

## Introducing the CEFR in BC: Questions and Challenges

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### Abstract

In 2010, the British Columbia Ministry of Education introduced an updated version of its international languages curricula titled Additional Languages (AL) draft curriculum which set out a clear articulation of the province's language education as conceived and developed over the past 15 years. The strength of the draft curriculum lies in its emphasis on plurilingualism as a guiding pedagogical principle, a response to recent recommendations of the Council of Ministers of Canada to adopt the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in a Canadian context. The CEFR framing has been retained in the latest revision of the AL draft curriculum, the 2011 French curriculum, which has recently replaced the original 2010 draft document. Despite this latest revision, the original AL draft curriculum maintains historical relevance for language education in BC by highlighting the province's linguistic diversity and the choice to value more than one language in different ways. In its original conception, the AL draft curriculum operationalized the recognition of linguistic plurality within an officially bilingual context and thus represented a concrete attempt to acknowledge the very dynamic language practices of British Columbians. In this paper we examine how the draft curriculum sought to negotiate historical, political, cultural, and linguistic questions with regard to language education in BC, by first considering the historical development of BC language education within the context of official bilingualism, followed by a thematic discourse analysis of the document text to highlight the clearest yet also most challenging articulation of plurilingual language education in BC to date.

### Résumé

En 2010, le ministère de l'Éducation de Colombie-Britannique a introduit une version révisée de ses programmes de langues internationales, sous la forme d'un projet de curriculum pour les langues additionnelles qui définissait une articulation claire de l'éducation linguistique de la province telle que conçue et développée au cours des 15 dernières années. La force du projet de curriculum se trouvait dans l'accent mis sur le plurilinguisme comme principe directeur pédagogique, une réponse aux recommandations récentes du Conseil des ministres du Canada à adopter le Cadre européen commun de référence pour les langues dans un contexte canadien. Ce projet de curriculum a été révisé pour devenir le curriculum de français maintenant cependant le CECR en reste la base théorique. De plus, le projet de curriculum demeure pertinent d'un point de vue historique pour l'enseignement des langues en Colombie-Britannique en ce qu'il a mis en évidence la diversité linguistique de la province et le choix de valoriser plusieurs langues de différentes façons. Il opérationnalisait ainsi la reconnaissance de la pluralité linguistique dans un

contexte officiellement bilingue et représentait une tentative concrète de reconnaître les pratiques langagières très dynamiques de la Colombie-Britannique. Dans cet article, nous examinons le projet de curriculum comme un moyen potentiel de négocier les questions historiques, politiques, culturelles et linguistiques à l'égard de l'enseignement des langues en Colombie-Britannique. Ainsi, nous considérons d'abord le développement historique de l'enseignement des langues en Colombie-Britannique dans le cadre du bilinguisme officiel, puis nous nous livrons à une analyse du discours thématique du document pour mettre en évidence l'articulation claire d'une éducation linguistique plurilingue en Colombie-Britannique, bien que celle-ci présente des défis.

## Introducing the CEFR in BC: Questions and Challenges

### Introduction

*“In Canada, French is one of our official languages. On the other hand, Canada is a multicultural and multilingual country with a growing Chinese population and an emerging Asian economy. Do you think it would be more effective and would open up more opportunities to send your child to a French Immersion school or a Mandarin Immersion school? Why?”*

This question was presented during a graduate course at a western Canadian university as part of a student presentation about a Mandarin-bilingual program operating in an urban public school in that region of the country. The class included local and international students, most of whom were teachers in second language (SL) or foreign language (FL) programs ranging from elementary to post-secondary education. The immediate response to this final question was a moment of silence, at which point one of the students, a French language teacher, expressed concern by pointing out that the question could potentially offend those involved in the teaching of French as a second language (FSL) in Canada, an integral part of that country’s policy of official bilingualism. The instructor responded to this by explaining that, while elementary students in British Columbia (BC) are required to learn another language, provincial language policy does not mandate that this language be French. This was followed by a brief discussion of Canada’s official bilingualism and multiculturalism policy within the context of an increasingly multilingual society.

Although ultimately left unanswered during the ensuing discussion, the question of how to reconcile official bilingualism and multilingualism with Canada’s plurilingual realities is representative of longstanding tensions around Canada’s national language policy (Fraser, 2006; Taylor, 1994). Perceptions about the implications of official bilingualism for how languages in Canada are valued derive in part from what are seen to be incompatibilities between official bilingualism and the role language education plays, and has played historically, in the struggle for political, linguistic, and cultural recognition and social equality (Duff, 2007). French and English language education, while administered at the provincial level of government, represent a central element of the federal government’s mandate of official bilingualism. Furthermore, alongside indigenous language programs, provincial and territorial language policies provide for instruction in other non-official minority languages. The place and role of French in Canada underpin not only an enduring debate on Canadian unity (Hayday, 2005), but also intersect with the presence of many community languages which are spoken across Canada and whose speakers constitute an integral element of the country’s historically linguistically diverse landscape (Haque, 2005). In several regions across the country, including BC, a number of these non-official minority languages today represent the dominant language together with English (Burnaby, 2008; Duff, 2007; Duff & Li, 2009).

In British Columbia, the question of how to reconcile the province’s multilingual and plurilingual reality with official bilingualism in Canada’s was addressed with regard to language education in the form of an updated languages draft curriculum titled *Additional Languages Elementary – Secondary Curriculum* (from here on AL draft curriculum), presented for public review in 2010. This first draft has now been replaced with a

curriculum document for French (British Columbia [BC] Ministry of Education, 2011a), with concurrent curricula forthcoming for other commonly taught languages in BC. Although no longer under consideration in its original conception, it is our view that the original 2010 draft curriculum remains historically relevant to an understanding of BC language education and is vital for future discussions about ongoing curricular developments. Framed within a federal initiative to advance bilingualism in Canada, the impetus for the AL draft curriculum was drawn primarily on established guidelines for additional language learning, teaching, and assessment as outlined in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This approach, developed in Europe to address the plurilingual and pluricultural practices of its speakers, has been retained in the latest revision of the AL draft curriculum, the French draft curriculum currently under review. A central theoretical foundation of the CEFR is the concept of *plurilingualism* which places the focus on an individual's linguistic repertoires across languages. This distinguishes it from *multilingualism* which is less concerned with individual language users and concentrates instead on the societal contact between languages represented by different language communities (Moore & Gajo, 2009). This conceptual distinction is important in understanding not only the impetus for the AL draft curriculum but also the challenges involved in the recontextualisation of the European framework within the BC context. With its adoption of the CEFR approach, the draft AL curriculum represented a significant endeavour to negotiate the many historical, political, cultural, and linguistic questions in relation to current language policies, minority language rights, and additional language education within Canadian society. It did this by shifting the matter of language learning from community interests to those of the individual language learner and/or language user. Precisely how this was accomplished is the central topic of our discussion.

