Second-Language Education Policy in Quebec: A Critical Analysis of the Policy of English as a Compulsory Subject at the Early Primary Level in Quebec

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This is a critical policy study of language planning and policy in Quebec regarding the new policy direction requiring the compulsory teaching of English at the early primary level (grades 1-2, Cycle 1) in francophone public schools. Based on the analysis of policy documents, archives, and narratives from interviews, the goal of this policy study is to determine how and why language-policy decisions about the compulsory teaching of ESL at the early primary level were made by policymakers in Quebec.

Cette étude d'orientation porte sur l'aménagement et la politique linguistiques au Québec quant à la nouvelle orientation qui rend obligatoire l'enseignement de l'anglais au premier cycle de l'élémentaire (1ʳᵉ et 2ᵉ années) dans les écoles francophones publiques. Reposant sur une analyse de documents de politique, d'archives et d'exposés des faits provenant d'entrevues, cette étude vise à déterminer comment et pourquoi les décideurs au Québec ont adopté des orientations politiques exigeant l'enseignement de l'anglais langue seconde au début du primaire.

Introduction

Based on an analysis of policy documents, archives, and narratives from interviews, this article presents a critical policy study that seeks to explicate contextually the key features of the process that led to the adoption of a set of directions introducing English as a second language (ESL) as a compulsory subject in grades 1 and 2 (primary Cycle 1) in francophone primary schools across the Province of Quebec in 2006 (Ministère de l'éducation, du loisir et du sport, 2006). This new policy direction needed to be analyzed in the context of the emerging conflict between the use of French-language policy in Quebec as an instrument of nation-building and the rise of a globalizing world requiring the mastery of English as an international language, recognizing that nation-building does not does not necessarily mean independent state-building (Keating, 1997). This policy study focuses on exploring the extent to which the tensions between the Quebec process of nation-building

on one hand and globalization on the other hand framed and influenced the narratives and "the processes by which agenda items and alternatives [came] into prominence" (Kingdon, 1995, p.15) during the phases of policy development.

This study is part of a wider international policy research trend investigating language-policy changes made by non-English-speaking societies in response to the rapid socioeconomic changes brought about by globalization, which are seen as "as a driving force to strengthen the position of English as a global language" (Chang, 2006, p. 515). The unprecedented spread of English as the lingua franca of international communication (Crystal, 2003), coupled with globalization, has had a significant effect on second-language policies in non-English-speaking societies including the Province of Quebec in Canada. The major challenge posed by globalization for such societies as that of Quebec is crucial because the English language, which functions as one of the most important mediational tools for globalization, is not their native language. Do ançay-Aktuna (1998) gave an historical account of the conditions that trigger the spread of English in these terms:

> As a result of socio-political and economic events, English began to spread in the non-colonized areas of the world after World War II via careful language planning. It gradually replaced French as the language of international diplomacy to become the *lingua franca* for trade, banking, tourism, popular media, science and technology. In order to gain access to these information networks, English was integrated into the education systems of many countries, even in officially monolingual areas, e.g. in the Middle East, Far East, and many European Nations. (p. 25)

Our study addresses the following question: How has Quebec responded to the global influence of English in its English-as-a-second-language policy, particularly in terms of the importance of English in early primary education in its public francophone schools? The element that makes this policy setting unique is the fact that Quebec is a society whose majority language constitutes a minority language in the Canadian and North American context. In response to its minority status, on August 26, 1977, Quebec formulated a language policy, Bill 101 (Charter of the French Language, RSQ, c C-11), which was designed to protect the French language from the influence of a larger and more predominant language in the neighboring English Canadian and United States societies. This policy was deemed necessary by the government of the time because Quebec was experiencing a continual shift in population due to ongoing immigration. Bill 101 focuses on the preservation of the French language while establishing procedures to ensure that immigrants acquire the language of the majority. At the same time, Quebec policymakers faced the challenge of designing a second-language policy in the public

francophone education system that would ensure sufficient and necessary English-as-a-second-language skills of francophones in Quebec.

In Quebec, French is the sole language of instruction for all francophone and allophone students. The only exceptions to this policy are children whose parents (one parent may suffice) received their secondary level education in an English-language school. Thus all students in French-language schools must take ESL. Because most students would not have access to an English-speaking environment outside the classroom (which is so for most regions in Quebec except for certain sections of Montreal) the Province of Quebec may have used the term *ESL* because English is the dominant language spoken in English Canada. However, the term *EFL* (English as a Foreign Language) would be more appropriate in this case (Brown, 2007; Judd, 1981).

