

The Portuguese-Canadian Coalition for Better Education
A decade of community activism in education
(1995-2005)

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Executive Summary

After a decade of activism, from 1995 till the end of 2004, the *Portuguese-Canadian Coalition for Better Education* folded as a lobbying group. The Coalition was a grouping of initially about sixty volunteers, individual activists, as well as representing different associations, all of whom with an interest in education - namely bettering the academic achievement of Portuguese-Canadian students.

The purpose of this document is to explain the work of the Coalition based on the files left behind by the volunteers, now housed at the *Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections*, located in the Scott Library, Keele Campus, York University.

Preceded by the *Toronto Portuguese Parents Association* in Liaison with the Toronto Board of Education (TBE), the Coalition came to being as a result of the 1991 The Every Secondary Student Survey, and a petition to the Ontario Ministry of Education calling for action to address deficiencies in the teaching of Toronto's Portuguese-Canadian students. A meeting with Minister of Education David Cooke in April 1995 initiated a collaboration - between the Coalition and the two school boards in Toronto with the highest numbers of Portuguese-Canadian students - in face-to-face meetings of the Work/ Advisory Group, and later through the Tutoring Project.

The issues discussed among the Coalition membership and with the two school boards were: Academic underachievement (Best Practices & tutoring projects), the placement of students in special education services, standard testing in inner-city schools; International Languages, parental involvement in the school system, School Community Advisors (SCAs); making available to the community statistical data on income, educational achievement, and special education; the onset of June Portuguese Month in Catholic and Public schools. The struggle to initiate and keep educational TV programs (ABC Show - CFMT), and the campaign to maintain the Portuguese Lectureship at the University of Toronto, were two other aspects of the Coalitions' lobbying work, beyond the school system.

The crowning achievement and legacy of the Coalition's work was the Tutoring Program. It was started in 2001 and has been sustained until present by the Working Women Community Centre (WWCC) under the name On Your Mark. It assists 300 students in 53 schools.

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Introduction

After a decade of activism, from 1995 till the end of 2004, the *Portuguese-Canadian Coalition for Better Education* folded as a lobbying group. The Coalition was a grouping of initially about sixty volunteers, individual activists, as well as representing different associations, all of whom with an interest in education - namely bettering the academic achievement of Portuguese-Canadian students and the involvement of their parents in the school system.

In 2004 there were attempts to incorporate the Coalition and to turn it into a vehicle for networking but in practice it was replaced by the *Portuguese-Canadian Educators Network* (PCEN), a committee of the Portuguese-Canadian National Congress, chaired by Ana Fernandes-Iria. In 2006, the Congress produced an education position paper that buttressed the Network activities: *A Promising Future for Luso-Canadians: A PCNC Policy Statement on Education and Training*. The PCEN also organized a memorable Parents' Conference, in November 5, 2006, with over 400 parents in attendance.

This group of activists, which was formed in the Spring of 2005 with "the ultimate goal to improve academic and educational success of community members", also folded in the Fall of 2008 due to lack of volunteers. At the time of publication of this document, there is no advocacy volunteer group that is working on education in the Portuguese-Canadian community of Toronto.

Trustee Chris Bolton, representing Ward 10 (Trinity/Spadina) for the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), was approached to financially assist in the production of this document, to be distributed in some key institutions where the work of the Coalition should be known, and referenced by both practionners and researchers.

Those who are interested in equity approaches and practices geared to changing the school system will value this document, based on the contents of the Coalition files. It will inform them of the steps taken by activists in order to make the system more

equitable for its student population, whose social class and ethnic background put them at-risk of dropping out and of joining the ranks of the underemployed.

This document was produced by past Coalition Chair, Ilda Januario, with the assistance of Prof. Manuela Marujo and of Dr. Fernando Nunes, and in consultation with Marta Brum, Ana Fernandes-Iria, Nellie Pedro, Katherine Ponte, Marcie Ponte, Enir Bassani and Adelino da Silva.

Background

The Portuguese-Canadian communities have had to bear a legacy of low academic achievement that was fostered on to them by a fifty-year dictatorship in the motherland, historically shaped by four hundred years of Inquisition. The result was a society that was deeply divided along the lines of educational and professional success and entitlement. It was not the poorest of the poor who tended to immigrate, but rather a social group which valued above all hard work and the acquisition of material security and comfort.

Education was seen – especially by the earlier immigrants whose official date of entry into Canada was 1953 – as a privilege of the few, a luxury incompatible in the short or long term with the pursuit of a job or trade and a comfortable, secure existence. Consequently their involvement in their children’s education tended to be minimal. Education was often not seen as a priority for their success in life. Higher education was not viewed as an achievable goal for most of these immigrants. Consequently, many did not expect their children to pursue post-secondary education, nor did they invest enough in this area.

Low academic results can be traced back to the Toronto Board of Education (TBE) statistics as early as the 1960s (Nunes, 1999).

About twenty years later, in the late 1970s and 1980s, a high time for parent activism in the public school system, Portuguese-Canadian parents in the Public school board were also among the first and most outspoken education activists of the time and they organized as the Toronto Portuguese Parents Association (Dehli, K. with I. Januario, 1994)

The Toronto Portuguese Parents Association in liaison with the Toronto Board of Education (TPPA)

The Toronto Portuguese Parents Association in liaison with the Toronto Board of Education (TPPA), formed in 1981, did much to advocate for the fate of Portuguese-Canadian students many of whom, like students in other ethno-cultural and racial communities, were streamed into the lower academic ranks, effectively compromising their access to post-secondary education. As such, TPPA volunteers produced the following:

- a bilingual guide for interviews with teachers
- a statement to the TBE on the secondary education review (June 1985)
- a motion about the Appraisal for Better Curriculum (ABC) and key proposals for a better curriculum (March 1985)
- a document in the two languages entitled Streaming in our schools: What it means, how is it a problem and what can be done about it (circa 1982)
- a Submission by the Toronto Portuguese Parents Association to the School Board Programs Committee - with eight recommendations - entitled The Education of Portuguese-Canadian Students in Toronto Schools. The results of the 1991 Every Secondary School Survey, March 1995.
- Parent Forums, the last of which was held in October 1994.
- intensive use of the Portuguese-language media to alert the community to the problem of streaming, thus paving the way for the Coalition to get implanted as the next education activist body.