This paper examines the recently proposed AL draft curriculum from a historical perspective, its underlying principle of plurilingualism as presented in the text and structure of the document, and how the draft document constituted an important articulation of additional language education in BC. Our discussion is structured around two primary tasks: first, we present the historical context of French as an official language in Canada with an emphasis on the political and socio-cultural forces implicated in the evolution of national language policy as well as regional language education and its impact on BC policy. Second, we examine BC curriculum and policy documents with a primary interest in language education rationales within the context of official bilingualism. With regard to the first task, given that the CEFR approach adopted in BC language curricular development involves the introduction of a language education framework conceived in a context outside North America (Vandergrift, 2006), awareness of the effects of the local recontextualisation of this framework is essential. We situate the recent development in its larger historical context as a way of acknowledging that the introduction of new or updated curricula and its implications for policy must be based on "rich interpretive historical, cultural and political understandings" (Luke, 2011, p. 2). We have chosen the federal Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (1967) as our point of departure to provide some understanding of how official bilingualism was originally conceived, subsequently taken up by the federal government, and the extent to which the federalist stance has informed language education in British Columbia. We draw on earlier BC language education policy and the curricular organization of language programs to highlight some of the contextual elements defining the 2010 AL draft curriculum. While we recognize that the

BC context did not evolve independently of language policy in other regions of Canada, the scope of this paper allows for analysis of only one specific curriculum development and we therefore do not include other provinces or territories in our historical overview (for an extensive discussion of other regions see Hayday, 2005).

The second task constitutes an analysis of the wording of currently used provincial curriculum guidelines in BC called *Integrated Resource Packages* (IRPs) as extended to and elaborated in the proposed AL draft curriculum. In BC, provincial curricula provide education standards set out by the Ministry of Education comprising prescribed learning outcomes for students at each grade level. Our interest is specifically in how the articulation of language education programming for the different languages taught in BC was articulated in the AL draft document based on the principle of plurilingualism and the use of the term *additional*. The thematic discourse analysis we have undertaken to examine the document is grounded in a socio-constructionist perspective (Wood & Kroger, 2000) with the aim to connect the various meanings of language education presented in the curricula with “discourses operating within society” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81). The values that are attached to the learning of particular languages in our society are indexed in discourses (Gee, 1990) constructed by groups of speakers to rationalize the implementation of certain language curricula. Bourdieu (1986) has defined educational qualifications such as additional language knowledge (linguistic capital) as a form of cultural capital. It is our view that an investigation of the distribution of this cultural capital as articulated in current curricula and the proposed AL draft has the potential to provide some understanding of the challenges involved in implementing plurilingualism in the Canadian context alongside an established regard for multilingualism and official bilingualism.

We conclude this introduction by stressing that the impetus for this article is the AL curriculum document itself and our method of analysis therefore centered on discourse. Our interest is in how the draft curriculum document discursively reflected and constructed BC language education given the origins of Canada’s bilingualism policy as initially set out by the Royal Commission of Biculturalism and Bilingualism (1967), and how prevailing traditional conceptions of language, bilingualism, multilingualism were possibly challenged by the implications of a curriculum based on plurilingualism as conceptualized in the CEFR.

### **Official Bilingualism as a Basis for Language Education in BC**

The introductory quotation highlights the main topic of the present discussion by centering on the following question: Which languages are deemed important in Canada, specifically in BC, and how are these languages valued in society? In this section we begin our discussion with the influence Canadian policy has had on the positioning and use of official and non-official languages in Canada at the national level, and its subsequent impact on language education in British Columbia. In so doing, we move our attention from the larger federal context to the provincial setting of BC and from a focus on politics to how language policy is realized in language education programming. The impact of federal policy on language education in BC is elaborated with reference to British Columbia language education policy documents as these allow us to highlight both the ongoing development of language curricula in response to language practices in BC and the manner in which the AL draft curriculum articulated a clearer definition of those practices in BC as compared to those presented in earlier curricula.

### **Royal Commission of Bilingualism and Biculturalism: Language Policy in the Making**

With the founding of Canada in 1867, both English and French were named as official languages of the legislatures and courts in Quebec and of the federal government. Responsibility for education was handed to the provinces with the assumption that language rights would fall under the mandate of religious schools (Hayday, 2005). The result was that, given the dominance of English in most regions across Canada, the teaching of French as well as of other minority languages was increasingly limited or entirely banned up until well into the twentieth century. The persistence of English dominance in areas of the economy and politics in Quebec eventually pushed francophones in that province to redefine their place within Canada, resulting in major reforms in Quebec throughout the 1960's and 1970's.

It was within this particular context and as a reaction to Quebec's emerging "territorialisation of identity" (Oakes & Warren, 2007) that the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism was called in 1963 with a mandate to investigate the practice of bilingualism in the federal administration, the role played by private organizations in promoting bilingualism, and the "contribution made by the other cultures" (Royal Commission, 1967, p.174). With regard to language education, its aim included an investigation about the "opportunities available to Canadians to learn the English and French languages and to recommend what could be done to enable Canadians to become bilingual" (p.174).

The Commissioners defined bilingualism as referring primarily to French and English as the two official languages of Canada (Royal Commission, 1967). To be "bilingual" meant to be able to speak both of these languages, one as a mother tongue and the other as a second language. The report briefly acknowledges Canadians of "other ethnic groups" as speakers who communicate in another language as well as in "one of Canada's official languages – usually English" (p. xxviii). For the most part, however, the Commission's mandate did not include indigenous language communities, or minority-language groups (Haque, 2005). English and French were thus clearly set apart from other "non-official" languages and based on a conception of language in structuralist terms, that is, as "equat[ing] a language with a people, [and] essentializing links between national or regional groups and linguistic practices" (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 246).

