

Symposium: *We all have our parts to play: The roles of students, peer-mentors and administration in creating pathways to higher education and student success for minority-language students*

Paper 1: Linguistic heterogeneity and non-traditional pathways to postsecondary education in Ontario

This paper will provide the broad strokes of the theoretical and methodological considerations as well as the context of a study funded by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (Canada), conducted in North America's largest bilingual university, the University of Ottawa. This study explores the impact of linguistic heterogeneity on student success, using the Francophone 2011-2012 undergraduate cohort as a case study.

Ontario, like many other educational jurisdictions, wishes to increase the further and higher education of its citizens. In 2010, it set a target of 70 per cent by 2020, up from 63 per cent. Luckily, the province boasts both the largest number of public institutions of further and higher education in Canada. However, despite increased targeted immigration, the province institutions have not been showing growth rates. Rae (2005) concluded that increasing participation in further and higher education is dependent on raising the participation rates of 5 traditionally underrepresented groups and increasing the participation of students other than direct admissions from secondary school. In Ontario, Francophones remain underrepresented, particularly in higher education (Labrie, Lamoureux & Wilson, 2009 ; Norrie & Zhao, 2011).

The University of Ottawa, North America's largest bilingual postsecondary institution, has a specific mandate to meet the needs of Ontario's French first-language minority community. Recent data analysis confirms that the University now attracts more than 55% of Ontario's university-bound French first-language secondary school graduates (Labrie, Lamoureux & Wilson, 2009) and increasing numbers of Francophone international students, anglophone students studying in French as part of the Immersion program as well as students from non-traditional pathways, that is not registering directly after secondary school completion. Fall 2010 enrolment was approximately 40,000, including more than 10,000 (or 25%) students in French as medium of instruction programs.

It should be noted that the University draws francophone students from all regions of the province. Recent demographic data shows that enrolment in Ontario's K-12 French first-language system has grown at a rate of 4% since 2004, with important regional fluctuations (Ministry of Education, 2010). This significant growth can be ascribed in part to a growing number of francophone students of international origin, especially in urban areas, as well as intra and interprovincial migration. These profound demographic changes are transforming the very nature of the Francophone population in Ontario such that it can no longer be considered a single monolithic group with a common language

variety and culture, as linguistic and cultural heterogeneity is now the norm in many areas of the province.

As is noted in several studies on the massification of further and higher education, students who meet the admission requirements increasingly experience a gap or distance between their linguistic repertoire and the linguistic register valued at the PSE institution where the language of instruction is their mother tongue (Erlich, 1998; Klein & Pierret, 1994; Monballin et al., 1995; Parmentier, 2006, 2011; Pollet & Delforge, 2011; Salmon et al., 2011). This gap poses additional challenges for students whose mother tongue or language of use is different from the institution's language of instruction, despite meeting language admission requirements for their PSE program (Gaudet & Loslier, 2009; Montoya, 2011; Smith-Adcock, Daniels, Lee, Villalba & Arce, 2006; Stevenson and Willot, 2010).

Preliminary institutional analyses conducted at the University of Ottawa reveal that graduates from French first-language secondary schools in Central and South-western Ontario, where Francophones are (i) particularly minoritized and (ii) linguistically and culturally diverse, and who meet the provincial standard (70 – 79%) in the language admission requirement for French as medium of instruction programs at the university are « at risk » in some mandatory first-year language courses. These difficulties permeate other courses where writing skills are paramount, and ultimately affect persistence and success. These students are also overwhelmed with significant linguistic insecurity that lingers well beyond their first year, impacting their academic success (Desabrais, 2008; Lamoureux, 2007).

Wishing to counter the linguistic insecurity and in order to provide First-year Francophone students with positive role models who can help identify and access resources to bridge the linguistic distance between their repertoire and that of their Eastern Ontario Franco-dominant peers, ease the transition to higher education and support student success, the University of Ottawa implemented a pilot peer-to-peer mentoring program that created relationships between incoming students and current University of Ottawa students from the same linguistically minoritized region. This relationship was established during the pre-admission explorations as well as during the registration process and course selections, continuing during the transition to University, including accompanying students in their integration during their first year in French medium of instruction postsecondary programs.

A research project was developed to shadow the implementation of the peer-to-peer mentoring program in order to evaluate its effectiveness, propose modifications as needed and explore the capacity for knowledge mobilization to other students groups from non-traditional pathways at the University of Ottawa and at other PSE institutions. The study had two large components. The first, a mixed methods study investigating the impact of the pilot program from the perspective of both the first-year students and their peer mentors. The second, a far reaching institutional analysis of student success data taking into account the linguistic heterogeneity within linguistic groups, the geo-linguistic origins of students and their pathway to postsecondary education at the University of Ottawa for both Francophone and Anglophone cohorts since 2008, with correlation

analysis of student achievement in foundation language courses, their admission grades and their achievement in discipline courses.

