Turnball, Patty Richard, Dorothy Maze, Mar Thompson, Gail Lecky, Paula Lenentine and Cathie Walsh Ramsay. I would also like to thank all those who have contributed their time and knowledge to CPF - PEI throughout the past 25 years.

We here at CPF - PEI hope that all those interested in learning about the history of how this organization began and developed in Prince Edward Island will find this both informative and interesting.

Canadian Parents for French (CPF) is a non profit, member driven association. It is an organization which works both with and for French Second Language students, their families, and their teachers. CPF is a trusted source of information on French Second Language learning in Canada, a support system for parents and a promoter of and advocate for French Second Language Education. Canadian Parents for French is a partner in education, working closely with educators, associations, business leaders, and decision makers in support of a better French Second Language Educational system across Canada (Helping Your Child Become Bilingual, pg 24).

CPF is Canada's largest advocacy group for French as a Second Language education (MacLean's Online, August 28th, 2000 by John Scholfield, pg 1) and is made up primarily of English speaking parents and concerned people who have a stake in the French immersion and Core French Educational Programs. CPF offers these individuals the opportunity to work with others who are committed to enhancing the quality of French second language education. CPF works to ensure that young Canadians, in all parts of the Country, have opportunities to learn and use French as a second language outside their schools. They also provide programs where students can exercise their second language abilities. CPF believes that a quality education must include both of Canada's official languages (Annual Report 1999-2000). Canadian Parents for French also provides services and programs that will assist the students, teachers and administrators in accomplishing their goals: giving children a good education, an education that will enable them to become "global citizens" (CPF PEI newsletter, November 2001).

CPF actively promotes and supports:

- Core French programs
- French Immersion programs
- Extra curricular activities in French for students
- Post secondary opportunities in French
- Research on French Second Language learning
- French as an integral part of Canadian life

(Helping Your Child Become Bilingual, pg 24)

Canadian Parents for French is national in scope, with Branches (Provincial Offices) in all provinces and territories across Canada (excluding Quebec). Each branch is made up of Chapters that represent different communities and cities across the Provinces. In Prince Edward Island, the local chapters represent the following families of schools:

- West Prince - Westisle Family
- East Prince - Three Oaks Family, Kinkora Family, Kensington Family
- Queens County Chapter - Bluefield Family, Charlottetown Rural Family, Colonel Gray Family
- Kings County Chapter - Montague Family, Morrell Family and Souris Family

(Canadian Parents for French - PEI Newsletter Jan - March 2000, pg 1 -2)

The CPF Branch is managed by a volunteer Board of Directors with a paid staff position to administer programs (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages 1998 Annual Report).

Canadian Parents for French Prince Edward Island works closely with the Department of Education, the School Boards, and the French Immersion and Core

French schools and teachers. On the national level, CPF:

- works with the federal government and national organizations and leaders to create an environment in which FSL education can grow and flourish
- monitors FSL education trends and releases an annual report on progress
- provides volunteer training and development
- develops and provides information and resources
- organizes, sponsors and supports french activities for students

(Helping your Child Become Bilingual, pg 25)

On the provincial level, CPF:

- works with the of Department of Education and other concerned groups to ensure that there is support for French Second Language Education
- keeps members informed through newsletters, web sites, conferences and annual meetings
- organizes and sponsors summer camps, family camps, french public speaking competitions, and a variety of other activities in French for FSL students
- acts as a resource for local chapter volunteers and members
- promotes French Second Language programs throughout the province/territory

(Helping your Child Become Bilingual, pg 26)

In the community, Canadian Parents for French:

- works with trustees, administrators and school principals to ensure the availability, continuity and quality of immersion and core french programs
- organizes and sponsors in - school activities in French such as pubic speaking competitions, winter carnivals, and performances by French artists

- organizes and sponsors out of school activities in French such as camps, exchanges, road trips, family dances and weekend workshops
- produces local newsletters and provides ways for fellow immersion parents to stay in touch with one another
- promotes French Second Language programs in the community

(Helping your Child Become Bilingual, pg. 26)

In 1867, at the beginning of Confederation, The Parliament of Canada adopted two official languages: English and French. Although, only officially bilingual in Parliament, the symbolic importance began to be realized when both French and English appeared on postage stamps and bank notes in the 1920's and the 1930's. As

well, in 1934, the previous unilingual public service sector began to communicate with the province of Quebec. These factors, along with the establishment of the Translation Bureau in 1934, were initial steps into helping pave the road to a bilingual Canada (Our Official Languages: As a Century Ends and a Millennium Begins, pg 3).