The Portuguese-Canadian Coalition for Better Education

As a result of part III of the 1991 The Every Secondary Student Survey (Brown et al., 1992, Cheng et al, 1993, and Yau et al, 1993), a petition to the Ontario Ministry of Education was circulated from October 1994 to February 1995 by the law student Katherine Da Motta Ponte calling for action to address deficiencies in the teaching of Toronto's Portuguese-Canadian students. She was assisted in this effort by another university student, Helen Felipe.

The petition gathered over one thousand signatures and had the effect of focusing and sustaining media attention on the situation of these students. It also proposed that Public and Catholic school boards work alongside with the Ministry of Education, and the various volunteer groups to improve outcomes. Katherine and a small group of students also went to churches, social clubs, bakeries, etc. to discuss these needs. The parents were also kept informed by her articles in the weekly Família Portuguesa.

In February of 1995 a series of articles was published in the Toronto Star newspaper, bringing the results of The Every Secondary Student Survey to the mainstream media.

The executive of the TPPA called upon all known entities and organizations interested in matters of education in the Portuguese community to get together, seeking to enlarge its scope beyond the group of Public school parents. After an “emergency meeting” that was held on February 16, 2005, at the then Grace Street Public School (now called Pierre-Elliott Trudeau, French School Board), the **Portuguese-Canadian Coalition for Better Education** /*Coligação luso-canadiana para a melhoria do ensino* was formed.

The purpose of this document

The purpose of this document is to explain the work of the Coalition based on the files left behind by the volunteers. The Coalition files contain by and large the headings covered in our table of contents (see appendix for a list of files). The files themselves are presently located at the *Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections*, located in the Scott Library, Keele Campus, York University. For more information on how to access

this collection, call the Clara Thomas Archives' staff at (416) 736-5442; or e-mail the staff at archives@yorku.ca"

What was the Portuguese-Canadian Coalition for Better Education?

The Portuguese-Canadian Coalition for Better Education was a volunteer group composed of Portuguese-Canadian organisations, parents, educators, and university students, who came together in February 1995 in response to the statistical results of the 1991 Every Secondary Student Survey conducted by the then Toronto Board of Education (TBE), published in three parts. This survey, published every 5 years up until 1997, showed that Portuguese-Canadian students consistently occupied the second to lowest rank in academic achievement relative to other ethno-cultural groups.

Mandate: Late in 1995, the Coalition, the Toronto Board of Education (TBE) and the Metro Separate School Board (MSSB) – the school boards with highest representation of Portuguese background students in the GTA – formed an Advisory Group to the Coalition mandated by the Minister of Education, David Cooke. This group met regularly with both boards until 2004 to reflect upon the situation of these students and share practices and strategies to improve their academic achievement, and the teaching of Portuguese as an International Language in the public school system. The Coalition also met with Minister of Education, Hon. David Johnson. The community was kept informed of these developments.

Issues addressed:

- Academic underachievement (Best Practices & tutoring projects)
- International Languages
- the placement of students in special education services
- standard testing in inner-city schools
- parental involvement in the school system
- School Community Advisors (SCAs)

- making available statistical data on income, educational achievement, and special education to the community
- the onset of June Portuguese Month in Catholic and Public schools
- the struggle to initiate and keep educational TV programs (ABC Show - CFMT)
- the campaign to maintain the Portuguese Lectureship at the University of Toronto

Geographical area: The schools located in the traditional and newer Portuguese-Canadian community are to be found in the area bounded by Queen and Eglinton, Bathurst and Keele and are administered by the TDSB and the TCDSB.

Coalition Membership

1) Originally, the Coalition membership was as follows:

- Toronto Portuguese Parents Association (TPPA)
- Portuguese-speaking staff from the TBE/TDSB and MSSB/TDCSB
- Volunteer representatives from International Languages & Concurrent Programs (ILACON)
- Portuguese-Canadian Student Federation
- Unaffiliated university students
- University of Toronto Portuguese Association (UTPA) Outreach Program
- York University Portuguese Association (YUPA) Outreach Program
- Portuguese Interagency Network (PIN)
- Portuguese-Canadian National Congress
- Federation of Portuguese Catholic Parents (FPCP-MSSB)
- Coligação Pais & Filhos (MSSB)
- OISE (unofficial) representative
- Department of Spanish and Portuguese, U of Toronto, (unofficial) representative
- Non-affiliated parents (TDSB), teachers and others from assorted organizations (BICS, CEF CUT/Jarvis, etc.)

Certain organizations were disbanded (Federation of Students) or became inactive (TPPA), and others came on board after 1999.

2) The final composition of the Coalition membership was the following:

- *Abrigo* Centre
- Alliance of Portuguese Clubs and Association of Ontario (ACAPO)
- *Coligação Pais e Filhos* (Catholic parents)
- *Conselheiro das Comunidades* (Community representative to the Portuguese government)
- Department of Spanish and Portuguese U of T
- Federation of Catholic Parents
- Federation of Portuguese-Canadian Businesses and Professionals (FPCBP)
- Individual parents, school teachers, and university students
- Project Diploma
- Portuguese-Canadian National Congress
- UTPA (University of Toronto Portuguese Association) and YUPA (York University Portuguese Association) outreach programs
- Working Women Community Centre (WWCC)

TDSB staff and school trustees that worked with the Coalition:

- School trustees (Nellie Pedro, Fiona Chapman, Christine Ferreira, TDSB, Catherine Leblanc-Miller, TCDSB)
- Marta Brum, School Community Advisor, TDSB, Enir Bassani, Community Relations, TCDSB

Most important project: The Tutoring/ Mentoring Program (now On Your Mark)

Given the inability of the school system to deal with the problem of Luso-Canadians and their academic underachievement, the idea was born at the Coalition to apply to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for a three- year grant to run a community-based tutoring

/mentoring project in schools with a high concentration of students of Portuguese extraction and low general academic standing.

The Foundation showed an immediate interest in the Coalition's proposal but the group was not eligible for a grant because the Coalition was not incorporated. Hence the Coalition executive approached Working Women Community Centre (WWCC), which became the lead organization, in partnership with the Coalition and the Portuguese Interagency Network (PIN).