In its definition, the Commission distinguished between individual and institutional bilingualism, the former referring to issues of proficiency and demographics, the latter presented as guiding the Commission's mandate of inquiry. According to the Commission, the bilingual state was "not intended as an instrument for the propagation of individual bilingualism" (Royal Commission, 1967, p. 12), but rather as protecting and promoting the monolingual maintenance for each language group, anglophone and francophone, in order to avoid complete bilingualism among individuals which could ultimately render one of the languages superfluous (Fraser, 2006). Institutional bilingualism was to serve as a means of preventing minority linguistic groups from being disadvantaged. While the Commission felt that a "sufficient number" of the population should be bilingual to ensure contact between the two language groups, maintenance of one's first language, particularly for francophone minority language groups, took precedence over the learning of a second official language (Royal Commission, 1967, p. xxviii). The Commission thus established a clear preference for multilingualism over plurilingualism by explicitly rejecting individual

bilingualism.

The distinction between French as a first language (*Français langue première*) and as a second language (FSL) is found in early BC official language education policy (BC Ministry of Education, 1994). The 1994 policy document set out four sections of language education, the second of which referred to French as a minority language, that is, as a first language (L1) for speakers of French Canadian ancestry. Alongside sections for English and First Nations languages education, the fourth, titled *Additional Languages Education*, acknowledged French with reference to “second language education” as the default alternative if no other language is offered by a particular school board.<sup>1</sup> This distinction between *Français langue première* and FSL was carried through into the recently proposed AL draft curriculum with the designation of *additional languages*, including FSL in the form of core French. The term *additional language* is defined here as referring to languages “other than...*Français langue première* for students enrolled in a Francophone Education Authority” (BC Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 4). This distinction between French as L1 and FSL (core French) is important because it signals the ability to conceptualize the status of French as multiple (that is, as a minority language, a second language, an international language, etc.). In other words, a differentiation can be made based on who is using the language, in what context, and for what purpose.

With respect to education specifically, the Commission’s report made the following recommendation:

Every province shall establish and maintain elementary and secondary schools in which English is the sole or main language of instruction, and elementary and secondary schools in which French is the sole or main language of instruction, in bilingual districts and other appropriate areas under conditions to be determined by provincial law; but nothing in this section shall be deemed to prohibit schools in which English and French have equal importance as languages of instruction or schools in which instruction may be given in some other language (Royal Commission, 1967, p. 134).

This recommendation concerning L1 schooling proposed that parents be given freedom to determine their children’s language of instruction, though principally interpreted with respect to French as a minority language. It should be noted that the idea of formally acknowledging only English and French in its recommendations framed by the principle of two “founding-nations” was not an undisputed decision. The Report was criticized by one member of the Commission for not adequately addressing the large concentrations of aboriginal and immigrant languages, particularly in the Northern, Western, and Prairie regions of the country, proposing that one of the Inuit languages as well as German, Ukrainian, and Italian be designated as “regional languages of Canada” and accorded special provisions with respect to education and usage (1967, p. 158). While this was never realized on a national level, as mentioned above, the term *additional language* already figured in early BC Language Education Policy (BC Ministry of Education, 1994) together with *second language*. The deliberate use of the term *additional* was clearly articulated in the province’s 2010 AL draft curriculum and explicitly defined in terms of plurilingualism. As stated in its preface, “[t]he term ‘additional languages’ has been selected based on its

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<sup>1</sup> The 1996 (BC Ministry of Education Skills and Training, 1996, p. 6) version of this policy document includes the term “Core French” as opposed to only “French” as in the 1994 version.

inclusiveness” (BC Ministry of Education, 2010, p. III) with specific emphasis on language learners’ pluralist language practices:

Many BC students have rich and diverse linguistic backgrounds in or connections to Aboriginal languages, Canada’s official languages (French and English), languages brought to BC by grandparents, parents or students and spoken in the home, heritage languages learned in the community or international languages learned while travelling or living abroad. Many BC students already have some degree of competency in more than two languages; others wish to develop plurilingual competencies. (BC Ministry of Education, 2010, p. III)

The term, then, is inclusive not only in its recognition of the range of languages spoken in BC but also by taking into account that British Columbians make use of and/or choose to learn some of these languages as “additional languages.”

The latest provincial language education policy has defined additional/second languages programming as “designed for students with little or no previous knowledge or ability to speak the language” (BC Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 9), while local development of curricula for the teaching of community languages was encouraged with “Procedures for Locally Developed Curricula” set out in Section 6.0 of the 1996 policy document (p. 13). Of interest here is the fact that in these earlier language policy documents (BC Ministry of Education, 1994; 1996; 1997) the terms *additional* and *second* are less clearly defined and hence used interchangeably, to some extent reflecting the difficulty of associating particular specifications of *official*, *second*, *heritage*, etc. to the language practices relevant in BC. It could be said that the difficulty of specifying the “category” of language being learned has in part led to the conflation of *heritage* and *foreign* language education in BC (Reeder, Hasebe-Ludt, & Thomas, 1997), as heritage languages (such as Punjabi) are taken up in school curricula under the rubric of “international languages,” for example (BC Ministry of Education, 2011b). While the term *heritage languages* is generally associated with local community languages other than Canada’s official (French and English) and indigenous languages (Duff & Li, 2009), at the post-secondary level many of these languages are taught as “modern” or “foreign” languages, including French.<sup>2</sup> This conflation also manifests itself in the pedagogy and learning materials of heritage language programs in BC, where L1 knowledge is still predominantly addressed with a second language (L2) curriculum (cf., Dressler, 2011).

Underlying this blurring of the terminology with respect to *second*, *heritage*, *foreign*, etc. is a conceptualization of language based on a structuralist orientation to bilingualism/multilingualism, that is, language as a discrete entity associated with a single homogenous group of speakers (Makoni & Pennycook, 2005) who themselves are typically seen as exclusively using one particular language. The explicit use of the term *additional* in the AL draft curriculum thus resolved the difficulty of language specification within the realm of language education in two ways: it acknowledged the diverse range of languages in use (multilingualism) in BC and, more importantly, it took into consideration the diversity of language practices of individual speakers and learners (plurilingualism) in that province. It thus not only provided a means of sidestepping any specification as to the

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<sup>2</sup> This is primarily the case at smaller tertiary institutions in BC where language departments are typically clustered into one functional area (e.g., Douglas College, Capilano University, University of the Fraser Valley).

nature of the language being learned, but also acknowledged the extensive diversity of languages and language knowledge brought into school classrooms by individual learners. In so doing, it avoided “essentializing categorizations” of language learners, the linking of an individual learner to only one particular linguistic group or community (Blackledge & Creese, 2010, p. 21).