This article is structured in three sections. The first presents the conceptual framework for policy analysis and the research methodology used in this study. The second section examines the content and changes made by the *Règlement modifiant le régime pédagogique de l'éducation préscolaire, de l'enseignement primaire et de l'enseignement secondaire (L.R.Q, c.I-13.3, a.447, art. 22)* in 2006 and provides an account of how policy problems were posed, explanations constructed, and policy directions formulated and adopted by policy-makers. The final section deals with the implications of this study for future research in the area of ESL language policy.

Conceptual Framework and Research Methodology

Conceptual Framework

In this study, our attention was directed toward developing an understanding of the extent to which the tension between English as a language of globalization and English as a threat to French framed and influenced the narratives by which issues related to the teaching of ESL in cycle one were recognized, placed, articulated, and formulated on the government policy agenda. In Quebec, identity is highly correlated to language group, with the Québecois identity felt overwhelmingly by the francophone community (Keating, 1997). We needed a policy-analysis model that would capture the incremental and complex nature of policy development. With these goals in mind, we adapted Levin's (2001) and Blaikie and Soussan's (2000) analytical framework (see Table 1), which reflects a balance between the linearity of rational models (Bridgeman & Davis, 1998; Grindle & Thomas, 1991; McCool, 1995) and the multi-staged, developmental and iterative nature of critical models (Ball, 1998; Dye, 2002; Levin; Prunty, 1985). Rational models of policy analysis focus on understanding policy formation in terms of: (a) problem definition; (b) clarification of values, goals, and objectives; (c) identification of options; (d) selection of courses of action; (e) evaluation of a course of action; and (f) modification of policies. Policy is understood in a means-ends

GERALD FALLON AND NATALIE RUBLIK

Table 1
Stages of Policy Origins and Development
(adapted from Levin, 2001; Blaikie & Soussan, 2000)

Stages of Policy Cycle	Elements of Analysis
Policy origins and development	*Interests and ideas:* focus on core beliefs and narratives that shape the policy; the framework used to think about the key policy issues; the competing problem definitions and interpretations.
	Policy formulation: focus on the interaction and/or responses of actors around proposal of policy formulation; roles played by the main actors; their strategies to represent their policy proposal.

rationality. Critical models of policy analysis define policymaking as an arena of struggle over meaning and representations or as the politics of discourse or narrative. Rational models of policy analysis are useful because they deal with the incremental and multi-staged nature of policy development, and critical models of policy analysis allow researchers to bring to the surface how language or narratives shape the policy agenda and how problems and solutions are understood.

For the purposes of this policy study, we focused on the policy origins and the development stage of the policy process.

The two elements of analysis presented are not separate and sequential processes. In terms of policy origins and development, the analytical focus is on such factors as stages in the political cycle; the internal dynamics of the governing party; the power, legitimacy, and personalities of important actors; the nature of the relationships among key players; and unanticipated events. Policy issues might emerge from various sources in the political landscape or be promoted by individual politicians or civil servants, political parties, government agencies, lobby groups, advocacy coalitions, policy entrepreneurs, or researchers. Why policy proposals take the form they do and when they do so is in large measure a reflection of a more general context of events, ideas, values, beliefs, and policy preferences. Sometimes these ideas, values, or beliefs expressed in narratives from which the data are drawn provide taken-for-granted backdrops to policy discussion, catalyze new debates, create awareness of new opportunities, and/or help determine the range of policy ideas that will even be considered by the policymakers, let alone adopted (Ball, 1998; Dye, 2002; Levin, 2001; Prunty, 1985).

The formulation stage of policy origins and development addresses the process of moving from a policy proposal to an approved piece of legislation or policy. Here, gaining an understanding requires insight into the specific

debate in which policy initiatives are turned into something workable. Such debates might be political as policy actors revisit their concerns as policy proposals are formulated and details worked out. The debates might occur in government, in the public arena, or in both simultaneously. The stage of formulation is important as an analytical focus in this study because it provides an understanding of how intentions underpinning policy initiatives might be modified by political and administrative considerations.