Governance: The Coalition ran as a group of activists and was never incorporated. In March 1996, it developed a Meetings Procedure and Coalition Governance. And, in 1999, it applied to become a Community Liaison Group of the TDSB, status which was granted in June 27, 2000.

The Coalition was chaired by three volunteers during the decade covered by this document - Ilda Januario, Christine Ferreira, and Nellie Pedro - and an informal executive of about five regular members. The Coalition member organizations or individuals were approached on an informal basis and were asked to name a representative to be part of the mailing list and attend meetings.

General Coalition Meetings: After a first series of regular meetings from 1995 to 1998 at Grace Street Public School, Coalition members stopped meeting face-to-face on a regular basis. A smaller group pursued contact and discussion on Coalition matters, as need arose. From 2000-2003, regular contact and consultation was pursued electronically by list-serv, with an annual meeting among members.

Unlike the meetings of the Working/Advisory Group that went on uninterrupted for eight years, membership Coalition meetings were of a more irregular nature as electronic discussion and decision-making replaced face-to-face meetings.



Annual general Coalition meeting, 2003

Meetings with Ministers of Education

1) Hon. David Cooke – 1995

Following the series of articles on the Toronto Star and the formation of the Coalition, a meeting was requested with the Minister of Education and Training (MET), Dave Cooke. It took place on April 12, 1995, and the minutes can be found in the files. In this meeting, the petition was presented to the Minister and the Coalition asked him to mandate the two Boards to meet with the community activists immediately. The Coalition requested access to statistical information on the situation of Portuguese-Canadian students, to hold conferences and other joint ventures to improve academic outcomes for them.

This meeting initiated the collaboration - in the form of the Working Group - which brought together the Coalition, the MSSB, TBE and the Assistant Deputy Minister, Ouida Wright, at the MET on June 6, 1995. This was the first of a series of meetings that would take place on average three times during the school year until 2003-2004.

2) Request denied to meet with Hon. John Snobelen – 1996

Also a letter, dated December 20, 1996, was sent to the Minister expressing the Coalition's concern for the hasty reform process and with five recommendations: opposing cuts to language programs, re-streaming Grade 9, and eliminating Grade 13; favouring standard testing and supporting the ideal mix of compulsory and optional credits.

3) Meeting with Hon. David Johnson – 1998

This meeting was arranged in collaboration with Carl DeFaria, then M.P.P for Mississauga East. The topics discussed were: The need to exclude the Grade 10 Literacy Test results from the students' transcripts; to develop IL and the Integrated/ extended day; to promote for early literacy and intervention, to reduce tuition fees, and to offer compulsory ESL training courses in teacher education.

4) Request denied to meet with Hon. Janet Ecker – 2000

Advisory/ Working Group Meetings

Following a meeting on April 12, 1995, with the Minister of Education and Training, Dave Cooke, the Toronto area school boards were invited to work with the community and the Ministry to: a) provide information on student achievement: b) and to work out a process for collaboration.

The meetings of what was initially called the Working Group, and later the Advisory Group, ran from June 1995 to 2003-2004. The meetings took place three to four times during the school year and were chaired alternately by the MSSB/TCDSB and the TBE/TSDB. Many topics of mutual interest were discussed with regards to students' achievement and the teaching of Portuguese as an International Language.



Meeting of the Advisory Group at one of the Catholic Schools

Initially, there was also a *Statistics Sub-committee of the Working Group*, which met with staff from the School Boards Research Departments. It produced a document entitled

Situation of the Portuguese-Canadian Students in the Metro Separate School Board (MSSB) and the Toronto Board of Education (TBE): A Summary of the Statistics (June 1996) prepared by Fernando Nunes and Ilda Januario in collaboration with Patricia Yuen (MSSB) and Maria Yau (TBE).

The Directors of Education were approached to provide special education statistics regarding the Portuguese-Canadian students relative to the general student population, a request which was met with some resistance. Those statistics were released for 1996-1997 and they confirmed the Coalition's concerns with respect to disproportionate concentration of these students in Special Education (Learning Disabled) in both Boards.

After the statistics subcommittee disbanded, staff of the Schools Boards Research Departments attended Advisory Groups meetings as required: most often Maria Yau for the TDSB and Dr. Nicholas White, for the TCDSB. In addition to gathering statistics and discussing topics of interest to schools located within the geographical area of the Portuguese-Canadian community - with the participation of board staff and school principals and teachers - the Advisory Group worked on three other main initiatives, which led to recommendations to senior staff regarding:

- A report entitled Suggestions for Better Outcomes in Education, compiled in June 1996, by a subcommittee of the Coalition composed of parents, Board personnel and students. The report identified relevant issues for the Portuguese community, as well as important facts that affected the education of Portuguese-Canadian youth. It also made recommendations concerning teaching and curriculum matters pertaining to early and primary education, secondary schooling and school-community partnerships.
- A letter to school board directors John Davies and Marguerite Jackson (TBE), and Johanne Stewart (MSSB), in 1997, about the overrepresentation of Portuguese-Canadian students in the Learning Disabled (LD) category.

- A meeting with the chair of the TDSB, David Reid, on June 10, 2003, where the high number of LD identified Portuguese-Canadian pupils was one of topics discussed.
- A letter to Joan Green, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), asking to for a meeting to discuss how EQAO results penalize inner-city schools, in 2001.

All these letters can be found in the files. See the bibliography for a bilingual reference on Special Education and Portuguese-Canadian students by Januario (2003).

The main players from the school boards in this sustained effort through the years were: The late John Trafford, Verna Lister, Gerry Connelly, superintendents, Marta Brum, School Community Advisor, Christine Ferreira and Nellie Pedro, trustees (TDSB), Frank Meagher and Gerald Dagenais, superintendents, Enir Bassani, Adelino da Silva, Community Relations (TCDSB). Trustee Katherine Leblanc-Miller from the TCDSB was a later addition. From the Coalition, other than then the executive, which remained stable, the membership fluctuated during the decade the Coalition was in existence and we would be sure to do members injustice if we tried – and missed - to enumerate them all.

Collaboration with individual School Boards

In addition to joint school board initiatives, there were also two important projects ran by the individual school boards in collaboration with the Coalition, both of which can be found in the files :

- Balanced Literacy Project (TCDSB)
- The Best Practices Project (TDSB)

Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB)

- *Balanced Literacy:*

This project, implemented in over 10 primary Catholic schools to encourage the early acquisition of literacy by using the home language, was a result of discussions in the Working/Advisory Group. It met with great success, as documented by internal reports of the school board's Research Department.

