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Chair

Mr. Colin Mayes

Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development

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● (0925)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC)): I call to order this meeting of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, September 26, 2006.

Here are the orders of the day. We have two witnesses today. From the University of Winnipeg, we have Mary Young, director of the Aboriginal Student Services Centre. Welcome. Also, from the B.C. First Nations Leadership Council, we have Nathan Matthew, senior advisor and negotiator for education. We thank you for being here and on quite short notice. We really do appreciate the effort.

We're going to proceed with two presentations of around 10 minutes each, and then I'll ask committee members to question you on issues related to post-secondary education, until the end of the meeting at 11.

We do have a translator, so you're going to receive some questions, I'm sure, in French. We'll make sure you're hooked up.

Mary Young, would you like to begin, please?

Ms. Mary Young (Director, Aboriginal Students Services Centre, University of Winnipeg): *Bonjour.* [*Witness speaks in her native language.*]

I think I need another PhD to figure out the technical system.

I say *meegwetch* for inviting me to come and speak this morning.

I have been at the university for 22 years, so I think I might know what I'm going to talk about today. One of the major things that needs to change with post-secondary education is the money the students get. They still get $675 a month to live on. I tried to live on that in 1973. Métis students have absolutely no funding. Many of them just get student loans, and you know what that means, how much they owe when they leave.

Accessing post-secondary education is a major feat. It begins much earlier. How many aboriginal students graduate from high school? If you don't graduate from high school, you can't access post-secondary education. We have trouble with turnover of teachers in first nations communities. We are still asked to give up our identity. We are still asked to be assimilated into mainstream society. Language, place, culture are the most important gifts that we were given by the Great Spirit, and we need those to be able to get through high school and post-secondary education.

When students come to the cities, they can't get appropriate housing. They have to rent apartments in areas where it's not safe to live or study. I haven't seen much change in terms of when I applied for an apartment and I was told to my face that I wouldn't be rented that room because I was aboriginal. I worked by myself advising, counselling, recruiting, liaising with communities for 16 years at the University of Winnipeg. When I went away, there was no one in my office. How could I go out and recruit other students and say to them, “These are the services available for aboriginal students”, when nobody was there?

Today we have a beautiful centre. That centre is a home away from home for many students. If we didn't have that centre we would lose many aboriginal students, because they don't stay. They have to have a connection to the university; they have to have a connection with the staff and faculty. We still struggle with alienation. We still struggle with a sense of belonging. We still struggle with fear of failure. Those were the feelings of separation that I talked about in my master's thesis. Those are very real issues. If we can't handle those things, we will not graduate from university.

I come before you as Anishinabekwe. I come before you as the daughter of my mother, Isabelle, and my father, Charlie. I also sit here representing the University of Winnipeg. I have learned to balance those two kinds of education. If I do not respect my father's teachings and my mother's teachings, and her personality and who she was, then I shouldn't be sitting here. When we talk about students in post-secondary education, we need to remember who they are.

With that, I say *meegwetch* for inviting me this morning.

● (0930)

The Chair: Mr. Lévesque, do you have a problem with your translation?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Absolutely not. Ms. Young seemed to having some problems with her earpiece. I merely wanted to mention to her that she could remove it during her presentation if it bothered her.

I'll wait my turn to ask questions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lévesque.

Mr. Matthew.

Mr. Nathan Matthew (Senior Advisor and Negotiator, Education, BC First Nations Leadership Council): *Bonjour*, good morning, and *weyt-k*. It's good to be invited. Thank you for the invitation to appear before this committee, which seems to be influential over the lives of first nations people, and in this case particularly over education.

I should take a time check. It's 10 minutes?

I'm a Secwepemc, a Shuswap person from B.C. I live not too far from Colin in the North Thompson, north of Kamloops, in a community, on a reserve, the Simpcw First Nation. I was born and raised there. I have a background in education. I've been a residential school administrator, a band planner, a principal of a first nations school, and I have extensive experience just dealing with committee work over the last 20 years with regard to first nations education from early childhood to post-secondary. Currently, I am adviser to the First Nations Leadership Council in B.C., as well as the First Nations Education Steering Committee and the First Nations Schools Association in British Columbia.