Research Methodology

This study was conducted in a policy community consisting of the Quebec provincial government and major stakeholders.[1] We relied on four data sources: (a) original government documents (policy statements, policy papers, and media releases); (b) written material and policy documents from government and non-governmental organizations; (c) interviews with senior representatives of key policy stakeholders who were involved in the development and formulation the policy under study; and (d) scholarly research literature on models of policy analysis and on policy issues concerning the teaching of English as a second language in monolingual societies.

An exploratory and descriptive policy study method was used in this research project (Jensen & Rogers, 2001; Robson, 1993; Yin, 1993). This policy-analysis research method was integrated into a multi-method approach (triangulation) in which the same phenomenon was investigated using several procedures and data sources: content analysis, archival data, policy documents, semistructured interviews, and research literature. We interviewed a total of 10 senior officials of various provincial professional organizations involved in the policymaking development and adoption processes. The participants who were interviewed played important roles in defining the formulation and adoption processes associated with the policy direction embedded in the *Règlement modifiant le régime pédagogique de l'éducation préscolaire, de l'enseignement primaire et de l'enseignement secondaire, L.R.Q, c.I-13.3, a.447, art. 22*. Interview extracts were used to illustrate the multiple perspectives of the individuals who were involved at the provincial level in the policy formulation and adoption process.

Table 2
Analytical Codes

Stages of Policy Cycle	Analytical Codes
Policy origins and development process	*Interests and ideas:* key policy issues and narratives reflecting the interests, values, and beliefs that shaped the policy
	Policy formulation: policy preferences that shaped the form of the current language policy on the compulsory teaching of ESL.

The data were analyzed across each phase of the policy origins and development process and in each analytical code to interpret and explain the process by which the policy directions came into being, were developed, and were eventually formulated as a policy (see Table 2).

Analytical case summaries were developed for each of the policy-analysis phases by using the analytical coding system developed to organize the findings (see Table 2). Then the data were analyzed across the policy phases and in each major analytic code to interpret and explain the process of the policy development and formulation.

Findings and Discussion

Policy Origin and Development

Our purpose in this section is to offer an understanding of the change in ESL policy in Quebec by the *Règlement modifiant le régime pédagogique de l'éducation préscolaire, de l'enseignement primaire et de l'enseignement secondaire (L.R.Q, c.I-13.3, a.447, art. 22)* as it modified the Education Act in 2006 to include ESL as a compulsory subject for grades 1 and 2, an understanding grounded in the narratives of actors, interest groups, and institutions involved in influencing and defining ESL in public education in Quebec through these narratives. Here we seek to capture the core intellectual dispositions that shaped the kinds of policy problems that were posed, the kinds of explanations that were offered, and the kinds of policy options that were suggested as solutions for the teaching of ESL at the early primary level.

In 2006, the Liberal Government in Quebec introduced policy changes in ESL education in the context of critiquing the responsiveness and effectiveness of francophone public schools in preparing a flexible and *bilingual* work force required to enhance the competitiveness of the province in the global market. In its official publication *Nouvelles*, the Centrale des Syndicats du Québec (CSQ) reported the government's position as follows.

> The first function of the government's decision is to emphasize its dissatisfaction with the fact that francophone schools in Quebec, where English has always been taught, do not produce a greater number of bilingual people. The government wants to show its determination to correct this state of things and indicate to all those active in the school system, at all levels, the primordial importance that it gives to the learning of English. At the same time it confirms its conviction that, in order to assure economic prosperity and be open to the modern world, Quebec requires that the large majority of its citizens (including those who do not complete secondary school) should know how to communicate easily in English. (Laberge, 2005, p. 20)

The perceived lack of responsiveness and effectiveness of the francophone public system in the context of globalization constituted the key narrative used by the Quebec government in framing the issue of teaching ESL to students at an early age in francophone public schools:

> Thus, Mr. Chairman, I would simply like to recall seriously that we are in a context of extremely important cultural changes. For several years, people have been speaking about the global village. The concept and expression of globalization now appears very frequently in our conversations and reflections, and this new context calls for a renewed reflection on education because most countries agree with the axiom that our capacity for development as a nation, as a society, and as a community is directly associated with the quality of the training and education that is offered to our children, our young people and our adults. (Line Beauchamp, Minister of Education, Assemblée Nationale du Québec, 2006)