The explicit use of the term *additional languages* for the entire selection of international languages curricula set out by the BC Ministry of Education resulted in a new structure of the curriculum document itself. Individual *Integrated Resource Packages* (or IRPs, the standard designation of BC curriculum documents) for six languages (German, Japanese, Mandarin, Punjabi, and Spanish, and *core French*) were combined into one single document, the AL draft curriculum, as part of a comprehensive revision of BC’s numerous language IRPs. Based on a general consensus reached during a 2008 summer institute for BC teachers, it was decided to adapt the CEFR to BC language curricula for the six most commonly taught languages in the province (Council of Ministers of Education Canada [CMEC], 2010). Although practical concerns appear to have informed the document structure, the single-document design as such also signaled a sense of “inclusiveness” by placing all six languages together. At the same time, reference to “Canada’s official languages (French and English)” (BC Ministry of Education, 2010, p. III) was made directly following the mention of “inclusiveness” and is also found in the *Core French* section of the AL draft curriculum guidelines. In sum, the AL draft document recognized French simultaneously as (a) one of Canada’s official languages, (b) as an additional language with specific reference to core French, and (c) explicitly defined as distinct from French as a first and minority language in BC. It is likely this multiple conceptualization of a language as valued according to different contexts and purposes across different learners and language users which ultimately raised questions from stakeholders (Radio-Canada/Vancouver Sun, January 31, 2011) and the general public (Steffenhagen, 2011a).

### **Official Bilingualism, Individual Rights, and the CEFR in a Canadian Context**

In the late 1960s and early 1970s the federal government under then Prime Minister Trudeau adopted the Commission’s recommendations to varying degrees. Trudeau strongly disagreed with some of the fundamental aspects of the Commission’s Report, rejecting outright the notion of Canada as a linguistic duality and the proposed model of bilingual districts based on the idea of collective language rights (Fraser, 2006, Hayday, 2005). Trudeau’s primary focus was on individuals’ rights, which he saw as encompassing language rights that would offer citizens equal access to government services in the official language of their choice. In 1969, the Trudeau government passed the Official Languages Act which designated French and English as Canada’s two official languages and established bilingual services in the central government and within federal courts.

BC’s reaction to the policies of the Trudeau government resulted in part from its linguistic and cultural composition. The BC government, as in other Western provinces, preferred an emphasis on multiculturalism and multilingualism and therefore initially adopted a hands-off approach with little involvement in French language education. Eventually, however, the BC government granted francophone education leaders greater protection for minority-language education (Hayday, 2005) and promoted bilingualism among anglophones through FSL programming. As francophones in BC began to establish their own French language schools during the 1980s (Hayday, 2005), ultimately assuming province-wide responsibility over francophone education in 1998 (Conseil Scolaire

francophone de la Colombie-Britannique, 2004), the province's focus shifted to FSL education as a means to promote bilingualism among anglophones, primarily delivered through programs which include core French, French immersion, and more recently also intensive French in British Columbia.<sup>3</sup> In the 1960's, anglophone parents across the country had begun to recognize the economic opportunities of being bilingual in French and English, eventually leading to the French immersion movement with its inaugural program introduced in a Montreal school in 1965. Although the learning of French in BC can be traced back over a century and a half, it was not until the later part of the twentieth century that it was officially integrated as a subject into all levels of schooling and institutionally funded (Carr, 2007). Core French became a required school subject at the secondary level in BC in 1977, while remaining a non-compulsory local option in elementary grades. By the mid-1990s, BC's official language education policy called for mandatory second language learning in Grades 5 to 8, which in most cases constituted core French, based on already established programs and existing resources. The shift from mandatory FSL to the learning of any second language is first articulated in provincial language policy during the mid-1990s as follows:

All students, except those noted below, must take a second language as part of the required curriculum in grades 5-8... The school board will choose which second languages will be offered. Core French will be the alternative offered, if a school board does not choose an alternative. (BC Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 6)

A subsequent development on the part of the federal government with respect to Canada's language policy was the inclusion of language rights in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms enacted in 1982. In English Canada the initiative was promoted as part of the government's design for national unity, whereas for Quebecers it was presented as "a political necessity" (MacMillan, 1998, p. 78) which would enable the government to guarantee language rights. Many agreed with Trudeau that a bilingual citizenry could stem the tide of separatist aspirations and ensure national unity (Taylor, 2001), and that official bilingualism offered a means of "diffusing Quebec's collective demand for more constitutional powers" (Fraser, 2006, p. 88).

The *Action Plan of Official Languages*, (Government of Canada, 2003), a recent federal initiative to advance official language duality, speaks to the question of language rights and the acknowledged long-standing challenge in Canada to balance community and individual linguistic interests (Taylor, 1994). The federal plan comprises three main foci: education, community development, and the public service, with the largest percentage of government financial support allocated to education (Hudon, 2011). One objective of this renewed commitment to minority language education and second language instruction is to double the proportion of secondary school graduates with a functional knowledge of their second official language by 2013 (p. 27). A three-year research initiative on official languages policy and practice, the Official Languages Research and Dissemination Program, was launched in 2004-2005 to explore a means of achieving this objective in collaboration with provinces and territories which hold jurisdiction over education in

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<sup>3</sup> On occasion, the term *FSL* is used with reference to only core French. This use is especially popular among teachers in BC, who often use the descriptor "FSL" to distinguish basic French programming from French immersion. Unfortunately this use has now also made its way into the research literature (e.g. Karsenti, Collin, Villeneuve, Dumouchel, & Roy, 2008; MacFarlane, 2005; Mady, 2008).

Canada. It focused specifically on the adoption of a common Canadian curriculum for second language learning and assessment with a consideration of “the relevance of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in the Canadian context” (Vandergrift, 2006, p. 5). In 2008, the Council of Ministers of Education Canada (CMEC) accepted the recommendations of the Advisory Committee of Deputy Ministers of Education (ACDME) working group and officially proposed the use of the CEFR in Canada as the framework of reference for “jurisdictional projects, programs, and initiatives related to second and additional languages” in response to an emerging societal emphasis on citizen mobility and “increasing numbers of multicultural and multilingual newcomers to Canada” (CMEC, 2010, p. i).