As with anything during the early stages of development, the path to bilingualism in Canada was not without its twists and turns. Some provinces had prohibited the teaching of the French language in the public school system. As well, friction could often be felt between Anglophones and Francophones. Government officials began to realize that more needed to be done for Canadian citizen's in the linguistic minority, as well as ensuring that all citizens and cultures were given the opportunity to flourish (Our Official Languages: As a Century Ends and a Millennium Begins, pg 3). If conflict between the citizens of Canada continued to occur, the fabric of the entire Country would have eventually been affected. As a result of these concerns, in 1963, the federal government established the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Bi-Culturalism. This committee spent seven years examining Canadian society and concluded that Canada was in a state of 'central crisis to its history' (Our Official Languages: As a Century Ends and a Millennium Begins, pg 3). As a result, this committee felt the only way to solve these problems was to ensure that every citizen be given the right to an education in his or her official language. They also concluded that it was essential for the rest of Canada to recognize the 'distinctive character' of Quebec (Our Official Languages: As a Century Ends and a Millennium Begins, pg 3). In 1969, the Official Language Act was passed, with no opposition, becoming national policy. The Act declared that the English and French languages would have equal status in all

institutions of the Parliament and Government of Canada. This act was considered to be one of the most “ambitious initiative since Confederation to ensure that those with different origins and traditions could continue to work together’. Both French and English were to become part of daily life; both in society and in the government. (Our Official Languages: As a Century Ends and a Millennium Begins, pg 3).

An accumulation of all these factors allowed Canadians to begin to realize the importance that bilingualism played in the character of Canada. Many Anglophone parents across the Country wanted their children to be exposed to bilingualism, but, at the same time, realized that the way French was being taught at that time was unproductive. A group of parents, in Saint - Lambert Quebec, believed they had the answer. They felt it was feasible for English children to learn French, without harm to their English, by using French as a living language within the classroom. In 1965, after a difficult, two year struggle, this group of parents received permission from the Quebec school board to begin the first ever French Immersion kindergarten class.

French Immersion is the teaching of a subject partially or entirely in French to children whose first language is English. The goal of this program is for students, by the time they reach high school graduation, to be fluently bilingual. In Atlantic Canada, second language learning is offered through Core French courses, or Immersion programs. In immersion, subjects such as Math and History are taught to students entirely in French. The French Immersion programs are designed to meet higher French proficiency goals than that of the Core French programs. (<http://apef-fepa.org>)

Early Immersion is the most frequently offered immersion program. Early Immersion occurs during the earliest years of schooling: in kindergarten, grade one or

grade two. When immersion is offered during the later years of schooling, from grades 3, 4 or 5, it is known as delayed, middle, or intermediate immersion. When offered in grades 6, 7, or later, it is known as late immersion. Classes are offered in a school district/board as an alternative to the regular English based curriculum. In some areas, 'immersion centres' have been developed: where French learning is not only confined to the classroom, but is present in the entire curriculum. This is an opportunity for French Immersion students to become engrossed in the French language, both in and out of the classroom (www.pch.gc.ca).

Although the idea of French Immersion is a "unique response to a uniquely Canadian language situation" (www.pch.gc.ca), these experiences are not confined solely to Canadian society. There has been, and continues to be, significant interest throughout the world concerning Canada's accomplishments in second language learning and teaching. As well, its methods have been used in many other Countries to teach French, Spanish and other languages (www.pch.gc.ca).

In 1975, Ron Elliot, Superintendent of Regional School Board Unit 3 in Prince Edward Island, developed an interest in having a French Immersion program in his jurisdiction. Although French was being taught in some schools across PEI, there was no official recognition or curriculum associated with these classes. Mr. Elliot did not speak French himself, but believed it would be a beneficial addition to the curriculum and a necessary part of a quality education. He contacted Clair Smitheram, a Core French teacher at the time, and asked if she would be willing to take on the

responsibility of researching French Immersion with the intent of developing the program for students in Unit 3. Needless to say, she welcomed the opportunity. Ron Elliot's plan was to send Clair to the Evangeline area, a predominately Acadian population, in Western Prince Edward Island. Here, she would observe the French First Language texts and programs and use this as the basis of their program. Clair, however, had a different idea. She decided to go straight to the source: Saint-Lambert Quebec, where French Immersion had first begun. She also visited the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal (PSBGM) and the public school boards in Ottawa. Ms. Smitheram was overwhelmed with the information she obtained: Anglophone children being fully immersed and learning entirely in French. She took note of everything: "I spent my nights reading and my days asking a thousand and one questions" (Clair Smitheram, Key Note Speech at 25th FI Anniversary Banquet). Clair returned to PEI with her arms, and head, filled with information and ideas on how to begin French Immersion in Prince Edward Island. In June of 1975, Clair wrote a proposal based on what she had learned. She then presented it to the School Board. The Board, after seeing Clair's presentation, decided that the idea of French Immersion in Prince Edward Island had merit. It would be offered the following September, providing the registration numbers met the numbers stipulated by the Board: a minimum of two classes, and a maximum of four.