The project led to the publication of Sons do Alfabeto audio-visual materials, which became popular in the community, an initiative of Enir Bassani, Community Relations, who was also instrumental in liaising between the Coalition and the Catholic Board. Balanced Literacy was replicated in other languages.

Other joint initiatives, to be found in the Coalition files, were:

- Oral deputation to the TCDSB on *After School Literacy Pilot Projects*, December 02, 1999.
- a joint presentation to the 14th International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI), Equity, Globalization and Change: Education for the 21st Century, January 06, 2001, Toronto. Ilda Januario presented a text on behalf of the Coalition, entitled "Community Concerns", in *Addressing the Needs of Low Achieving Second Language Learners*,
- **Toronto Board of Education (TBE) / Toronto District School Board (TDSB) Best Practices (1995-1998)**

In June 1995, at the request of the Coalition and through Trustee Fiona Chapman, the Toronto Public School Board approved the establishment of a five-year School Improvements Project, which outlined the basic requirements prepared by the working/advisory group. They derived in part from the recommendations made by Portuguese-Canadian parents at a Parents' Forum, held October 1994.

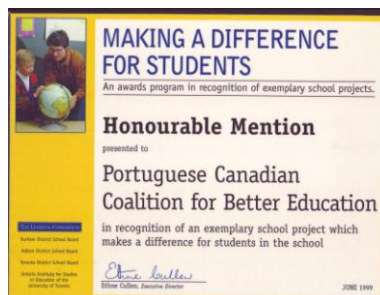
Having started in two schools with a high percentage of students of Portuguese background – Charles G. Fraser Junior and Shirley St. Junior - by 1998, other two schools had joined in, Eglinton Junior and Regal Road Junior.

Marta Brum, SCA, was instrumental in liaising between the Coalition and the Public Board.



Portuguese politician visits one of the Best Practices School, 2002

For its involvement in this project, the Coalition received an honorable mention from the Learning Consortium Awards Program (at OISE/UT) in recognition of exemplary school projects, “Making a difference for students”, in June 1999.



Other joint initiatives, to be found in the Coalition files, were:

- **Presentation to Toronto Board of Education (TBE) principals, Wards 3/4, September 10, 1997 :**

The presentation focused on the high numbers of Portuguese-Canadian students in LD, early detection and intervention of at-risk students, the re-streaming of Grade 9 and cuts in IL programs.

- **Parent, Student and Community Involvement Task Group**

Coalition participation in the meetings to develop the “Policy & Procedures for Parent, Student and Community Involvement”. The final report of the Task Group is dated November 18, 1998.

- **Parent Concerns Protocol**

The meetings to develop the “Guiding Principles for the Parent Concern Protocol” took place from September to November 2002 with Coalition participation.

- **Deputations on budget cuts**

The Coalition made a deputation on TDSB budget cuts at the Public Forum for Equity-Seeking Groups in May 2002 and November, 2002.

Coalition work with the MEDIA

Media Articles

Articles in the media played a fundamental role in formation of the Coalition. As stated before, it was a series of fifty articles in *Família Portuguesa* and *The Toronto Star* (February 1995) that sparked the interest in the formation of a coalition of Portuguese-Canadian associations and individuals – parents, teachers and other TDSB staff - to seriously tackle the issue of student underachievement, drop out and low access to post-secondary education. Unfortunately most of the articles in the mainstream media were not included in the Coalition files.



Article in the Toronto Star, Monday, February 13, 1995, by Andrew Duffy,

Later and for a brief period, Coalition Chair, Ilda Januario, ran a regular newspaper column in the weekly *Portuguese Post*, *Diary of an Educator* (see appendix). Some of these articles were also published in the *Luso-Press* newspaper, in Montreal, by Carrefour Lusophone (see list of articles by Ponte and Januario in Appendix B).

Another member of the Coalition, Ana Fernandes, at the time a teacher at St. Mary's Secondary School (TCSDB), was the author of a series of close to 150 articles on the *O Milénio* newspaper, focusing on every aspect of the Ontario's school curriculum, which was translated and published by topic.

The ABC SHOW– CFMT TV

A proposal for a TV show was presented to CFMT (now OMNI) in May 1999 by Claire Silva, parenting centre teacher at the TDSB, with Coalition support. The educational show, in Portuguese language, was geared to pre-schoolers and their parents or guardians.

A thirty-minute pilot was produced in the summer of 1999 and the show was aired as a 10 minute segment in *Hora H* on Sundays. The program was cancelled in October 2002, a move protested by the Coalition and its members in a letter to Madeline Ziniak, V.P.

and executive producer of CFMT, dated the same month. The program was not reinstated.



Claire Silva in the CFMT car, 2002 Portugal Parade

Education in Action – CIRV.FM Radio

Another active and long-standing Coalition member, Dr. Manuela Marujo, started a radio weekly Portuguese-language program on CIRV.FM 88.9 entitled “*Educação em Acção*” [Education in Action]. The programs initiated in November 2001, still run and are heard in all of Southern Ontario. They focus on many aspects of education and all sorts of experts have been invited to participate as guests. Several listeners call in response, requesting more information on the issues aired.



Dr. Marujo interviews the late Valter Lopes, 2005

Portuguese as an International Language

The work of the Coalition, like the work of its predecessor (TPPA), was always two-pronged: To improve the academic achievement of Luso-Canadians and to preserve Portuguese as an International Language in the Public and Catholic school boards.

The struggle to keep the teaching of International Languages in the primary curriculum, during school hours, was a continuation of many immigrant parents' efforts in the late 1970's. The TPPA, with other parents' associations, fought long and hard to attain the integration of International Languages in schools and have those programs funded by the Ministry of Education. They are often the way to get immigrant parents involved in the school system.