In BC, the timing of regularly scheduled curriculum renewal coincided with the initial recommendations made to the CMEC by the ACDME in 2008 (CMEC, 2010). Given the province’s interest in more clearly defined proficiency levels and the desire to respond more effectively to diverse and multiple language use among BC students, the BC Ministry of Education opted to use the CEFR as a guide for the development of its additional languages curriculum. As discussed above, the AL draft curriculum was created based on the CEFR with a particular focus on the framework’s “comprehensive, transparent, and coherent account of language competencies” (BC Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 2), fundamental in its conceptualization of plurilingualism. The CEFR is described as offering “a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 1) with the primary political aim to “equip all Europeans for the challenges of intensified international mobility and closer co-operation, ...promote mutual understanding and tolerance, ...maintain and further develop the richness and diversity of European cultural life through greater mutual knowledge” (Council of Europe as cited in Little, 2006, p. 169). In the BC context, the framework offered a way of accommodating the province’s multilingual *and* plurilingual reality while recognizing Canada’s official languages.

### **Plurilingualism in a Multilingual, Multicultural Context**

The multiple status of French in Canada – as a minority language, as an official second language, as an international language – has been constructed out of a particular interpretation of Canada’s history as a nation state. This history generally positions French speakers as both colonists and as conquered colonials, which in many ways lies at the heart of the paradoxes and contradictions characterizing official bilingualism. Ultimately, official languages have been assigned and are maintained for the purpose of control over political and economic power, with language education situated at the centre of this struggle. Whereas a majority language such as English offers social and economic mobility (May, 2003), French has been a fundamental element of identity for francophones in Canada, which, in Quebec, has led to mobilization for greater political power and the elevation of French to a language of equal economic power (Heller, 2001). Interestingly, and perhaps not surprisingly, despite the Commission’s mandate of *biculturalism*, it was *multiculturalism* which ultimately became federal policy a decade later (cf., Haque, 2005). The idea of a multicultural yet bilingual country allows for a characterization of Canadian society as both diverse and unified. The notion of “unity in diversity” not only constitutes a central element of federalist discourse around official bilingualism and multiculturalism, (frequently expressed in terms of a “Canadian mosaic”) but is also prevalent in language education policy for both *français langue première* (e.g., Heller, 2011) and French as a

second language (e.g., Turnbull, 2000).

The mostly unquestioned acceptance of this rationalization as a means of justifying competing interests represented by official bilingualism versus non-official language group rights continues to be prevalent in official as well as public discourses, to some extent positing an unproblematic adaptation of plurilingualism with respect to language education in Canada (e.g., Bouchard & Fraser, 2011). The CMEC, for example, tackles this issue directly by offering a translation of the CEFR's underlying contextual features from a European to a Canadian context, with specific reference to the framework's political and educational objectives. The CEFR's focus on individual language through *plurilingualism* is recontextualized into the Canadian context of multilingualism with the idea that recognition and promotion of bilingualism "factors in individuals' plurilingualism and multiculturalism" (CMEC, 2010, p. 4). In its working document of support for the CEFR, the CMEC acknowledges the Canadian context as encompassing "two official languages, recognition of aboriginal languages, and consideration of diversity in international languages" (p. 4), (a contextual structure for language education which, incidentally, corresponds to the curriculum structure adopted by the BC Ministry of Education in its language education policy over the years). Translation of the CEFR's focus on plurilingualism into a Canadian context relies on "a multidimensional orientation" to language learning and teaching which, according to the CMEC document (2010), incorporates Canale & Swain's (1980) model of communicative competence as well as the concept of *citizenship education* (Hébert & Sears, 2001). The latter allows for a recontextualisation of plurilingualism which is consistent with the notion of a Canadian mosaic in that it recognizes and respects "linguistic and cultural diversity of Canadian society...as well as individuals' values in their search for a Canadian identity" (CMEC, 2010, pp. 10-11). Citizenship education encompasses diverse values which, assembled within a single concept, aspire to balance language rights of Canada's linguistically diverse communities with official bilingualism. These values include:

- English and French as common languages of public life
- knowledge of Aboriginal languages and respect for Aboriginal rights and cultures
- the learning of heritage languages for immigrant populations and respect for their languages and cultures
- the learning of international languages to facilitate understanding among learners (CMEC, 2010, p. 11)

It is the inherent challenges posed by this balancing act that have informed discussions about BC's AL draft curriculum and contributed to a perceived shift in how languages are valued in that province. While BC has always recognized French as an official language of Canada, it chose to adopt an approach to additional language education which does not explicitly and exclusively promote or "favour" the teaching of French, a position at times misconstrued in the public realm (e.g., Steffenhagen, 2011b). Exactly how language education has been re-articulated in the AL draft curriculum is presented in the following section.

### **Current IRPs and the AL Curriculum: A Comparative Analysis**

In this section we present the results of a comparative thematic discourse analysis in which we considered any notable changes to the document wording between current IRPs and the proposed AL curriculum. Based on an approach to discourse analysis which views discourse as social practice (Potter, 2004; Wood & Kroger, 2000), we were particularly

interested in the manner in which key terms and the different languages had been defined in the document. We interpreted these intertextually by drawing on prevalent discourses in society as articulated, for example, in the Commission's Report, by the media, in the academic literature, and elsewhere. Our main interest was in the manner in which programming for the different languages was justified in the IRP documents' *Rationale* sections as compared with the *Rationale* in the AL draft curriculum. The *Rationale* section in the IRPs typically outlines reasons for the teaching of a particular language with reference to both the local (provincial) and national context. The format and wording is based on a languages curriculum template provided by the Ministry of Education (BC Ministry of Education, 2003), and consequently, the wording from one IRP document to the next can be quite similar, at times to the point of reiterating certain statements verbatim. In terms of representation, this means that in our analysis below, an excerpt may represent a single or repeated instance of a particular claim. We therefore do not specify with which IRP curriculum document(s) each individual excerpt is associated, given our interest in a global overview of prevalent themes expressed in the IRPs and our view that a focus on individual languages could interfere with the central issue of this paper. All references to a specific language or country in the IRP documents have been replaced with "xy" in the excerpts presented and discussed below.