Information programs, radio talk shows, and TV interviews were held prior to registration, to help inform parents and the community about the French Immersion program. Although such interest was shown at the information sessions and by the Island community, Clair feared there would not be enough students to meet the

requirements set by the School Board. Her fears, however, were unfounded, and on the bases of the registration numbers, three classes in Spring Park School and one in Sherwood School began. In 1975, Early Immersion became a reality on Prince Edward Island as a 3 year pilot program. Interest for the program was also being shown by parents who already had children in the English curriculum. Such interest was expressed, that Clair was once again approached. This time, the School Board came to Clair with a proposal to start a late immersion program, beginning at the grade 7 level. The entire process began again, and a year later, Late Immersion began in Charlottetown at Birchwood and Queen Charlotte Schools. By 1977 Early Immersion classes were being held at West Kent, Spring Park and Sherwood Schools in Charlottetown. Late Immersion Classes were held at Birchwood School, and Queen Charlotte School in Charlottetown. In the fall of 1977, two new grade one Early Immersion classes began in the Summerside area. Unit 4 was the last Island community to offer the French Immersion program. On December 30th, 1976, the Eastern School Board announced they would be providing the program for 25 children in the Montague area beginning in September of 1977.

Canadian Parents for French (CPF) was founded in 1975. Keith Spicer, the then Commissioner of Official Languages, invited French Immersion teachers and administrators from all across the Country to Ottawa to discuss the state of French education and FSL learning in Canada. He was concerned of the negativity and ignorance towards French Immersion, and therefore its frailty. Keith Spicer's purpose reached far beyond merely bringing French Immersion teachers and Officials together, he wanted to organize a group of individuals, apart from the school boards, to act as supporters and advertisers of the French Immersion program (Globe and Mail, Norman Webster, Mar 2th, 1977). Consequently, he contacted 30 parents from across the Country, inviting them to this historical meeting as well. He felt these parents would be the ones most passionate about the success of the French Immersion program. It was

the Canadian parents who had the most at stake: the education of their children. At the Ottawa meeting, Mr. Spicer challenged these 30 parents to come together to share any concerns they may have regarding opportunities for Anglophone children to learn French in Canada, as well as to take on the role of advocater for the 35, 000 children enrolled in French Immersion across Canada at that time. These parents met the challenge, staying in Ottawa for a brainstorming session of their own. They set up a new organization; one to pool ideas and information on French Second Language teaching and to provide support for the different groups fighting for the establishment and continuation of French Immersion across Canada. These innovative founders of CPF quickly realized they shared the same beliefs concerning their children's education. They believed that learning a second language would not only help to increase communication between Canadians, but it would also enhance thinking skills, widen horizons, and help to develop an appreciation for and respect of other people and cultures. These parents had the foresight to recognize Canada's two official languages as an opportunity for their children. They believed that learning both French and English in publically funded schools should be an essential ingredient to a quality Canadian education. They saw French Immersion as a sound investment in Canada's youth and the entire future of Canada. Those few days in Ottawa were busy ones. They left, returning to their respective provinces, with their goals firmly established, and a name: Canadian Parents for French. CPF's goals began as, and have remained similar to, the following:

- To assist in ensuring that each Canadian child has the opportunity to acquire as great a knowledge of the French language and culture as he or she is willing to

obtain

- To promote the best possible types of French language learning opportunities
- To establish and maintain effective communication between interested parents and educational and governmental authorities concerned with the provision of French language learning opportunities

(Report, written by CPF - PEI provincial Board, 1982-1983)

In October 1977, after only a few short months from their founding meeting, the first CPF National Conference was held. With the help of many organizations, especially the Department of the Secretary of State¹, CPF National was able to sponsor Provincial delegates as well as fund the conference. Newly joined members from all across Canada met in Calgary to talk with other parents committed to the idea of effective French Second Language learning. Max Yalden, Commissioner of Official Languages, spoke at the reception on the opening evening concerning the importance and usefulness of an organization such as CPF. He gave welcome assurances of the continued support of the Commissioners Office, with the departure of Keith Spicer. Jean Luc Pepin, co chair of the Task Force on Canadian Unity, spoke to the group of the multi faceted nature of Canadian unity. The Supervisor of Curriculum Development for the Ottawa Separate School Board, Adrienne Game, described the challenges of providing materials for FSL programs.

In less than a year, an organization that began with a mere 30 parents, grew to almost 5, 000 members. The Second National Conference was on October 12-14,

¹ Now known as Canadian Heritage

1978, with more than 200 delegates in attendance. Much was accomplished, including receiving a letter from the Prime Minister of Canada. The forefather of instituting a bilingual Canada, Pierre Trudeau: “Both English and French Canadians have to learn about each other and respect each other...and the action taken by CPF carries a message of hope for the Country’s future” (Dec, 1978. #5).

In January of 1978, the CPF National released their second newsletter, complete with 3 goals that CPF had formulated at the first meeting in Ottawa, and how they intended to accomplish them.

To Accomplish These Goals, they intended to:

- 1) produce publication popularizing relevant research, case studies and other pertinent information
- 2) produce a current directory of resource people, programs and organizations
- 3) produce an annotated bibliography of relevant research
- 4) communicate the Associations goals and ideas to appropriate authorities and to the general public.

(CPF National Newsletter, January 1978, Issue #2)

One year gone and CPF was well underway in making themselves known across Canada. Each provincial branch was busy lobbying for the beginning of and improvements towards French Immersion programs in their area.