With that, I think the discussion around post-secondary education is always timely; it's always been there for the last number of years. The expectation that first nations lives can be improved by participation in education I think is very true—I believe that, and I think we all do. But we have always been challenged, in the last couple of generations anyway, over the last hundred years, in gaining the benefit of an education that will allow us to succeed in a contemporary world, and not only to succeed in the contemporary world but to do it from the unique perspective of first nations people in terms of maintaining our language and culture as part of that success overall.

So the experience I have had is I think similar to the experiences of many other first nations people. I'm in my mid-fifties, and neither of my parents had any post-secondary education; they went to a residential school, they both went and completed that. In that institution you completed at grade 8 with absolutely no expectation of going on to take advantage of the benefits of a post-secondary education, to get into the professions and into business and that sort of thing. That was not the purpose of those institutions. The other negative aspect of the institutions is well-documented as well, the negative impact in terms of culture and language and that sort of thing.

Neither of my parents went to post-secondary education, and they had no expectation of going to any post-secondary education experience, and neither was there any support, either from their homes or from government.

I think to some extent we're still living the hangover from that experience. The expectations are still low, most of the kids don't expect to go on to post-secondary education, and there's a lack of significant support along the way, from the communities, the parents, and in the government's role in financial support, through policy and allocations of resources for post-secondary education.

Like Mary, I think a good education has a firm foundation in early childhood, in the K to 12 area. We simply don't have enough first nations learners who are succeeding in the K to 12 area to really close the gap significantly. If all of our kids graduated from grade 12 in the next number of years, we still wouldn't be closing the gap. There are very large numbers of first nations learners who simply do not have the benefits of a good quality grade 12 graduation certificate. Many of our students are graduating from grade 12, but without significant or appropriate credentials in terms of course work to go on into the post-secondary education program of their choice.

● (0935)

There's a huge pool of first nations learners out there who still need the benefit of a grade 12 education. So it's not simply post-secondary education that we have to deal with. We have to deal with early childhood education and K to 12. But the academics are a real challenge—the foundations that lead to success in post-secondary education. We're being challenged in that way. We're simply not getting the appropriate academic success to lead us to be successful in post-secondary areas.

We don't have many role models yet within our communities. I don't believe a lot of our children are being positively counselled and have career plans that clearly lead to post-secondary education. So those areas are really important to deal with.

Staying with the K to 12, we're still challenged in our first nations schools with having the appropriate support, particularly funding for the schools themselves, the schooling, and the systems for first nations learning in our communities.

A challenge is that entrance requirements for universities are rising. It's not just, “get a grade 12 certificate and you can get into university”. Many universities don't accept just any graduates. They have levels of entrance requirements that are quite a bit higher than just having a certificate. You have to graduate with a certain grade-point average before you can even be let in the door. So we require not just success but strong success at the grade 12 level to get into post-secondary education.

We have a large pool of first nations learners who don't have grade 12 or don't have sufficient credentials to get into post-secondary programs. We have a university-college education program to provide support for students going into post-secondary education, but that's just a one-year program. I believe we need more than just one year to support learners bridging their secondary experience with the requirements for entry into post-secondary education.

A very large issue that continues to come back to first nations is that neither Indian and Northern Affairs nor the federal government really takes responsibility for providing adequate resourcing for post-secondary education. It's not a firm mandate through legislation. The Indian Act is interpreted such that post-secondary education assistance is just a matter of policy. Down the road, first nations believe that the federal government might just set it aside and there won't be any support.

Costs are a real factor. Tuition allowances are limited, and the cost of tuition has been sky-rocketing in the last number of years. I think you're all aware of that from the stats. That is really a significant issue, as well as the cost of living. I know that support is pegged to the student loans program, but for first nations learners coming from remote rural areas, costs can be very significant.

Do I have more time?

● (0940)

The Chair: You're fine.

Mr. Nathan Matthew: I was worried about that.

Certainly we're challenged just in terms of the broad social condition of first nations people in terms of poverty, in terms of access to services in our communities, health, addictions—all leading to challenges to just being successful in post-secondary education. So I think there has to be a more integrated look at how to support first nations in post-secondary education. It's not just post-secondary education, it's also supporting first nations in a holistic way and taking a look at the situation with regard to lifelong learning, rather than simply early childhood, K to 12, and post-secondary education.

Another issue is that the segmentation of responsibility of government to post-secondary education leads to fragmented programming, where you have some of the training taken by Human Resources Development Canada—that's the apprenticeship-type programs—and other supports such as child care are by other human services departments outside of Indian and Northern Affairs.