The curriculum excerpts analysed here are presented in two tables below: IRP excerpts are presented in Table 1 and excerpts from the AL draft curriculum in Table 2. In order to arrive at this tabular categorization, statements from each of the relevant sections of the curriculum documents were coded for prevalent themes and organized accordingly. Statement excerpts most representative of their thematic classification were chosen to be presented as complete extracts in the tables below. In our representation of the analysis the excerpts are re-contextualized (Briggs, 2007) into our discussion with the use of double quotes and a distinct font. Each re-contextualized data extract is referenced to the statement presented in the corresponding table with the use of line numbers. All IRP excerpts presented in the discussion from the International Language Curriculum (BC Ministry of Education, 2011b) are accessible on the BC Ministry of Education website. Access to the Additional Languages Elementary – Secondary: Draft Curriculum 2010 (BC Ministry of Education, 2010) is no longer available online as of February, 2012.

### **Current IRPs**

The current IRPs used for this comparison were implemented (or revised) over the past 15 years and include Core French (2001)<sup>4</sup>, German (1997), Italian (2005), Japanese (1997), Korean (2006), Mandarin (1998), Punjabi (1995), and Spanish (2005) (BC Ministry of Education, 2011b). Our consideration of the IRP documents produced five major themes: knowledge, identity and belonging, institutional framing, global status, and personal development, all of which can be seen to constitute some form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1979). The first theme represents three different types of knowledge (meta-linguistic, intercultural, and cultural).

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<sup>4</sup> Implementation date

Table 1

Prevalent themes, with corresponding statements from curriculum documents.

THEMES	IRP EXCERPTS
<b>KNOWLEDGE</b>	
META-LINGUISTIC INTERCULTURAL	1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Learning <i>xy</i> enhances the learning of first and additional languages</li> <li>◦ develop critical thinking and learning skills such as active listening, predicting, generalizing, imagining, categorizing, and utilizing resources</li> <li>◦ ...it encourages the development of intercultural sensitivity</li> </ul>
	5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Learning <i>xy</i> can broaden the social and cultural perspectives of students and encourage respect for cultural diversity...</li> </ul>
CULTURAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The ability to communicate in <i>xy</i> encourages the development of positive attitudes toward <i>xy</i> and other cultural groups</li> <li>◦ ...study of <i>xy</i> language and culture affords them lifelong benefits, including...expanded insight into their own cultures...develop sensitivity to culture and an augmented aesthetic awareness</li> </ul>
	10 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ increases students' awareness of their own cultures</li> <li>◦ The ability to communicate in <i>xy</i> increases students' awareness of their own cultures.</li> </ul>
<b>IDENTITY &amp; BELONGING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Knowledge of <i>xy</i> will...also serve to preserve their cultural heritage/background.</li> <li>◦ Interest in the <i>xy</i> language stems from the fact that a significant number of Canadians are of <i>xy</i> origin and are an integral part of the Canadian cultural mosaic.</li> </ul>
	15 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Through the study of a variety of languages and cultures...students are better able to understand and benefit from the diversity of Canadian cultures</li> <li>◦ British Columbia is a land of opportunity, whose citizens represent diverse multilingual and multicultural backgrounds of creative growth potentials.</li> </ul>
<b>INSTITUTIONAL FRAMING</b>	20 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ B.C. provincial language education policy reflects the needs and aspirations of this linguistically diverse society</li> <li>◦ In Canada, where one quarter of the population comprises speakers of French, one of Canada's two official languages, it is important for BC students to have opportunities to communicate in French.</li> </ul>
	25 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The BC Language Policy states that, "The Ministry of Education encourages all students to develop language skills which will assist them to live and function more effectively in BC's ethno-culturally diverse environment and in bilingual Canada."</li> </ul>
<b>GLOBAL STATUS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ In British Columbia, the <i>xy</i> community has been established since early in the century and now numbers over 150 000...</li> </ul>
	30 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <i>xy</i> is spoken by more than 360 million people in 21 countries and is one of the five official languages of the United Nations.</li> <li>◦ <i>xy</i> is among the ten most-spoken languages worldwide, one of the working languages of the United Nations, and an official language of the European Community.</li> <li>◦ An understanding of <i>xy</i> culture and society and the improvement of economic and commercial ties</li> </ul>
	35 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ can be enhanced and enriched by communicative competence.</li> <li>◦ British Columbia and Canada have growing economic and cultural ties with <i>xy</i>.</li> <li>◦ BC's proximity to the Far East is a prime reason for Western Canadian students to learn <i>xy</i>.</li> </ul>
<b>PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The ability to communicate in <i>xy</i> encourages the development of positive attitudes toward <i>xy</i> and other cultural groups</li> </ul>
	40 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The study of <i>xy</i> is intended for all learners and offers lifelong enjoyment</li> <li>◦ ...communicative competence in more than one language as a source of personal satisfaction, enriches individual life experiences</li> <li>◦ Exposure to the expression of <i>xy</i> language and culture in its many forms also furthers students' intellectual, emotional, and social development during their school years.</li> </ul>
	45 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Communicating in real life situations in another language also enhances students' self-confidence...</li> </ul>

Metalinguistic knowledge relates to the notion that the acquisition of French or another language "enhances the learning of first and additional languages" (line 1), an idea repeated across most of the IRPs. Intercultural knowledge is either mentioned explicitly or expressed as "positive attitudes...toward other cultural groups" (lines 7-8) and in terms of "respect for

cultural diversity” (lines 5-6). In contrast, cultural knowledge represents students’ “awareness,” “sensitivity” or “expanded insights” into “their own cultures,” (lines 9-11) which in one particular excerpt includes “an augmented aesthetic awareness” (line 10). Cultural knowledge here is linked to meta-communication skills “such as active listening, predicting, and generalizing, imagining, categorizing, and utilizing resources” (lines 2-3).

The second theme, identity and belonging, concerns the idea of heritage communities as constituting and shaping the larger national community of Canada. Knowledge of a language, associated with a particular community of speakers, is said to contribute to the preservation of speakers’ “cultural heritage/background” (line 13). Furthermore, immigrant communities are described as being “an integral part of the Canadian cultural mosaic” (line 15) in other words, as a historically fundamental element of Canadian society. In order for BC students to “understand and benefit from the diversity of Canadian cultures” (lines 16-17) they require access to a “variety of languages and cultures” (line 16). The portrayal of BC as “a land of opportunity” (line 18) in which diversity is associated with “creative growth potentials” (line 19) serves to establish the speaking and maintenance of another (possibly first) language as a Canadian tradition, grounded in and further contributing to the idea of Canada as a “cultural mosaic.”