In Prince Edward Island, following the emergence of French Immersion in 1975, a group of parents, with children in the first immersion class, joined together to form a parents' support group. They met to share ideas, to encourage one another, and to help keep other parents of students in French Immersion informed of changes or insights into the program. Because the FI program was in its infancy in Prince Edward Island, teachers were often left to develop the curriculum on their own. They would often get together on a Saturday at each other's homes, once or twice a month, to discuss what they were going to use as curriculum for the next week. They would have create the material since there was no program established for French Immersion students at that time. "We were using materials that were used for Francophone students and it had to be adapted because it would be too hard [for French Second Language students], or talking about things that didn't even exist here on PEI. So we cut out pictures, made posters, laminated and did stencils to give to the students [as learning tools] (Interview with Linda Lowther). As a result, the parents wanted to help out as well. They took the initiative to keep each other informed, and to act as

advocaters for continued improvements in the French Immersion program. It was the parents in this group who spread the word regarding French Immersion across the Island and who answered the questions of concerned and interested parents.

Mary Lou Morrison was the chair of this French Immersion parents group and had a daughter in the first immersion class on PEI. In 1977, she was approached by Clair Smitheram to attend a meeting in Ottawa on French Immersion education. Mary Lou said yes, and became one of the 30 parents who formed Canadian Parents for French. She returned from Ottawa as the representative for Atlantic Canada, and was full of ideas. It did not take long for the Island's French Immersion group to amalgamate with CPF and begin to consider themselves the PEI Chapter of CPF. CPF PEI began as a very informal group, meeting at each other's homes, working out strategies to maintain and improve upon the existing French Immersion program. They sent newsletters home with the French Immersion children to give to their parents. Credit needs to be given to these parents, not only for taking a chance on a relatively unknown program, but promoting it and providing guidance for other parents. In October 1977, the parents in Prince Edward Island, attended the first National Conference in Calgary. Rendell Seaman, Carol MacLeod, Mary Lou Morrison, and Jean Collins attended this National Conference as the Island contingency. A plan was beginning, and the organization was well under way after only 8 short months.

Island parents soon discovered the numerous benefits of joining this National organization. CPF National was full of information and a source of affirmation regarding what was occurring on PEI. It made them aware of shared problems with other French

Immersion programs that were occurring across the Country.² The members of CPF - PEI found reinforcement at these meetings, used them to share ideas, and become aware of how other provinces were handling any backlash associated with French Immersion. Prince Edward Island was envied by many places (outside of Ottawa and Montreal). Many provinces were amazed that the Island's Immersion program was initiated by a School Board administrator. Unlike most other provinces, French Immersion had not grown out of demands of parents, rather it had been initiated by one person who felt it would be a good idea. Although not on the cutting edge, Prince Edward Island was not far behind when it came to its French Immersion program. PEI was one of the first provinces to enjoy a successful French Immersion program, and has always experienced, percentage wise, being one of the top provinces for enrollment in their French Immersion program (Interview with Linda Lowther). Because PEI was a small province, they were able to accomplish things other, larger, provinces were not. There was a close relationship with the Department of Education, and many meetings were held between Immersion teachers across the Province so that they could prepare their materials in a cohesive manner. Teachers, officials and CPF members would visit other provinces that had successful programs, especially in the Ottawa area. They would observe what was being done and how they were conducting their French Immersion programs. They would, in turn, then bring this information back to PEI. Other provinces would often visit PEI to observe what was occurring in the French

² Montreal, Ottawa and New Brunswick (specifically Moncton and Fredericton) were provinces that experienced very little problems initiating French Immersion, most importantly, receiving full support from people in administration. (taken from interview with Jean Collins, March 5, 2002)

Immersion program. “The first Immersion class was tested from the time they were in grade one until the time they graduates. They were the most tested group that this Country has even seen. They were tested for everything: grammar skills, English skills, Math skills. They were guinea pigs” (Patrick Kinnear, June 13th, 2002). Everybody wanted to see what the teachers were doing, how they were conducting their classes: university researchers, teachers and consultants from other provinces. How were the kids doing? Could they speak French? Could they cope? Could they actually read and do math? Parents wanted to know what was going on and as a result, classes were often disrupted and the teachers were under a lot of pressure, being watched all the time. (Linda Lowther interview). Much credit needs to be given to the dedication and the perseverance of the first group of teachers who were able to endure this and able to still teach the children. They “invented the road as they travelled it, put in long hours, creating the material themselves because there was nothing there to work with” (taken from interview with Jean Collins, March 5, 2002).

With the retirement of Ron Elliot, however, and the changing of School Board members, the easy road to establishing French Immersion in PEI was becoming a thing of the past. Many new School Board members and officials did not want French Immersion on PEI and wanted to see it abolished. In order to ensure that FI continued and remained strong, CPF- PEI went beyond merely being an organization that planned activities for French Second Language students. CPF members became a politically tactile group. They were adversarial, and placed pressure on those in power. CPF - PEI were extremely effective in all they took on. “It was (CPF - PEI) a non political, political power” (Pat Kinnear). CPF - PEI began to be known across the Island for their

determination, their accomplishments, and their outspokenness. “Every year it seemed as though we were fighting for the same thing. It [CPF - PEI] was so political, that some people did not even want to touch us. CPF - PEI was very political, very committed and very vocal. We were the ones that were going to get things done. You can never, ever stop a bunch of parents who want something for their children. For a bunch of parents, we had lot of influence, it was the progression, after we graduated, we moved into social activism for our kids” (interview with Patrick Kinnear, June 13th, 2002).