So it seems government doesn't really talk, the departments don't talk to one another or have a coordinated approach to supporting first nations learners at the post-secondary level.

One of the key issues, I believe, is that in the area of trades, the post-secondary programs through Indian and Northern Affairs don't allow for the support of apprenticeships and trades. That's a real challenge, and although there is funding that comes through other federal sources, it's a challenge to get those two bodies to work together, especially when it comes down to what happens in our community for provision of support. It's a real challenge.

Another area that we feel is a challenge is actually provision of the post-secondary services by first nations. So the development of first nations post-secondary institutions, we believe, is the right way to go in terms of first nations taking control and responsibility of post-secondary education, but there is very little support for that. So the rise of first nations post-secondary institutions across the country is being limited and the potential for their support for first nations in a positive way is limited because there is a lack of policy to support them in terms of their core revenue stream.

I have just a couple of ideas of what we're doing in B.C. We seem to do it a little bit differently in British Columbia. We think the best practice is led by, number one, first nations looking after their own education, having jurisdiction, and in post-secondary education, it's no different. We make the decisions, we develop the support systems, and we become responsible for the whole program. So we're looking toward that and developing ideas around jurisdiction. We have, of course, spent a lot of time developing partnerships. We've developed the B.C. post-secondary education and training partners program, which includes the B.C. Assembly of First Nations, the Ministry of Advanced Education, Indian and Northern Affairs, the University Presidents' Council, the B.C. College Presidents, and our own indigenous adult and higher learning association, working together to improve the levels of participation and success of aboriginal learners. We believe that working together with major stakeholders is a positive thing.

In that group, we have worked to identify areas of moving forward that we feel would be moving in a good and positive way. Number one is student support, both in the community and in post-secondary institutions. There is support for our own counsellors and administrators to have more specific training to provide counselling and academic support, in addition to institutional support in both first nations and public institutions, including program support and student support services, helping students make their way individually.

● (0945)

Another area we're working on is data. We don't believe we have enough information to make appropriate decisions. We want to collect information on a research basis about how our kids are doing and make decisions based on that.

The other area we're working on is a joint post-secondary education group in our own indigenous adult and higher learning organization. The Indian student support program—that's the Indian and Northern Affairs post-secondary program for institutions—and our own first nations education steering committee post-secondary subcommittee are working together to provide and strengthen first nations delivery of post-secondary education programs. And of course we're doing our own "working toward" research, going toward quality assurance in terms of programming and support for learning, and developing handbooks on post-secondary best practices for our own institutions and our communities.

There are many areas we can talk about in terms of post-secondary education. We do believe that funding is a real issue, not just funding for no purpose, but based on what we believe through research in order to meet the real needs to support first nations in terms of giving them the opportunities, making sure they have access, making sure they have a good solid K to 12 beginning, and to give them positive support once they get access to their programs in post-secondary. In many of those areas we're challenged by the resourcing, the organization, and the pulling together in terms of partnerships to complete the task.

Thank you.

[*Witness speaks in his native language*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Matthew.

We'll move to questions now, and we'll start with the Liberal Party.

Who would like to speak first?

Mr. Merasty.

Mr. Gary Merasty (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, Lib.): First of all, thank you very much for your presentations. I think they speak loudly to some of the challenges you've addressed.

In one of my previous lives, I was a grand chief for six years. One of the biggest issues that emerged, of course, was funding. Logically, the next questions after that were: where do we direct the funding, and how do we invest strategically to support our students at the K to 12 and post-secondary levels?

In order to answer those questions, Mr. Matthew touches upon data collection, which helps drive strategies that come from the community level. If we don't know what our numbers are, how well we're doing, and where the challenges are, sometimes it's difficult for us to invest in those areas.

I'm a real strong supporter of data collection. In that light, I know that the Department of Indian Affairs doesn't really have an educational expertise; they collect numbers basically from a quantitative perspective. One of the things we're looking at here is trying to get the qualitative...an understanding of what works and what some of the best practices are.

My questions are going to be around funding, in one sense, and barriers on the other. I know if I had a chart in front of me, our population is going like this in the aboriginal community, the funding has basically flatlined, and the gap between the two is growing significantly. So directly, with respect to funding—and you've both identified issues there—could you comment on what that may mean for us as a people or for our students in the future?