The third theme, institutional framing, makes relevant an orientation to nation building and multiculturalism whereby official bilingualism and/or provincial language education policy are used to frame the learning of a particular language:

In Canada, where one quarter of the population comprises speakers of French, one of Canada’s two official languages, it is important for BC students to have opportunities to communicate in French. (lines 22-24)

In a number of cases provincial language education policy is explicitly cited as “reflect[ing] the needs and aspirations of this linguistically diverse society” (lines 20-21), also exemplified in the following excerpt:

The BC Language Policy states that, ‘The Ministry of Education encourages all students to develop language skills which will assist them to live and function more effectively in BC’s ethno-culturally diverse environment and in bilingual Canada. (lines 25-27)

The reference to students’ language skills, used here to support the learning of a language associated with a particular language community, acknowledges the diversity of BC language learners and therefore could in fact be interpreted as a nod to plurilingualism. To some extent, it signals the already existing conception of plurilingual language education in BC.

The fourth theme, global status, focuses on the relative status of a linguistic community in order to position itself as a viable group of heritage speakers, mainly by highlighting the prevalence of its language and the number of speakers in BC, Canada, and internationally. Historical status, demographic statistics, and references to international and economic relations figure as primary resources for constituting this theme:

- In British Columbia, the *xy* community has been established since early in the century and now numbers over 150 000... (lines 28-29)
- *xy* is spoken by more than 360 million people in 21 countries...(line 30)

- xy is among the ten most-spoken languages worldwide, one of the working languages of the United Nations, and an official language of the European Community. (lines 32-33)
- British Columbia and Canada have growing economic and cultural ties with xy. (line 36)

Finally, the fifth theme, centers on personal development, with language learning “offering lifelong enjoyment” (line 40), which “enhances students’ self-confidence” (line 45-46), “furthers” students’ “emotional and social development” (lines 43-44) and provides a “source of personal satisfaction” (line 41).

### The Additional Languages Draft Curriculum

Analysis of the AL draft curriculum for additional languages has generated two main themes, plurilingualism and capital, outlined with corresponding excerpts in Table 2.

Table 2

*Additional Languages* curriculum with main themes and corresponding excerpts.

THEMES	ADDITIONAL LANGUAGES CURRICULUM EXCERPTS
<b>PLURILINGUALISM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Many BC students have rich and diverse linguistic backgrounds in or connections to Aboriginal languages, Canada’s official languages (French and English), languages brought to BC by grandparents, parents or students and spoken in the home, heritage languages learned in the community or international languages learned while travelling or living abroad. Many BC students already have some degree of competency in more than two languages; others wish to develop plurilingual competencies. (p. III)</li> <li>5</li> <li>◦ The CEFR approach of equally valuing all languages...is consistent with British Columbia’s goals for learners of additional languages. (p. 2)</li> <li>10</li> <li>◦ British Columbia’s students bring a rich variety of languages and cultures to the classroom. Aboriginal students have traditional languages. Many students are recent immigrants or have learned a heritage language at home. Other students have acquired languages skills in one or more languages through contact in their communities or abroad. This prior linguistic knowledge is a part of who the student is.</li> <li>15</li> <li>Validation of the student’s ability in the language reflects the belief that all language learning is important and is a life-long endeavour (p. 8)</li> </ul>
<b>CULTURAL CAPITAL &amp; KNOWLEDGE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The [European] framework has international currency.</li> <li>◦ Communicative competence or additional language competence:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- expands national and international career opportunities in fields such as global commerce, hospitality, tourism, technology, and diplomatic and non-governmental organizations</li> <li>- enhances both academic and intellectual potential in areas such as first and additional language skills as well as in mathematical skills, and helps to build superior divergent thinking ability, memory ability, and attention span</li> <li>- increases awareness of one’s own culture as well as of the additional culture(s) and develops cross-cultural skills.</li> </ul> </li> <li>20</li> <li>25</li> </ul>

The concept of plurilingualism, the first theme, is used in the draft curriculum in accordance with the CEFR definition. It refers to language knowledge in terms of an individuals’ ability to use a variety of languages, not as separate entities, but in terms of communicative competence “to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 4). This distinction from *multilingualism*, “the co-existence of different languages” (CMEC, 2010, p. 10) is an important point to consider here because the orientation to individual speakers in the excerpt above signals a significantly different conception of and

context for language education. The emphasis here is on the student, not so much as language learner but as established language user with “connections to Aboriginal... Canada’s official...heritage...or international languages” (lines 1-4) and often with “competency in more than two languages” (line 6). Furthermore, these speakers are not necessarily associated with a particular group of speakers or linguistic community but, instead, are situated in a dynamic of multiple language encounters and experiences “at home...in their communities or abroad” (lines 12-14).

This conception of individual plurilingualism is also found in the CMEC working document as a rationale for the adoption of the CEFR and the latter’s suitability for the Canadian context:

Canada wants to develop students’ “linguistic capital” as “children of the world,” given that young people are increasingly in touch with people representing a host of nations, even in their own community” (CMEC, 2010, p. 4)

Being connected with different speakers, “even” within one’s own community, represents a conception which is different from multilingualism in that it appears to signal the crossing or disassembling of linguistic and cultural boundaries and opens the door for “equally valuing all languages” (line 8).

The concept of “linguistic capital” in the CMEC excerpt above speaks to the second prevalent theme in the draft curriculum: cultural capital. The notion of capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), already found in current IRP rationales as noted above, was recontextualized in the AL draft curriculum as part of that document’s *Rationale* section. Here cultural capital is invoked in a more instrumental sense, explicitly as “currency” (line 17). The CEFR is presented as providing certain benefits to learning additional languages in view of the fact that this knowledge can “expand national and international career opportunities” (line 19) in a range of fields. In addition to benefiting one’s professional status, “additional language competence enhances both academic and intellectual potential” (line 22) and contributes to a person’s academic prospects. Finally, the suggested benefits of “increase[d] awareness of one’s own culture as well as of the additional culture(s)” (line 25) and the development of “cross-cultural skills” (line 26) are included as valuable components of language learning which contribute to an individual’s general education. Again, the notion of intercultural competence and knowledge framed as cultural capital echo the earlier wording of current IRPs. However, in the AL draft, linguistic and cultural knowledge is more specifically framed as a tool to further an individual’s professional advancement with enhanced “cross-cultural skills.” It is a resource which characterizes linguistic capital as globally, professionally, academically, and culturally valuable. Significant in the wording of the AL draft curriculum is thus the absence of a focus on group identity and community, most commonly associated with institutional bilingualism and its related concept multilingualism.