The International Languages program was, and still is, forever on the budget "chopping block". It remains marginalized from the curriculum and the regular school day in most schools where it is offered. The Coalition, and other parent groups, had to be attentive to trustees' meetings and the budget process; its members presented oral or written deputations over the years, in an effort to convince trustees and senior school board staff, to keep and develop the program. This is the list of mostly oral and some written deputations, as well as other activities, to be found in the files:

- Deputation TCDSB, May 02, 2002, Re: saving the integrated program at S. Sebastian's School (M. Marujo)
- Deputation TDSB, May 07, 2001 (I. Januario)
- Deputation TDSB (written), May 03, 2000 (I. Januario)
- TCDSB, May 04/2000 (M. Marujo)
- Spring Parent Forums, April 30, 2000 (I. Januario and M. Marujo)
- *Conferência de imprensa sobre os possíveis cortes aos programas de línguas internacionais integrados no dia escolar* (Press conference about the possible budgetary cuts to the integrated language programs), May 19, 1999, Caldense Bakery, a collaboration between the *Conselho das Comunidades* and the Coalition.
- Deputation TDSB, May 12, 1999 (I. Januario)

- Fact Sheet about the International Languages Program in Public and Catholic elementary schools, April 1999
- Memo from Dr. Jim Cummins, Prof. Modern Languages, OISE/UT, to Chair Ilda Januario, International Languages Coalition, May 04, 1999
- Letter to Hon. David Johnson from the Consul General of Portugal, João Perestrello, with a written deputation from M. Marujo, April 14, 1999
- Oral deputation TCDSB, March 3, 1999 (M. Marujo)
- Oral deputation to the TDSB, and Communiqué in Portuguese, June 2, 1998
- Written deputation to the TDSB, May 21, 1998 (I. Januario)
- Interview in Portuguese in the *Rádio e Televisão de Portugal Internacional (RTPi)*, May 23, 1997 (I. Januario)
- An article about the Portuguese language and identity in the diaspora (Baptista & Marujo, 2002).

The Coalition also sustained efforts to create and/or keep a Portuguese language program in two community schools:

- Action to set-up an after-school International Portuguese language program at Regal Road Public School 1994-1997. Summarised and analysed in a letter to Tam Goosen, Chair of the ILACON (International Languages and Concurrent Programs Committee), dated Dec. 1, 1997(I. Januario)
- Action to save the integrated International Portuguese Language program at St. Anthony's and S. Sebastian Catholic Schools, where Dr. Manuela Marujo played a major role. This action was supported by a letter from Joseph Carnavale, then Chair of the TCDSB, May 2002.

Portuguese as a teachable subject

In 2000, the Coalition lobbied to make Portuguese one of the officially teachable subjects in Ontario secondary schools along with German, Italian and Spanish. Most secondary schools teachers of Portuguese were not trained in the methodology of teaching Portuguese, but rather as teachers of French or Spanish. In a secondary school where Portuguese was offered for credit, these teachers would be called upon to teach Portuguese with no specific training in this language.

Having received no clear indication on who to address and how to proceed to change this situation, Coalition action was directed at the following institutions:

- Letter to Dr. Michael Fullan, Dean, Faculty of Education, U of Toronto, and to Dr. S. Shapson, Dean, Faculty of Education, York University (March 05, 1996)
- Letter to Dr. Terry Piper, Dean, Faculty of Education, York University May 05, 2000)
- Letter to Dr. Gerry McIntyre of the Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Branch of the Ministry of Education and Training (May 18, 2000)
- Letter to Linda Boudeham, Coordinator of Modern Languages at the School of Continuing Studies, OISE/UT (April 12, 2000)
- Meetings with the Advisory Committee on International Languages in the OISE/UT B. Ed. Program (April 03, 2001, March 06, 2003)

Only OISE/UT responded in a substantive way to our request, offering to meet with us and actively listen to our concerns, as well as to those of other ethno-cultural communities in the same situation. As of 2001, OISE/UT initiated a three-year long pilot project with a view to making any International Language a teachable subject.

Recruited by the Coalition, three accredited teachers of Portuguese background enrolled at OISE/UT to study pedagogy of Portuguese during the second year of the pilot. These teachers graduated in June 2003 with Portuguese as one of their specialized subjects. They were Cristina Marques, Monica Marques, and Óscar Monteiro.

Unfortunately, due to the curricular changes of the last years, International Languages taught for credit at the secondary level have become an optional subject. As well, many students of Portuguese-background come from homes where English has replaced Portuguese as the main language of communication. Therefore, the demand for Portuguese taught for credit has declined considerably. The graduating teachers had difficulty getting placed in high-schools that offered Portuguese and the recruitment action with OISE/UT was no longer warranted.



Graduating teachers, left to right: Cristina Marques, Óscar Monteiro, and Monica Marques

Recognition of UTPA and YUPA Outreach Programs for admission to Faculties of Education at University of Toronto and York University

Concurrently with making Portuguese a teachable subject, the Coalition included in the same letter to the Faculties of Education of both Toronto and York Universities, a request that the volunteer services of the Outreach Programs of the Portuguese university students' associations (UTPA and YUPA) be recognized toward the admission process of Portuguese-background applicants to teacher training. This request, which met with success, was made with a view to increasing the number of Luso-Canadians in the teaching profession, thereby fostering the visibility of these teachers as role models in the school system.

The struggle to keep the Portuguese Lectureship (*Leitorado*) at the U of Toronto

In June of 2003, a group of concerned citizens in the Portuguese community approached the Coalition to write a letter to the Portuguese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Martins da Cruz, in support of the Visiting Lecturer of Portuguese, at the at the Department of Spanish and Portuguese of the University of Toronto, a position which was remunerated by *Instituto Camões*. Several other entities in the community also sent letters of support. The letter addressed two main points:

- the need to keep the Visiting Lecturer position, the only one in Canada
- the need to extend the mandate of the then Lecturer, Aida Baptista, so that she could - together with other department staff - help organize two important conferences programmed for 2003 to celebrate the 50th year of the official arrival of Portuguese immigrants to Canada
- A letter was also written to the editor *Jornal das Artes, Letras e Ideias* (JL) to critique an interview given on the topic of lecturer position cut-backs by the then president of the Camões Institute, Maria-José Stock.

The first letter was followed by a petition, conducted in collaboration with the Portuguese Bookstore, centrally located in the community. That petition was signed by about 300 concerned citizens.

Although the campaign to save the Lectureship was not successful at the time, it created a stir in the community and an awareness of the teaching of Portuguese at university level, as a continuation of Coalition's work on International Languages program in Public and Catholic schools.