Such a view was also supported by the main business interest group, the Conseil du Patronat du Quebec (2001):

> People can always deplore certain effects of globalization, but it is a reality that is here to stay and with which we will have to live. No law, however valid it might be, can stop English from being the common language among various countries on the Internet. Insistence on making laws will only satisfy those who look for justifications for continuing sterile quarrels among the different groups that make up Quebec society. The question that should be asked is: what should be the role of the state in order to assure the fulfilment and development of Quebec society? (p. 5)

Furthermore, the deliberations about the teaching of ESL in grades 1 and 2 occurred in a wider debate that also addressed the purpose of public education in Quebec. The data under analysis highlighted the existence of competing conceptions of public schooling embedded in the policy narratives of various stakeholders who reacted to the policy initiative of the Quebec government. Such stakeholders as the Conseil du Patronat du Québec and the Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec (FCCQ) argued that for Quebec to position itself advantageously in the global economy, it needed to realign its educational priorities to embrace the supremacy of the needs of the global market by cultivating and providing a flexible, competitive, and bilingual work force. The instrumental rationality of a market orientation provided the primary logic guiding education policy with regard to ESL teaching.

At the opposite pole were stakeholders (Centrale des Syndicats du Québec–CSQ, L'alliance des professeurs et des professeures de Montréal–

APPM, and the Société Saint-Jean Baptiste–SSJB), who focused on what they regarded as the central mission of public education in Quebec: the creation of citizens who would enable the province to function as a sustainable, democratic, and predominantly francophone society. These stakeholders insisted on the crucial role of education in strengthening the cultural, social, and institutional fabric of a francophone society and warned against the temptation to reduce education and civic participation to narrow market forces. In their official response to the government's position, L'alliance des professeurs et des professeures de Montréal stated:

> The globalization of the economy and culture, since the advent of the world web of new technologies, cannot justify a reduction in terms of the requirements that are necessary for the survival of French here. We believe, on the contrary, that the globalization of the economy and communications, as well as immigration and mobility should rather incite us to increase our efforts to assure the pre-eminence of French in Quebec as a social cement and a tool for developing original thought and culture which should be able to assert themselves in the competitive world environment. (Séquin, 2000, p. 7)

Some stakeholders rejected the view that francophone public education existed mainly to enable the province to become more responsive to changing economic conditions in the global marketplace by creating more functionally bilingual individuals. They also raised the issue of the viability of the French language as they saw a danger that the quality of the French language could be eroded by advancing ESL teaching at an early age in public francophone schools:

> The Quebec National Movement [MNQ] asks the Quebec government to undertake an "impact analysis." Several studies have shown that "the more an individual masters his first language, the easier it is or him or her to learn another one." "We observe that more and more Francophone parents want their children to master English by the end of their schooling. This desire of the parents is comprehensible, but now we wonder about the best moment and the best way to teach a second language like English in a Francophone society like Quebec, which is a small minority in North America," said Ms. Chantale Turcot, president of the MNQ. (Miller, 2005)

By challenging public schools to live up to their mandate to promote the francophone character of Quebec society, these voices called for more emphasis on the necessity to protect the French language by using the public education system as a tool for the survival of a unique culture. They claimed that adding an ESL program in grades 1 and 2 would have a detrimental effect

on basic literacy in French. Such a position was stated to us by one of the research participants who served as a senior official of an organization promoting the teaching of English as a second language:

> Many organizations were against the introduction of English as a second language in grades 1 and 2. Their main rational was that … the kids … before learning a second language should learn their own native language first. They were clear about their beliefs that implementing a compulsory program for teaching English in the early primary grades would take away hours from teaching French and it would have a negative impact on the level of mastery of the native language, which is French.

Thus by stressing public schools' democratic and cultural mission to protect the French character of Quebec society, these voices called for more emphasis on the formulation of a language policy that would protect the national language (French) against the influence of a larger and more prominent language (English).

Taken together, the above two competing views of the primary mandate and of the desirable second-language policy for public education suggested conflicting answers to questions about what needs were to be met by an ESL policy for early primary education and by what means. Analysis of the data suggests that the most desirable provision of an ESL program at the early primary level remains uncertain at best. Although some groups wanted to see greater allowance for the teaching of ESL at the early primary level as a way to make schools more responsive to the reality of a globalizing world, others wanted to subsume such a language policy in the need to protect the French character of Quebec society.