This paper will outline the context of the study, highlight the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of the project and present overarching results. Challenges and limitations of the study will also be discussed. We will demonstrate how this project has informed and continues to inform university policy and services at the University of Ottawa. Finally we will provide insights on which findings could be transposed to other institutions, in a variety of settings.

References

- Desabrais, T. 2008. Insécurité linguistique et études supérieures : le cas d'une université bilingue canadienne. Paper presented at the conference Universités francophones et diversité linguistique. Yaoundé, Cameroon.
- Erlich, V. & Lucciardi, J. (2004). Le rapport à l'écrit des étudiants d'université. *Spirale*, 33.
- Gaudet, E & Loslier, S. (2009). *Recherche sur le succès scolaire des étudiants de langue et de culture différente inscrits dans les établissements collégiaux francophones du Canada*, Ottawa : Réseau des cégeps et des collèges francophones du Canada, 76 pages.
- Klein, J-R. & Pierret, J-M. (1990). Une enquête sur la pratique du français en première année à l'université. *Enjeux*, 21, 7-13.
- Labrie, N., S. Lamoureux and D. Wilson. 2009. *L'accès des Francophones aux études postsecondaires en Ontario : le choix des jeunes*. Toronto: Centre de recherches en éducation franco-ontarienne (CREFO). Available at: crefo.oise.utoronto.ca/UserFiles/File/rapportsprojets/rapport%20finalLabrie.pdf.
- Lamoureux, S. (2007). La transition de l'école secondaire de langue française à l'université en Ontario : expériences étudiantes. Thèse de doctorat non-publiée (Ph. D.), Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.
- Ministry of Education of Ontario (2010). Données démographiques pour les écoles de langue française de l'Ontario. Document de travail.
- Monballin, M., M. van der Brempt and G. Legros 1995. Maîtriser le français écrit à l'université : un simple problème de langue ? *Revue des sciences de l'éducation*, 21, pp. 59–74.
- Montoya, M.C. (2011). Student autobiographies, a practice for recovering heritage languages and recognizing dual identities. Paper presented at the International Society for Language Studies Conference, June 24th 2011, Aruba.
- Norrie, K. and H. Zhao. 2011. An overview of PSE accessibility in Ontario. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, Issue Paper no. 8. Available at: www.heqco.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/At-Issue-8-Accessibility-ENG.pdf.
- Parmentier, Ph (dir.). (2006). *Promotion de la réussite des nouveaux bacheliers à l'université: actes de la journée d'étude*: Namur: Presses universitaires de Namur
- Parmentier, Ph. (dir.) (2011). *Recherches et actions en faveur e la réussite en première année universitaire. Vingt ans de collaboration dans la Commission "Réussite" du Conseil interuniversitaire de la Communauté française de Belgique (CIUF)*. Bruxelles: CIUF, 79 p.
- Pollet, M.Ch. & M. Delforge (2011). Comment développer les compétences langagières des étudiants? In Parmentier, P. (Ed.) (2011). *Recherches et actions en faveur e la réussite en première année universitaire. Vingt ans de collaboration dans la*

- Commission "Réussite" du Conseil interuniversitaire de la Communauté française de Belgique (CIUF)* (p. 50-54). Bruxelles: CIUF.
- Rae, Hon. R. (2005). *L'Ontario : Chef de file en éducation, rapport et recommandations*. Toronto : Gouvernement de l'Ontario.
- Salmon, D., Houart, M. & Slosse, P. (2011). Pourquoi mettre en place des dispositifs d'accompagnement et de remédiation, et comment en évaluer l'efficacité ? In Parmentier, P. (Ed.). *Recherches et actions en faveur e la réussite en première année universitaire. Vingt ans de collaboration dans la Commission "Réussite" du Conseil interuniversitaire de la Communauté française de Belgique (CIUF)* (p. 32-38). Bruxelles: CIUF.
- Smith-Adock, S., Daniels, M.H., Lee, S.M., Villalba, J.A., & Arce, N. (2006). Culturally responsive school counselling for Hispanic/Latino students and families: The need for bilingual school counsellors. *Professional School Counseling, 10*, 92-101.
- Stevenson, J. & Willot, J. (2010). Refugees: Home Students with International Needs, in Jones, E. (Ed). *Internationalisation and the student voice* (p. 193-200). New York: Routledge.