It was also the first time that a campaign was mounted at the community level - with regards to the higher teaching of language and literature - that publicly criticized a

Portuguese education entity for an initiative that paid no heed to the needs of Portuguese immigrants and their descendants in Canada.

The Lecturer was replaced by an assistant for the academic year of 2004-2005 but it was reinstituted in 2005-2006, with the arrival of the current Lecturer, José Pedro Ferreira. We like to believe that the campaign of the Coalition can be credited in part for this happy outcome.



Aida Baptista in front of Victoria College, U of T

June, Portuguese History and Heritage Month in Toronto Schools/

Junho, mês da História Portuguesa e da Lusofonia

Bill 120, approved by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario in October 2001, proclaimed that every year in Ontario, June 10 will be Portugal Day and the month of June will be Portuguese History and Heritage Month. This was an initiative of M.P.P. Carl DeFaria.

In 2002, a committee called “50th Anniversary – Celebrating Portuguese-Canadians”, was struck to prepare the celebrations of 2003 as the 50th anniversary of the official arrival of Portuguese immigrants to Canada. The Coalition was represented in this committee and proposed that it work actively as a subcommittee to introduce June Portuguese History and Heritage Month in Toronto schools, as a curricular initiative, following the model of February Black History Month (first proclaimed in 1993).



Meeting at the Federation with members of the 50th Anniversary Committee, 2004

Ideally, this initiative would continue beyond 2003 and spread to other school boards in Ontario, an effort which was pursued to some extent by the Federation of Portuguese-Canadian Businesses and Professionals (FPCBP), after receiving a Trillium grant. When formulating the idea for this yearly project, the Coalition intended that this initiative be: a) curricular; b) inclusive of the whole school population; and c) inclusive in content and materials, i.e. include the eight countries where Portuguese is spoken as an official language.

The Federation received grants towards June Portuguese Month initiatives and requested that partner organizations submit proposals in order to get a share of the funds and steer the initiatives. The Coalition presented a first proposal in June 2002 and a second in December 2003, with a view to organizing related events in June 2004. Other than a Federation donation to the Coalition for the events of June 2003, the collaboration did not continue into the following year, although the Federation consulted with members of the 50th Anniversary committee after receiving the grant (*).

To fulfill the goal of celebrating June Portuguese History and Heritage Month in 2003, in Toronto Public and Catholic schools, the Coalition undertook the following action:

- Presentations to the TCDSB on June 03, 2002, and to the TDSB on June 10, 2002, requesting that the School Boards accept the idea of celebrating June Portuguese History and Heritage month, particularly in those schools with a high percentage of students from Portuguese background.
- The Portuguese Month at the TCDSB was approved on January 17, 2003, as a result of a delegation to its Trustees by the Coalition.

- A motion presented to the TDSB by then Trustee Nellie Pedro.
- Letter (sent by e-mail) to Ms. Saheeda Mohamed of Ministry of Education requesting that schools across Ontario, starting in 2003, celebrate that month and that the Ministry work with the Coalition towards preparing a Resource Guide for Teachers.
- Response letter by Catherine Rankin, Director of Curriculum and Assessment Policy Branch of the Ministry of Education, urging the Coalition to approach school boards to endorse the requested resource, dated January 29, 2003.
- Nomination of School Community Advisor, Marta Brum, through Verna Lister, Equity Superintendent at the TDSB, to work with the Coalition for the preparation, launching and implementation of June Portuguese History and Heritage Month in Toronto schools.
- Preparatory meetings by the *June Portuguese Month Coalition Subcommittee* held on January 16, February 19 and April 15, 2003.
- Organization of an educational kit, in a binder, to distribute in schools, endorsed by the Trustees and Directors of Education, Tom Donovan (TCDSB) and David Reid (TDSB).
- Celebration of Thanksgiving Mass to honour immigration pioneers on June 03, 2003, organized by the TCDSB.
- Press conference to launch June Portuguese Month at *Galeria Corte Real* on June 03, 2003, with the FCPBP as the host.
- A meeting with the chair of the TDSB, David Reid, on June 10, where June Portuguese History and Heritage Month was one of topics discussed.

The Coalition requested that a report of activities from the TDSB and the TCDSB be presented, listing what schools and what types of activities that took place during June Portuguese Month, but no reports were received. In the end, activities that took place in schools were initiated, as those for the traditional Portugal Day, by Portuguese language teachers, falling short of the Coalition goals for the new Month initiative.

Coalition Support Letters

The Coalition wrote letters, to be found in the files, in support of the following initiatives:

- Exhibit on Portuguese-Canadian Press in a Multicultural Society (May 03, 1995)
- Campaign seeking retraction of series of articles about “female psychology” in the newspaper Família Portuguesa (August 10, 1998)
- Request to create a chair of Luso-Afro-Brazilian Studies at University of Toronto, on the occasion of awarding an honorary doctoral degree to Dr. Mário Soares, a former Portuguese prime minister and president (November 25, 1997)
- Campaign to save our School Community Advisors (SCAs), letter written on January 22, 2003. (see below)

BOOK Launch

- The Coalition, in collaboration with the Portuguese Bookstore, launched the Portuguese version of Schooling for Change: Reinventing education for early adolescents (*Educação para mudança. Recriando a escola para adolescentes*) by Prof. Andy Hargreaves, Lorna Earl and Jim Ryan from OISE/UT, on June 20, 2002.

Coalition Collaboration in Education Initiatives

- Participation in the *Year 2000 Committee* meetings. A presentation was also made at *Casa dos Açores*, Cultural Week of November 2000, entitled *Ano 2000, Ano da Leitura* (Year 2000, year dedicated to reading)
- Rosario Marchese's *Popular Forum* held on September 22, 2001. The Coalition directed the session on education.
- **Carrefour Lusophone** – The Coalition was asked to address one of the meetings of the Carrefour, a youth group based in Montreal (founded in 2001) to defend and promote the rights and interests of lusophone youth in Quebec. A collaboration resulted in which the Carrefour presented a proposal to the *Fonds Jeunesse du Quebec* based in part on the one presented by the Coalition to the Trillium Foundation in Ontario.

The tutoring/mentoring piece of the grant, *Projet de Tutorat*, took place from February-June 2005. The Carrefour was also encouraged to contact Working Women Community Centre (WWCC) and Project Diploma to ensure continuation of this initiative but the project was not sustained after the grant ran out.