The second thing is with respect to some of the barriers, aside from funding. Ms. Young specifically talked about housing. I know back home, because some of our bands don't tell students they are approved for funding until July, all the good housing is gone and they end up, for lack of a better term, in the ghetto, which affects their quality of life and the time dedicated to their studies. So maybe you could provide some thoughts on that as well.

And I have just a final thing. It seems to me that there's a critical mass of knowledge or information coming forward from successful programs such as you've both referred to—and I'll use the Saskatchewan context—whether it's Indian teacher education programs, native law centres, SIIT, and other support and access programs. They have the program at the U of W, the partnerships. It seems to me that we're starting to identify critical factors to success so that we can share those best practices and move forward quickly.

I don't know who wants to start, but maybe you could make some comments on those areas.

● (0950)

Ms. Mary Young: When we form partnerships with other organizations, to me that means we're going to work together. For many years, since the era of the residential school system, we have walked not together but away from each other. Aboriginal people and non-aboriginal people don't know each other in Canada, and we need to close that gap. We have to have relevant curricula in high schools and universities and let aboriginal people know that we live on this land, we're from this land, and we are important.

You asked for real issues. This is my dissertation on my educational journey—and I'm sure Nathan has experienced some of the things I have. I graduated twice from grade 12, once from a commercial program, and when I said I wanted to go to university, the guidance counsellor laughed. I said, "I want to go to university." I was placed in that stream because I wasn't expected to become somebody other than a stenographer. So when you ask about high school and the education of young people, we cannot stream aboriginal students anymore. It goes back to what Nathan was talking about in careers; otherwise the money is gone.

For me, that collaboration is very, very important. The supports must be in place with educational authorities who send students to universities and say, "You take five full courses, which is 30 credit hours." Many people who work in those positions do not have a university education, so how can they understand what university means? University, to us, is still very new.

When I was called to come to this meeting this morning, there was no way I was going to say no. This is too important, and we have to look at those many issues that you brought up.

Mr. Nathan Matthew: In terms of funding, I think we have to get real in terms of the numbers we're dealing with. We have an idea about how many students aren't getting access to post-secondary education just because of funding. They're eligible, but they're not getting in. We don't have any research tools to tell us the real numbers on that. I think we have to develop those and make sure first nations are involved with the collection of information.

We need to be tracking students: how are we doing prior to the students getting to post-secondary education? A lot of the problems we're having in terms of success are predictable. If they're not on an academic math or English track that allows them to get into a post-secondary program, an academic program, what kind of expectation are we giving our students? A lot of our students really believe they're going to get into university just because they have a certificate. That's not real. I think we have to make sure we have a good information base about the students we're dealing with and not depend on Statistics Canada or anything like that and make some guesses five years after the fact. That I think is a real challenge.

In terms of the actual funding, I think we should be dealing with tuition costs, the actual costs of tuition. We should have the cost of living, all the issues around what it costs to live: food, transportation, accommodation, and child care. We should be experts on that. If we're responsible for post-secondary education for first nations learners, then we're the ones who have the responsibility of making intelligent decisions and less of a back-and-forth argument about the true situation of aboriginal learners.

Right now, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs has information about post-secondary education. They have all the information, but they don't share it with first nations. That's a real challenge.

● (0955)

The Chair: Okay, we'll move to Mr. Lemay.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Thank you for joining us.

First of all, your presence here today impresses me. More extraordinary still is the fact that you have completed post-secondary studies. You have to admit that this is quite rare in aboriginal communities, too rare in fact. That's why we made the decision to study the future of post-secondary education in aboriginal communities. I'd like to congratulate you personally—and probably on behalf of all my colleagues here—for achieving such a high level of education.

I come from a small town in the Abitibi region called Amos. It is located some six hours north of here by automobile. We had one native residential in town. Over the years, we always managed to segregate natives from non-natives.

Your observations are a very accurate reflection of the events of the 1960s and 1970s which unfortunately, resulted in many First Nations losing their culture, a culture that today they are attempting to reclaim.

Mr. Matthew said something very important and it has stuck with me: Learning to live in a modern world almost cost us our culture. Now we must learn to sustain it.

My question is for Mr. Matthew. How can aboriginal culture be sustained through post-secondary studies? Let me give you one example. Back home in Rouyn-Noranda, the Cree own all of the buildings in which students from the North reside while attending school. These residences have been adapted to meet their needs. I wanted to point this out because at least something is being done somewhere. Perhaps communities should...