This comparison of current IRP documents with the AL draft curriculum underscores the explicitly articulated focus on individual language learning taken by the BC Ministry in accordance with the adoption of plurilingualism as guiding principle in the 2010 draft curriculum. Although by some perceived as a repositioning of the values concerning languages in BC, the draft curriculum succeeded in clarifying additional language learning with the introduction of a different conception of language and language learning. This clarification can be characterized as a transition from an emphasis on social or group identity to a focus on the individual learner and user of languages. Rather than

characterizing language knowledge in terms of its heritage or local connections which serve to sustain a sense of belonging with one's linguistic community, plurilingual competence was presented as an individual's cultural capital in a global market. In the words of Heller (2011) whose work investigates a similar phenomenon with respect to the commodification of French in central and eastern Canada: "In this discourse, language is less about identity and pride...and more about market value" (p. 127). While this sense of pride may not be directly expressed in everyday public discourse, it is manifest in the *Rationale* sections of current IRP's, particularly in connection with the theme pertaining to institutional status. A conception of language education as providing a "marketable" (Carr, 2008) resource is not new, and has been discussed for more than a decade by Canadian scholars in sociolinguistics (e.g., Heller, 2002) and applied linguistics (e.g., Dagenais, 2003), as well as in economics with reference to human capital theories, albeit the latter with a decidedly different perspective (e.g., Pendakur & Pendakur, 2002). A shift from ethnically marked, localized knowledge to global perspectives and standards has also been found in studies examining the ideological framing of language curriculum materials, specifically for Spanish as a heritage and an academic language in the United States (Leeman & Martinez, 2007; Valdès, González, López García, & Márquez, 2008) and of English as both a second and international language (McKay & Bokhorst-Heng, 2008).

In line with the explicit use of the term *additional languages* and the single-document design of the AL draft, the decision to forego an emphasis on community in its wording and focus instead on language plurality further illustrates the BC Ministry's attempt to operationalize a balance between individual and group linguistic rights. In addressing the province's linguistic diversity as well as the range of language knowledge among individual speakers, the AL draft curriculum sought to reconcile plurilingualism and multilingualism with the historically protected status of French as it pertains to FSL education in BC. That being said, it is ultimately plurilingualism that defined the BC Ministry's latest approach to language education. The adoption of the European-based framework introduced into the Canadian context a different conception of what it means to learn a language. The present-day European approach is centered on individual language learning as defined in its concept of *plurilingualism*. It is centrifugally-oriented in that it represents an international interest in language learning which is directed to the outside, generally as part of an individual's general education or language learning for professional purposes (Kramsch, 2008). Within Canada and specifically in BC, wording in the IRP rationales demonstrates a centripetal orientation in defining its interest in language education. Elementary and secondary language programs are motivated internally by local interests and include "languages that are important to a local region or community" (BC Ministry of Education, 1996, p.12). Consequently, viewing the "CEFR approach of equally valuing all languages" as "consistent with British Columbia's goals for learners of additional languages" (BC Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 2) was not so much about prioritizing the learning and teaching of one language over another; rather, it shifted the focus from language to the "learners" of those languages and highlighted students' ability to access a variety of language practices. It created a context which acknowledged that *different people learn different languages for different reasons*.

The perception of the AL draft curriculum as negating French the "favoured status in B.C. schools" (Steffenhagen, 2011b) may possibly be attributed to the different theoretical understandings of language in Canada as they relate to *plurilingualism*, *bilingualism*, and *multilingualism*. In this light, the AL draft curriculum represented an

implicit challenge to prevailing structural conceptions of language, conceptions which assume the association of a single homogenous linguistic system with an equally homogeneously defined linguistic, cultural, or “ethnic” group. An understanding of bilingualism as two monolingualisms underpins the Royal Commission’s notion of *institutional bilingualism* and constitutes the basis for contemporary considerations of what it means to be functional in more than one language in Canada. It also informs the manner in which the protection of minority languages is understood within an English-dominant context. For francophones, the successful participation as equals in modern society relies on “institutions that are monolingual” and that “belong to them” (Heller, 2001, p. 384), a reality not only threatened by English but by non-official language communities in Canada increasingly vying for greater recognition and support when it comes to language education (Duff, 2007; Mizuta, 2010). Ultimately, the introduction of the CEFR in BC has drawn attention to the challenges of reconciling the Commission’s recommendation for institutional bilingualism with the now well-established practice of individual bilingualism in Canada, situated within an increasingly multilingual societal context that is shifting the interest from only bilingual to also plurilingual language competency.

### Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to examine the 2010 AL draft curriculum for additional languages and the reason for the questions its introduction raised with regard to language education in BC. We have traced the evolution of national language policy of official bilingualism over the past four decades, specifically its impact on BC language education policy and language curriculum development, followed by a discourse analysis comparing current language curricula and the newly proposed draft curriculum. Our historical overview and text analysis show that an emphasis on language as community and identity grounded in structuralist conceptions of language and linguistic identity underpins the challenges of addressing the growing linguistic and socio-cultural diversity and plurality in Canadian society. It is perhaps for this reason that the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages is seen to provide some direction in a world of competing social and linguistic forces, historical and political tensions, and the daily practicalities language teachers and students face in their multilingual and multicultural classrooms. The adoption of the CEFR framework in BC has allowed for an articulation of language learning and use, which moves away from a justification for language education based on community membership, institutional status as evident in the rationale wording of current IRP documents.

The recontextualisation of a value-laden framework of reference such as the CEFR in the Canadian context is not unproblematic, specifically with regards to the perceived realities and conceptions of official bilingualism and multilingualism. Despite the CEFR’s “generic and local validity” (North, 2008, p. 222), the task of translating the value and potential benefits of a framework oriented towards professional and academic mobility and economic co-operation is not easy. The recontextualisation of this framework, into a context which is historically, politically, and culturally defined by official bilingualism, requires recognition of the dynamic, fluid, and socially situated nature of language. Ultimately though, in Canada as in Europe, the focus is on ensuring that students’ learning of other languages is valued. This, in our view, is what the BC draft curriculum for additional languages set out to accomplish.

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