Policy Formulation

The purpose of this section is to offer an understanding of the ideas, values, beliefs, and policy preferences that shaped the form of the current language policy of compulsory ESL teaching. These ideas, values, or beliefs were expressed in narratives that influenced the range of policy ideas that were considered by policymakers in their formulation of the final version of the ESL policy for the early primary level.

The idea of introducing ESL as a compulsory subject in the early primary grades that could actually be put into practice led to a debate as to what the original intentions were and how they could best be realized in the school system. The debate became political in that as the details were worked out, stakeholders inside and outside the Ministry of Education revisited their concerns about the relevance and timing of introducing ESL in cycle one:

> We were cautious in our position not to give the impression that this would solve all of our problems, that it would [increase] the [achievement] results. It would simply not be enough to increase the language capacity of our students. This type of an approach, by spreading the hours over three cycles ... as research has proven, this kind of formula doesn't really work [in] the long-term. It doesn't really work well, okay, if you want to implement the teaching of English at cycle one or grade 1, you should add more hours and promote more intensive teaching of English at the end of cycle three or even in cycle two. In all, our position was to increase the number of hours at the end of the primary program. (Interview with a senior official of a professional ESL teacher association)

For some research participants, the current policy of introducing ESL in primary Cycle 1 reflected lack of understanding on the part of some politicians and policymakers in the Liberal Party of the complexities of existing public school systems, of the effects of other competing agendas (other specialist groups trying to gain greater allocation of teaching time for their own subjects), or of the difficulties that arise in the attempt to move from a general idea to a specific set of directions embedded in a policy and ESL curriculum targeting early primary students.

At the stage of the policy formulation, the government consulted various organizations. This process seems to have played a critical role in determining what alternatives were to be considered by policymakers in terms of an appropriate curricular approach for the teaching of ESL in the particular educational environment of Quebec. In their discussion with the Quebec government, some professional organizations expressed a preference for an intensification of the teaching of English between grades 4 and 6 instead of spreading the teaching hours allocated to ESL over six grades at the elementary level.

> The assumption of the government at that time was that by adding one hour a week over grades 1 and 2, it would translate into a better effectiveness in terms of the capacity to master the language at the end of the secondary program ... effectiveness in terms of language competency in the second-language at the end of the high school program. (Interview with a member of the executive of an ESL teachers' organization)

Explicit experimentation was the predominant feature of the policy-formulation process. This experimentation with the ESL curriculum began with the creation and selection of one or more possible solutions for teaching ESL in the early primary grades. These were then tested against an array of requirements and constraints. Feedback outcomes were used to revise and refine

the curricular solutions under development, and thus generally progress was made toward an acceptable result.

> Initially, the programme for cycle one was supposed to be one based only on developing comprehension skills. As they went along, as they tried out the programme in classes, they realized that these kids were attempting to speak as well. They had to encourage that trend. They came back to the field and the teachers were observing the same thing through video feedback and all of that. So, they added the speaking part. It has always been a back-and-forth process. (Interview with a resource teacher involved in the experimentation phase as a representative of a professional organization)

The formulation of the ESL language policy was partly driven by an action-focused approach to the implementation stages of the policy process that led to changes to the final version of the ESL policy. Policymakers and stakeholders deemed this critical for the questions of whether it might be possible to implement the ESL policy at the early primary level and of which form would be most likely to succeed in the field. The Ministry of Education was also concerned with the potential conflicts that it might generate in Quebec society because of some stakeholders' perceptions that the introduction of ESL at an early age could have a detrimental effect on basic literacy and numeracy competence and skills in the mother tongue.

> They were clear about this, that implementing a compulsory programme for teaching English at cycle one would take away hours from the teaching of French, for instance. Already some students have a problem with writing in French; so, introducing English as a second language in cycle one could have a negative impact on the level of mastery of the native language, which is French. This was the main public position of other teacher organizations on that issue. (Interview with a senior official of an ESL teachers' organization)

Our data revealed that this strategy affected the final formulation of the ESL language policy in terms of choosing policy ideas that restricted the scope of potential conflict with stakeholders who opposed the introduction of ESL at the early primary level such as teachers' unions and some nationalist pressure groups. The resulting form and content of the language policy emphasized listening and speaking while concentrating on authentic and communicative activities excluding reading and writing.