From the very start, CPF - PEI faced many issues regarding the French Immersion program from the Island community. Since it was a such a new program, parents were worried and unsure if it was the right thing for the children. The biggest concern of CPF - PEI was accessibility to the program in the public schools. Because of their belief that French Immersion should be a right for Canadian children, there was a growing concern that children were being turned away due to lack of space, lack of existing programs or lack of transportation. “Our ideal situation would provide for universal accessibility to immersion programs” (Report, written by CPF - PEI provincial Board, 1982-1983). Registration issues were the cause of continual conflict between CPF - PEI and School Board officials. Because CPF members believed that a bilingual education was the right of a child, not merely a privilege, they believed that any child that chose to register should be accepted into the program. The School Board, however, had placed restrictions on the registration process: a minimum of 25 students were needed to fill one class. If 24 students registered, the class would not be held. If 26 students signed up, one student would not be accepted. The method of registration was a continual cause of concern as well. In 1977, the newly formed CPF - PEI began

their first battle. Unit 3 had decided to change their registration process from first come, first serve, to a lottery system. Although neither was an ideal process, CPF - PEI felt that their children's schooling should not be left up to chance. So, they lobbied: they were interviewed on TV, held meetings, and talked to newspaper and radio reporters. CPF - PEI's efforts paid off and they enjoyed their first victory. Registration in Unit 3 went back to first come, first serve. Registration issues were a continual problem when Immersion first began and was only resolved, years later. Many years, parents who wanted their children in the program, would line up hours, sometimes at 5:30 in the morning for registration that began at 9:00am. But as time went on, and Immersion became more popular, parents began showing up as early as 24 hours before the registration time. When officials began to see the increased number of parents arriving early, they opened up the gymnasium's in the schools for the parents to spend the night. Local coffee shops would donate coffee and donuts to the tired, but dedicated parents. One year, Premier Ghiz waited in line for the evening, wanting to register one of his children in the Immersion program. The Superintendent of Education at that time, Parnell Garland, received a call from a parent wanting to skip the registration process. Superintendent Parnell, however, would hear nothing of it: "If the Premier [of PEI] is going to spend the night in the gym, so are you!" (Linda Lowther). Although this was not the ideal registration process, CPF felt that it was the lesser of two evils: parents who were truly committed to entering their children in the Immersion program could make themselves available for early registration. Unit 4, however, continued to use the lottery, phone in system, which most individuals saw as incredibly unfair. The most controversial registration of all, parents who had rotary phones were unable to

compete. Units 1 and 2 in Tignish and Summerside area, had no formal registration policy. The number of students entering the program was not significant enough to cause any type of registration problems.

Unfortunately, the success that Unit 3 was facing in regards to the French Immersion program was not experienced across the Island. Unit 1 (Tignish area) and Unit 2 were trying to muster up interest in both the French Immersion program and with CPF - PEI. The most hard fought battle, however, was occurring in Unit 4. In January 1983, Montague School Board Trustee Scott MacPherson introduced a Motion calling for a stronger French Core Program to begin at the grade one level. He wanted to see this replace a second French Immersion class in the area. Betty Fraser, President of the Unit 4 Chapter of CPF stated that CPF would be in full force at the School Board meetings to register their protests (Eastern Graphic, Jan 26, 1983). Only a day after making this motion, Trustee MacPherson indicated that he was withdrawing the motion and resigning from the School Board. His resignation was one of four that year, causing many people to believe the French Immersion debate played a role (Eastern Graphic, January 26th, 1983). In response to the debate in Unit 4 and as an antithesis of CPF, a group calling themselves Canadian Parents for English formed. This group pushed for the development of and improvements in the Core French programs, as opposed to expanding the already existing French Immersion programs. They feared that French Immersion would replace other courses, and cause the English program to suffer. "Canadian Parents for French have sold their product [French Immersion] like Kellogg's, and we have to catch up" (Canadian Parents for English member, The Guardian, Feb 18th, 1983). They also believed, that with French

Immersion courses continuing to grow, English programs would suffer and ultimately lead to the loss of English teachers. Canadian Parents for English decided to take over the fight abandoned by Trustee MacPherson. With the increasing interest in the French Immersion program, and the already small class sizes at Montague Consolidated, CPE were concerned over the possible loss of English programs. Members of CPF disagreed with this suggestion, as they had when Scott MacPherson suggested it. As a result, the Unit 4 School Board meetings turned into a verbal battle field. On the pro immersion side, were CPF members. On the other end, were anti immersion parents who wanted a stronger Core French program. CPE also wanted the board to determine a deadline for the cut off point of registrations for the proposed second Immersion class (Guardian, March 2, 1983). In response to these questions and concerns, the Unit 4 school board decided to establish a policy regarding French Immersion, including the proposed cutoff date for registration. "The lack of French Immersion policy has turned the last two monthly school board meetings into a tug of war as pro and anti immersionists lobby the school board over the status of a second grade one French Immersion class next year" (The Guardian, March 10, 1983). The School Board approved the French Immersion proposal of the addition of a second Immersion class in the Montague area, resulting in accusations from CPE that they board had been pressured into a decision. For CPF however, it was another victory.