- The campaign to save SCAs – it merits greater explanation, see following section.

The Campaign to save School Community Advisors (SCAs)

The Coalition participated in the retirement ceremony for the late and SCA Valter Lopes on February 28, 2002, after working for the TBE/TDSB for 26 years (**). He was instrumental in assisting the work of the TPPA as a liaison group of the TBE. At that time, the Coalition membership, and other liaison groups of the TDSB, would have not

foreseen that the whole professional category of SCA would be extinguished a year later, in March 28, 2003, after 28 years of existence. Other than Valter, two other of the twenty-two SCAs were Portuguese-Canadian – Marta Brum and Filomena da Costa.

Under the leadership of Doug Hum, of *the Toronto Federation of Chinese Parents* (TFCP), the campaign to save the SCAs was initiated by a letter written in December 2002 by what became known as the *Community Advisors Advocacy Coalition* (SAAC). This Coalition met on 155 College shortly before the physical and symbolic move of the TDSB headquarters to North York.

On January 8, deputations were made to the TDSB trustees' meeting, three press conferences were held for mainstream and ethnic media, and a petition was sent to Queen's Park, to no avail. The motion presented to the TDSB on March 26 by Trustee Fletcher was defeated and the SCAs were eliminated as a category before the end of the school year.

The Portuguese-Canadian Coalition was actively involved in the campaign to save the SCAs. It held its own press conference at Queen's Park on February 07, 2003, with M.P.P. Rosario Marchese as the host, and it participated actively in the SAAC meetings, letter writing (January 22, 2003), radio interviews, etc, as well as producing a flyer in Portuguese explaining the main responsibilities of SCAs at school and Board level.

Finally, a written deputation was presented to the TDSB by Fernando Nunes, V.P. of the Portuguese-Canadian Congress, on March 26, and an article was published Orbit Magazine, to document the loss of the SCAs, only recently replaced by a new category of Community Support Workers (CSW).



SCAs: Marta Brum at the centre, from row

The Tutoring Project

After five years of meetings, it became obvious that meeting with politicians and school boards - i.e. doing lobbying work, with a view at improving strategies to improve the academic success of Luso-Canadians - was falling short of Coalition members' expectations. And this especially in a political climate where equity issues were no longer driving the agenda of politicians and senior staff in education.

The Coalition centred its efforts, in the Fall of 2000, on applying for a grant to The Ontario Trillium Foundation that would provide a multi-year, community-run, tutoring /mentoring program. After a series of meetings with member organizations, including the newest member, Working Women Community Centre (WWCC), a proposal, entitled A Tutoring/ mentoring Programme for Portuguese-Canadian Students in Inner-city Schools, was presented to the Foundation. In Dec. 9, 2000, the Foundation approved a grant to WWCC, as the lead organization, for \$210,000.00 over 36 months.

The lead organization was chosen on the basis of being a medium-sized non-profit centre with an interest and background on mentoring issues (it ran a mentoring program for young women) and a track-record for administering grants that the Coalition - as a non-incorporated, volunteer-run organization – did not have. The signing partners on this project were the Coalition and the Portuguese Interagency Network (PIN).

The grant started in 2001 and finished in 2004. Nancy Brasil was hired as the Coordinator, as well as an assistant to the coordinator, and the Coalition became the lead organization in the Steering Committee during the duration of the project.

Although the grant came to an end in 2004, thanks to the fundraising efforts of the WWCC led by Executive Director Marcie Ponte, in collaboration with *Academia do Bacalhau*, and other dedicated volunteers, a successful fundraising formula was found, namely four “Meet the Mayor” dinners, held annually from 2004 to 2007.



Left: Dinner with the Mayor. Right: Mia & Ivo Azevedo, *Academia do Bacalhau*, & Marcie Ponte, WWCC

In May 2004, Sonia Neves was hired as the program coordinator. Run by a paid coordinator, with volunteer tutors, recruited in universities and community colleges, the program On Your Mark was born with the approval of the Coalition membership, who understood the importance of turning their volunteer efforts to a community-controlled project. It was the crowning achievement of half a decade of meetings with school board staff and politicians, who valued the work done by the Coalition.

In 2008, the WWCC was successful in securing funding from both the TDSB and the TCDSB to help sustain the program. This funding continues and both boards of Education contribute in-kind free space in their schools to run the program. The program serves, at present approximately 300 children from 53 schools tutored by close to 200 volunteers. However, there is a waiting list and as the program expands to the Spanish community, with close to 100 children participating in the first year, the program continues to need additional funds.

Lastly, homage must be paid to the precursors of the idea to put in place a tutoring program. The idea for the original grant was based on the Outreach work of YUPA and UTPA, first initiated in the 1980s. One of the first teachers of Portuguese descent in the public Toronto School Board, the now-retired Luis Carlos Moniz, had unsuccessfully and many years ago, tried to interest the senior staff on the idea of such a program for at-risk students. However the program was only formalized in the early 1980s by YUPA, under the guidance of Fernando Nunes.

Conclusion

Volunteering to benefit Canadian students of Portuguese background and to motivate their parents become involved in the school system so that their children can achieve academic success and a measure of fluency in their mother tongue, or the language of their grand-parents, has been an effort that most of us gladly made for a decade. Some of us have continued engaged as individuals in the same spirit.

The current absence of an organized group of activist is not due to lack of need or interest. As such, we continue to be attentive and to support whatever initiatives will come to our attention and in particular the project On Your Mark, which represents the culmination of our collective efforts as volunteers.

(*) The FCPBP agreed to defray \$500 towards cost of materials to celebrate June Portuguese History & Heritage Month, for the total of \$1,565.00 spent on resource material binders, colour photocopies and posters. The TDSB covered most of the costs of the materials and the amount provided for the Federation was also used towards the purchase of a filing cabinet to keep the Coalition files, initially at WWCC.

(**) Valter Lopes died June 29-30, 2006. He is sadly missed for his work on behalf of students, parents, and the community in general.