Sadly, there are no such residences in Winnipeg, Regina or Montreal where members of First Nations can meet, without necessarily feeling cut off from the rest of the world.

Ms. Young, your MA thesis is extremely interesting. Could the Library of Parliament possibly get a copy of it for inclusion in our files? In my view, it touches on a number of very important issues.

How does a person, often someone from a remote aboriginal community, manage not be assimilated into so-called Canadian society when he or she relocates to a large city to the South to study medicine, law or some other discipline? Is there a particular approach we could advocate or a recommendation that we could include in our report?

Those are my two questions.

● (1000)

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Matthew: I think the question was how do you preserve the culture for first nations. It's a very high-level question, and it has to do with the Government of Canada and the people of Canada—the non-first nations people of Canada—giving full respect and recognition to the aboriginal title and rights as set out in section 35 of the Constitution, recognizing the right to the land for those who have aboriginal title, updating the old treaties to ensure there's a contemporary perspective given to those, and really respecting and recognizing first nations as having a right to live in this country as unique people. If we can live in our own traditional territories with rights to the land and the resources and the benefits of the land and resources and the benefits of having the right to associate amongst ourselves and create our own political and cultural and economic institutions, that, I believe, will preserve first nations.

That's my short answer. So I think that's the problem. We have been constantly challenged over the years by non-first nations governments and non-first nations people to our right to live as unique people in this land. There still is a strong attitude against that idea and I think that's the challenge. If there is respect and recognition, then I really do believe that first nations people will look after their own culture and their own languages. If we had the benefits of the resources in our traditional territories, we wouldn't be coming to the federal government to fund our post-secondary education or anything. There's sufficient money within our lands, sufficient benefits to be had, that if we had access to that, then I think that would be a solution for this country.

Ms. Mary Young: *Meegwetch* for asking that question.

It has been a challenge to maintain my language and my culture because I decided I was going to live in Winnipeg. When I was going through high school and when I was facing racism and discrimination, I didn't want to be with aboriginal people. I didn't want to be aboriginal. It was only after I went back spiritually and thought about what my father had taught me, it was only then that I was able to succeed in university, in my life in the city. And I can't believe I actually agreed and believed other people that aboriginal people were not good people, including my parents.

When I talk about real issues in school and in universities, those are the kinds of things I talk about because I had to spend many years unravelling all those identities that were given to me. I am a Nishnawbe. I am not aboriginal.

[*Witness speaks in her native language*] We were given the language, Anishinaabemowin, not Soto, not Ojibway. So the identity and the culture is really crucial.

And if that student from the far north wants to move into the city and practise there, he or she needs to carry their language, their culture, to survive where they'll end up, and the patients that he or she is going to serve will recognize how proud that person is. Nathan is right. Each of us has a responsibility of keeping our languages and keeping them alive, and we have to remember that they are not dead languages.

I hope that answers your question, Mr. Lemay.

● (1005)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move on to Madam Crowder, please.

Sorry, Mr. Matthew.

Mr. Nathan Matthew: I want to address what you can do at the post-secondary level to preserve culture. I'm associated with Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, B.C. One of the ideas we're looking at is a community of first nations learners. In this case we take the students who haven't quite made the eligibility for full post-secondary entrance, so we're preparing them in terms of college or university preparation. We'd bring in first nations, 15 or 20, and keep them together and give them particular support. The support would be largely coming from themselves in terms of looking after their own interests and in terms of working successfully on their issues at the university. That's one area.

Another, and this is in terms of the federal government, is providing centres in universities for first nations, places for students to gather and to deal with their issues, to have conversations, and for the university itself to have their own staff come and talk to first nations about first nations issues and get acquainted a little better, because in a lot of cases first nations just disappear into the school or the post-secondary population.

Many first nations have elders-in-residence programs, so there's a body a post-secondary learner can go and talk to and get counselling and get some of that security around culture. A lot have specific hiring practices attracting first nations aboriginal instruction. Of course, in B.C. every post-secondary institution has a first nations aboriginal counsellor on staff to provide support for first nations learners.

In many cases, campuses at our post-secondary institutions have very specific physical aspects with first nations motifs. When you go there as a first nations person, there are things you recognize, just in the buildings and the art that's on the wall and that sort of thing, that make it less alien. Many things can be done to preserve culture and a sense of identity and esteem for first nations learners in a post-secondary environment.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Crowder is next.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank you both for coming before this committee. I come from Vancouver Island and had the good fortune to work at Malaspina University-College, where a significant number of aboriginal students were on campus, so I have had some firsthand experience in working with aboriginal students and their issues.