> The programme allows more play type of things, and the kids come out without any prejudices against second language learning. The programme is based on listening to songs and plays. We also saw that

they could function in English alone, which is a major hurdle at the primary level. If we can do it earlier, then it makes the time we already have later in cycle 2 and 3 more efficient because we don't have these kids thinking that you have to be spoken to and taught in French in order to learn English. (Interview with a teachers' union official)

There were obviously good reasons for focusing on introducing ESL at the early primary level merely by stimulating learners' interest in the language and developing their enjoyment while learning English. By focusing simply on an introduction to ESL without going further in the development of competence, the new ESL language policy was formulated to appear less threatening to the quality of the French language and more palatable to the general public.

I think that the ESL curriculum respects the context that actually favours the development of a second language without being in conflict with the teaching of reading and writing … in the mother tongue. Thus I think that what should be avoided is having an approach that begins with writing because that would cause confusion and it would not make matters easier. (Interview with the president of an ESL teachers' association)

The debate and responses that led to the current formulation of the ESL language policy for early primary students reflected a sophisticated management of policy narratives by all stakeholders involved. They tried to influence who would design the final substance and formulation of the policy while determining how ESL education in primary schools in Quebec should be delivered, and how much English should be taught.

Conclusion and Research Implications

The discourses of globalization and of the protection of French in Quebec dominated the debate about the introduction of ESL at the early primary level. The nature and function of ESL itself, defined in terms of its relationship with the economic competitiveness of the province, was used as the main rationale by government and business interests. However, this had little effect on the content and final formulation of the ESL language policy. The narrative of protecting and sustaining the francophone character of Quebec society affected the policy-formulation process in terms of the design of the policy instrument used to introduce ESL in early primary grades: the ESL curriculum. A whole battery of curriculum development ideas were used to limit potential conflicts about issues of the deleterious effect of the introduction of ESL in grades 1 and 2 on necessary gains in basic literacy in French. As a result, the ESL policy and corresponding curriculum had a main focus on

building positive attitudes toward ESL rather than explicitly on developing a certain level of proficiency. There is evidence in this study that there was a disconnect between the alternatives that were considered by policymakers in terms of an appropriate curricular approach for the teaching of ESL and the overall objective of producing an increasing number of fluent speakers of English in order to meet the challenges of an increasingly globalized world. In this case, the deliberative process that led to the policy on English as a compulsory subject at the early primary level in Quebec reflected a sophisticated management of policy narratives by all stakeholders involved as they tried to influence who would determine the substance of the ESL curriculum, how ESL should be delivered in relation to the provision of French-language instruction, and who had access to ESL education and to how much of it. The expressed need for system-wide adoption of measures aiming at functional bilingualism for every young Quebecer was balanced against the need of Quebec francophones to preserve and improve their own language while protecting and nurturing the francophone character of their society. At the end of the process, all policy actors gained a little of what they wanted.

Several implications may be suggested for future language-policy planning and ongoing research to address the spread of ESL in monolingual societies like Quebec. The teaching of ESL in monolingual areas has implications for language-planning, particularly with regard to ensuring that it is designed to promote the quality of second-language acquisition, leading in the long run to the overall production of effective speakers of English. On the basis of the above, there is need for further research on the design of language policy developed to protect and promote an official language (French) while including provisions about the effective teaching of a second language and taking into account the power relations that might exist between the two languages in times of globalization.

Follow-up qualitative research is also needed on the implementation phase to yield clearer insights into the effectiveness of such language policy in terms of how ESL teachers in francophone schools negotiate the effect of the teaching of English as a compulsory subject at the early primary level. More specifically, such a study should examine teachers' perspectives on the adoption of the policy on English as a compulsory subject at the early primary level, its implementation in their district, and its perceived effect on their practices.

Note

[1] L'Association des cadres scolaires du Québec (ACSQ); Centrale des syndicats du Québec (CSQ); Regroupement des responsables de l'enseignement de l'anglais langue seconde (RREALS); Regroupement des conseillères et des conseillers pédagogiques d'anglais langue seconde (RCCPALS); Society for the Promotion of the Teaching of English as a Second Language in Québec (SPEAQ).

GERALD FALLON AND NATALIE RUBLIK

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