The Souris/Morell area of PEI were facing even bigger problems. French Immersion had yet to be established in this area. In January of 1983, the proposal to initiate French Immersion in these two areas was voted against by the Unit 4 School Board. Four months were spent designing the French Immersion policy, completed by

a committee consisting of: school trustees Cyril Gallant, Donna Seres, Merlin McCarthy, French Coordinator Albert Seror, teacher Gail McAleer and Superintendent Ralph Stonefield. The recommendations called for the establishment of a French Immersion program in the Morell area. In an unprecedented move, a motion was made by Donna Seres for the board to hold an open vote, in front of the press and the public. This was completed, the motion being defeated by a vote of 7-5. The first vote over the immersion program in Morell was first done in May 1982, and this too was defeated by a vote of 7-6. The defeated vote against the French Immersion program did not dissuade the CPF parents however. Although frustrated with the lack of French Immersion in the area, and the addition of a second class in Montague, they still continued to promote the French Immersion program in an effort to get a class established (The Guardian, February 3, 1983). Concerned parents, teachers and educational specialists came together to discuss the advantages and problems that a French Immersion program would cause in Eastern Kings. Melvin McQuaid, former Justice of the Supreme Court, chaired the panel discussion. Panellists included Unit 4 consultant Albert Seror, Superintendent of Education Ralph Stonefield, Immersion teacher Gail MacAleer, Unit 4 CPF President Betty Fraser and Trustees Robert Rose and Audrey Barter. Sister Marie Arsenault, French Coordinator in Unit 3, lead a session during the evening where adults became the “students” as she conducted a typical French Immersion class. This gave parents an idea of what their children would experience during their first days of immersion. This time, however, regardless of CPF’s efforts, French Immersion was not to become a reality in Unit 4, with only 11 students registering for the program.

Another issue that CPF - PEI found it necessary to acknowledge was dealing with negative publicity concerning the French Immersion program that was occurring in many areas. One issue that was creating much discussion was whether French Immersion was an elitist program. Much research had been conducted across the Country, proving that Early Immersion was acceptable for everyone and that every child had the opportunity to get into the program if he or she chose. CPF - PEI wanted to dissuade this theory quickly, for it contradicted all the CPF - PEI believed French Immersion to be. In order for FSL to be a right, all children must have access to the program, regardless of race, religion, educational ability or socio-economical background. It was important for CPF - PEI to assure parents that any child had the right and the ability to enter the program.

Another problem that CPF - PEI was facing was the fears of many that French Immersion would place a strain on the English school system. With the hiring of new teachers for the French Immersion programs, many Islanders feared that English speaking teachers would begin to lose their jobs because they were unable to speak or teach French. Members of CPF empathized with the teachers. However, CPF wanted to ensure parents and the community that because "it [French Immersion] was faded in so gradually, that with retirements and so on, people didn't actually lose positions. There may not have been openings in the English stream, but there were not people that lost positions because of it" (Interview with Linda Lowther).

Another problem that began to arise, was the amount of French being taught at the Junior High and High level. Prince Edward Island's Early French Immersion program was regarded as being very successful, even in comparison to programs in

larger Canadian cities. However, parents found that once their children reached the Junior High level, the program began to deteriorate. The reason for this problem was due to the fact that the schools were finding it difficult to find French Immersion speciality teachers in subjects such as Music, Library, etc. As a result, the French Immersion program became 'watered down'. (Report, written by CPF - PEI provincial Board, 1982-1983). In comparison to the rest of the Country, course offerings in Prince Edward Island were inadequate. They estimated that grade 10, 11 and 12 students were only receiving 12.5% to 25% of French Instruction at the high school level. This number, compared to other Canadian provinces at 50% French instruction, was significantly low (The Guardian, Nov 14, 1984).³ Whatever the issue, the members of CPF - PEI worked diligently to find the solutions. They knew what needed to be said and done. Because they felt so strongly about the program, they were able to remain enthusiastic about defending it and ensuring that it would continue to flourish. Their ability to become educated and learned in all subjects that were a cause of concern for the French Immersion program, is no doubt, one of the reasons they have remained so successful in their endeavours.