APPENDICES

a) List of Coalition Files

ABC Show- CFMT

Advisory Community Meetings

Advisory Group Action on EQAO

Articles –Media

Diary of an Educator – Articles

Finances

General Meetings

History- Governance

International Languages – Deputations to the TDSB and the TCDSB, from 1998-2002
and direct action in two schools:

- Regal Road School (TDSB)
- St. Anthony and St. Sebastian Schools(TCDSB)

June Portuguese and Heritage/History Month

-Federation Proposals

Letters of Support

Meetings with Ministers of Education:

Janet Ecker

David Johnson

John Snobelen

David Cooke

Membership

Participation in Education Initiatives

Carrefour Lusophone

Year 2000 Committee

Rosario Marchese Popular Forum

Portuguese as a Teachable Subject

Ministry of education

OISE

Faculty of Education- York University

Recognition of UTPA & UPTA's Outreach Program

TCDSB – Coalition Collaboration

Addressing the Needs of Second Language Learners

Literacy Club Deputations

International Languages Deputations

TBE/TDSB – Coalition Collaboration

Best Practices Project
International Languages Deputations
HELACON/ILACON
Budget Deputation
School Community Advisers (SCAs)
Meeting with TDSB Chair and Vice-Chair
Report on Parent, Student and Community Involvement
Presentation for Principals Wards 3-4
Portuguese Parents' Forum

Tutoring/Mentoring Project

Trillium Application Submission
Steering Committee Participation
Outcomes
Fundraising Initiatives

University of Toronto Lectureship Petition

B) List of articles in print:

Família Portuguesa by Katherine Da Motta Ponte

- Education Forum: It's time to deal with the challenges facing Portuguese students (Oct. 23/04)
- Addressing the problem of scholastic achievement in the Portuguese Community: are education conferences enough? (Oct. 30/94)
- Taking the next step: do you care about the future of our community? (Nov. 06/94)
- Majority of schools in the Portuguese community have below average results (Nov. 13/94)
- Over 1,000 signatures (Nov. 20/94)
- Trustees: get them working for you (Nov. 27/94)
- Advancement through unity (Dec. 04/94)
- Stay in School (Dec. 11/94)
- Women in the workplace (December 18/94)
- Holiday reflections (December 25/95)
- A new year's resolution worth keeping. Part I – General study skills (January 01/95)
- A new year's resolution worth keeping. Part II – Test taking strategies (January 08/95)
- Portuguese Canadian students Federation's first board (January 15/95)
- A new year's resolution worth keeping. Part III – Paper research strategies (January 22/95)

- A new year's resolution worth keeping. Part IV – Putting pen to paper (January 29/95)
- Recognizing academic achievement in the Portuguese community (February 05/95)
- A message from the Portuguese Canadian Student Federation (February 12/95)
- The coexistence of academic success and Portuguese pride (February 19/95)
- Destreaming towards what end? (February 26/95)
- Royal Learning Commission on Learning (March 05/95)
- Job search strategies (March 12/95)
- Parents have an important role to play (March 19/95)
- Two Portuguese appointments to the Mayor's committee (April 09/95)
- Education Support Group (April 16/95)
- Portuguese meet with the Minister of Education (April 23/95)
- Portuguese: a valuable international language (April 30/95)
- Speak out against violence (May 07/95)
- Stopping the spread of hate crime (May 21/95)
- Portugal Day: a celebration of Portuguese achievement (May 28/95)
- Portugal Day writing contest (May 28/95)
- Exam time plus Portugal Day writing contest – winning entries (June 04/95)
- Picking the right elementary school (June 11/95)
- The high-school decision, part I (June 18/95)
- The high-school decision, part II (June 25/95)
- Shipwreck riches, part I (July 16/95)
- Shipwreck riches, part II (July 23/95)
- Welcome back (Sep. 17/95)
- AIDS awareness (Sep. 24/95)
- SIDA (Oct. 01/95)
- AIDS prevention and AIDS and youth (Oct. 08/95)
- Volunteering: a benefit to yourself and others (Oct. 15/95)
- Opportunities for volunteering (Oct. 22/95)
- Parent-teacher interviews (Nov. 05/95)
- Portuguese-Canadian Student Federation: a great first year (Nov. 12/95)
- Caring communities find a way (Nov. 19/95)
- Let's talk about drugs (Nov. 26/95)
- We want answers. We want justice (youth death while in police custody) (Dec. 3/95)
- Activism can make a difference (Dec. 10/95)
- Give the gift of education (Dec. 17/95)
- A safe and merry Christmas (Dec. 24/95)

Portuguese Post by Ilda Januario

- Of Deficits, School Boards and Community Concerns (Sep. 06/02)
- Starting and Finishing High-School (Oct. 03/02)
- A participação dos pais nas reuniões escolares: quem vela por isso? (Parents' participation in school meetings: who looks after this?) (Oct. 17, 2002)
- The budget cuts proposed by Supervisor Paul Christie at the TDSB: How will Portuguese-Canadian students be affected? (Nov. 29, 2002)
- A teacher voices her concerns about immigrant and working-class parents' disadvantage in schools (January 09/2003)
- Project Diploma: What the results of the survey tell us (January 23, 2003)
- School Community Advisors nas escolas públicas – SCAs in public schools (February 06, 2003)
- “The schools we need”: A report we all need to read (Feb. 20, 2003)
- Once we were slave traders - A lecture by Prof. José Curto at Victoria College, (March 06, 2003)
- June Portuguese Heritage and History Month in Catholic and Public Schools (March 06, 2003)
- O ensino do português nas escolas secundárias, um passo em frente, dois passos para trás (*The teaching of Portuguese in secondary school: one step forward, two steps backward, March 20, 2003*)
- São onze horas da manhã, tem a certeza que o seu filho está na escola? (*It's 11 in the morning. Are you sure your child is at school? April 03, 2003*)
- Equity in Education: A conference about inequality in public schools (April 17, 2003)
- Public Attitudes Towards Education in Ontario: the 14th OISE/UT Survey (May 1st, 2003)
- Interview in Portuguese with the departing Reader of Portuguese at U of T, Dr. Aida Baptista (May 2003)
- O fim do ano escolar está à porta mas nunca é tarde para se informar sobre o rendimento escolar do seu filho (*The end of school year is here but it is never too late to find out about your child's achievement, May 29, 2003*)
- Professores pioneiros luso-canadianos formam-se e reformam-se (*Pioneer Luso-Canadian teachers graduate and retire, June 26, 2003*)

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