CPF - PEI did not only lobby and fight for the implementation of quality FI programs. They also wanted to give French Immersion students the opportunity to use French outside the classroom. In 1977, the first year of Canadian Parents for French, was also when the first French Immersion summer camp was held. A total of 60

³ The number of course offerings at the Junior High/High level, has been an issue that has continued on for many years, a fight that CPF - PEI has been extremely active in, and one that has only recently been solved in the past few years.

children attended, and was an overwhelming success. The next year, in 1978, 5 camps were held, with 150 students in attendance. “The camps give the children an opportunity to use their classroom language in a recreational setting” (Mary Lou Morrison, *The Guardian*, 1978). This was the newly formed CPF - PEI’s first major project. They wanted to offer an opportunity for French Immersion students to use their French both outside of the classroom, as well as during the summer months, when opportunities were not readily available. Activities that were held at the camps included night walks, crafts, bonfires, swimming games, and a bus tour of the Acadian Village and Acadian Museum. French Immersion teachers from across the Island volunteered a week of their summer vacation to act as camp directors, assisted by Acadian student counsellors.⁴ Besides the French Camps, CPF - PEI organized other activities for French Immersion students as well. Teen dances with French music and special French speakers were all programs they tried to bring into the schools. As time went on, many other activities have been added as an important part of CPF’s mandate.⁵ “Those [extra curricular French activities] were [are] an important component of making the culture come alive and realize that there are other things other than a classroom where you can speak French.” (Interview with Linda Lowther)

It goes without saying that French Immersion would not exist on Prince Edward Island today if it was not for the gumption and perseverance of Canadian Parents for

⁴ Although, increased in size, French Camps are still remain one of CPF - PEI’s most popular activities

⁵See Appendix 1

French. Their dedication to ensuring the implementation and continuation of the French Immersion program all across the Island was inspirational. So, with French Immersion now firmly established in the school system on PEI, does it mean that CPF is no longer needed? Looking back at all that CPF has done and continues to do, one can answer with a resounding 'no'. From 1990 on til today, CPF - PEI has continued in active role in maintaining the quality of the French Immersion program on Prince Edward Island. A main part of their mandate is ensuring that parents are still aware of the benefits of the program, as well as providing quality activities for French Second Language students to use their French outside of the classroom setting.

Percentage wise, French Immersion has established itself across the Country, with PEI experiencing significant numbers of adolescents entering the program. In 1996, nearly 25% of the population of young Canadians, aged 18-29, were bilingual. 317, 351 students were currently enrolled in french Immersion programs across the Country, as compared to 37, 835 in 1977. More than 2 million English speaking students were studying French as a subject in school. And in almost every Province and Territory the percentage of bilingual teens aged 15 - 19 had doubled since 1981. Prince Edward Island demonstrated the largest growth, with 25 of the schools in the Province offering the Immersion program to over 3, 800 students, approximately 15% of the student population. Prince Edward Island had the largest increase in bilingualism among adolescents in the Country, a trend which has continued on throughout the past 6 years. A continuing trend, is that the younger generation of Canadians is becoming

more bilingual than any before.⁶

One of the most significant changes of the 1990's, however, was the discontinuation of the registration process. Students (and parents) are no longer forced to wait in line, or face hours of getting a busy signal for the phone in system. The school board realized that something needed to be done, how unfair the existing process was, making parents wait in line, such an unwieldily process. "They [the school board] tried all sorts of way to handle registration, phone - ins, first come first serve, but when they realized that the numbers were stabilizing, realizing that it was not just some type of educational fad. And, with the numbers stabilizing, realized that by making the program available to everyone, the program, in turn, would begin to stabilize as well. From the planning perspective and public relations it was better to make it acceptable to all. So finally, in the 1990/1991 school year, French Immersion became available for all students on Prince Edward Island that wished to attend" (Linda Lowther).

The programming and how French Immersion is taught in the classroom has changed significantly throughout the years as well. Significant research has been conducted concerning French Immersion and the way that French Second Language students learn. CPF has been a major contributor to much of the research that has been conducted and continues to be an advocator of the benefits of being bilingual. The knowledge teachers and officials now have on how students learn a second language compared to when the program first began in 1975 is significant, and adds to the benefits of the program.

⁶ See Appendix C

Things have changed drastically in the past 25 years in term of French Immersion, the need to lobby, although still important, is no longer a main priority of CPF - PEI. Instead, they have taken on a much more administrative role in the establishment of successful Immersion programs across the Island, working closely with French Immersion schools, teachers, principals and the Department of Education. As well as through the continued support of the parents and the of Canadian Heritage. CPF has still maintained the necessity of insuring that better programs are available, better class sizes, and increasing the number of courses being offered at the senior high level.

Besides acting as a support for parents with children in French Immersion programs, CPF also organizes programs and activities to help promote the French language within

the communities and also to give French students the opportunity to practice what they are learning in the classroom. Activities that are participated in by CPF - PEI include the following:

- 1) **Early French Immersion Information Meetings:** these meetings are sponsored by the school boards in partnership with CPF. They are for (but not exclusive to) parents who are interested in starting their children in French Immersion as early as Kindergarten. These meetings give them the chance to ask any questions and to find out information to help them make an informed decision in choosing the educational route of their child's future.
- 2) **Late French Immersion Information Meetings:** these meetings, although similar to the Early French Immersion Meetings, are for parents (and students) that are interested in starting French Immersion but have already attended school.
- 3) **School Board Meetings:** these are attended by members of CPF - PEI to become aware of what is happening in the PEI school system. It also gives schools the opportunity to hear what programs are being planned at CPF - PEI
- 4) **Home and School:** see above
- 5) **Service Groups:** allows other groups across PEI to talk to members of CPF - PEI, find out what is being planned and to answer any questions they may have

- 6) **PEI Teachers Federation Convention:** “see above”
- 7) **Meet the Teacher Night:** “see above”
- 8) **Homework Workshops:** sponsored by CPF, helps the children in FI with any help them may need. It also helps to take pressure off the parent for help who may not be bilingual
- 1) **Welcome Wagon Baby Shower:** introduces CPF to new and expecting mothers
- 10) **Charlottetown Area Chamber of Commerce:** Mixers for displaying and giving out material
- k) **CPF-PEI Annual General Meeting:** Minister of Education or the Deputy Minister attends AGM as well as the Director of French Programs and Services or her designate
(binder pg 5)

Activities that are organized by CPF - PEI include the following:

- a) **Summer Camps:** for immersion students, divided for age groups. Students have fun in french.
- b) **Encounters with Canada Bursary:** send 5 students to the Terry Fox Center in Ottawa for a week of bilingual encounters with young people from across Canada. Positions are awarded based on submissions from students and their supporters
- c) **Concours D’Art Oratoire:** province wide french public speaking contest, divided by age and different levels of French proficiency

- d) **Doolys Speakeasy:** four Doolys locations and CPF -PEI team up to offer students a place to go on a Sunday afternoon. Pool, board games, and conversations with peers in French
- e) **CPF -PEI Educator of the Year:** awarded to an individual who has shown exceptional support and dedication to the quality and availability of French second language programs in Island schools. Sought through the school system and the media⁷
- f) **Provincial/National Newsletters:** information of interest in the French Education field, success stories, contests, job opportunities, extracurricular activities, meeting dates, etc.
- g) **Student Newsletters:** designed for grade 1-6 and 7-12 full of contests with prizes
- h) **French Drama Festival:** offers opportunities for French immersion and Francophone students to show off artistic theater talent. 4 day long event held at the Carrefour Theater in Charlottetown.
- i) **Student Assistants/Community Service Bursary Program:** offers grade 11 and 12 students opportunity to work with CPF PEI
- j) **Resource Room:** has available research and studies on French as a Second Language Education, learning tools, official language documents, publications, movies, videos, word games
- k) **Chapter Activities/Volunteer Opportunities:** participate in local activities

⁷ See Appendix B for complete list of CPF - PEI's Educator's of the Year

such as book fairs, fun nights, swims, skates, etc.

(Found in Canadian Parents for French PEI: Services Provided)

Each year, CPF - PEI awards an educator who has shown exceptional support and dedication to the quality and availability of French Second Language program in Island schools. The following are a list of the Educators of the Year:

1984 = Claire Smitheram
1985 = Sister Marie Arsenault
1986 = Thomas Hall
1987 = Tilmon Gallant
1988 = Albert Seror
1989 = Claude Brisson
1990 = Jeanne Collins and Bernie Pepin
1991 = Jean Shea and Louissette Blouin
1992 = Linda Lowther and Debbie Pineau
1993 = Gail MacAleer
1994 = George MacDonald
1995 = Nancy DesRosiers
1996 = Mar Thompson
1997 = Beryl MacLeod
1998 = Louise Seaward - Gagon
1999 = Ida Bernard
2000 = Monique Brisson
2001 = Maurice Poirier

Time line

1966 - 1978 =

Premier of PEI - Alexander Bradshaw Campbell

1978 - 1979 =

Premier of PEI - William Bennett Campbell

1980 =

Provincial Director - Jean Collins

Alternate Director - Mary Lou Morrison

Premier of PEI from 1979 - 1981 - J. Angus MacLean

French Coordinator for Unit 1 - Winston Gallant

Superintendent of Unit 2 - Leonard Russell

Unit 4 French Coordinator - Gerard Comeau

1981 =

PEI Provincial Director - Muriel Walsh

Alternate Director - Elinor Reynolds

French Coordinator - Sister Beaton

Secretary of State - Gerald Regan

Premier of PEI from 1981 - 1986 - James Matthew Lee

1, 3000 Island children were enrolled in French Immersion

1982 =

PEI Provincial Director - Dorothy Maze

Over 250 members of CPF - PEI

Number of Adolescents enrolled in the French Immersion program in Atlantic Canada:

	NB	NF	NS	PE
1990 - 1991	18.9%	3.5%	3.1%	14.3%

1991 - 1992	16.7%	3.8%	3.6%	14.8%
1992 - 1993	17.5%	4.1%	3.9%	13.7%
1993 - 1994	17.5%	4.3%	4.2%	13.7%
1994 - 1995	18.2%	4.5%	4.5%	14.7%

<http://apef-fepa.org>