I will give a bit of context. When the committee decided to look at the post-secondary area, it was not that the committee didn't recognize the very serious issues in the K to 12 programs but that we were waiting for the department to report on some other issues they were looking at in the K to 12 area and we didn't want to pre-empt their study.

The other thing is that significant numbers of studies have identified barriers. One example was the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. We've got a binder full of executive summaries on studies on barriers to post-secondary education. You've certainly listed some of them: poverty, housing, support, resources, financial recognition—I mean, the list goes on and on. Demographics—Mr. Merasty talked about the changing demographics and the fact that we're going to have significantly more young people.

I don't want to see us spending endless weeks on a study to look at barriers that have already been identified; I want to know what we need to do in a very real way to close these gaps. I know more funding is one of them, and that's one thing we have to say: there needs to be more money.

There is another issue. One of the things that prompted me to be interested in the post-secondary area was the statement you made at the outset, Mr. Matthew, around the fact that there is no legislation; it is simply policy. I was surprised to find out that post-secondary could disappear off the agenda, or be devolved to provincial governments, because there's no legislative mandate to require the federal government to be involved in post-secondary. I think that's a very real problem.

Could you talk about that? I know you can't solve this problem in five minutes.

● (1010)

Mr. Nathan Matthew: What is the question?

Ms. Jean Crowder: What do we need to do? We've identified the barriers. The gaps are very clear. What do we need to do to get some very real action to address this very real need here?

Mr. Nathan Matthew: As with K to 12 education, we should put post-secondary education more in the hands of first nations people, making first nations people responsible for programming and the results their learners are getting. That's one issue.

Again, to promote partnerships.... The majority of first nations post-secondary learners go to public institutions, and there have to be partnerships, agreements, memoranda of understanding, and protocols between first nations and those public institutions. That, in itself—and I'm not sure how you could legislate that kind of goodwill or planning—is necessary.

If first nations are going to realize their potential in contributing to their own well-being and to this country, we have to take significant steps. In terms of post-secondary education, we really have to put the responsibility and the decision-making into the hands of first nations people—I truly believe that and trust in that process—and as well, really do a better job than we have been in K to 12. We simply are not getting the kinds of graduates necessary for any kind of broad success in post-secondary, simply because we don't have the students graduating with the kind of strength that's necessary. We really aren't looking at the broader spectrum as much as we have to, in terms of going straight from early childhood, K to 12, to post-secondary and taking a lifelong perspective on education for first nations.

Ms. Mary Young: I agree with Nathan that we have performed partnerships. There was a history made a year ago in Winnipeg. The University of Winnipeg had a memorandum of understanding with the southeast tribal council.

They asked me to name the building where the self-governance program was going to be. It was historic because this was the first time the University of Winnipeg partnered with an aboriginal organization. I saw that partnership in a very significant way. So when I tried to come up with the name of the building, I thought about my parents again. My father would refer to my mother as *Ni Wiichiiwaakan*, and my father would say the same thing about her.

So I came up with the term *Wii ChiiWaaKanak*, which means partners. I saw the southeast tribal council as not merely observers; they were going to be equal participants in that memorandum of understanding.

When I was at a meeting, one of the administrators or consultants came in and said, “I don't know how to use that word, so can I just call it 'partners'”? I said, “No, you won't. I spent time; it was in honour of my parents that I named that building, and you will learn to pronounce *Wii ChiiWaaKanak*.” So those are the fights that we need to do in universities.

I teach a course right now called Aboriginal Issues in Education. It's designed for education students. Most of the students in that class are in their fourth and fifth year. Do you know how many don't know anything about the residential school system? We're training these students to become teachers. They need to know the history of aboriginal people in Canada. If they don't have that history, how can they teach children who are having difficulty with who they are because they don't know how to speak the language? So we need to change how we train teachers.

Only in the last three years have we had courses on indigenous knowledge in university, at least at the University of Winnipeg. I imagine other universities are more advanced than we are. When we have courses like indigenous knowledge and indigenous science, we're telling aboriginal students—and all students—that those courses are important, significant. That will help us collaborate with one another. So if there's a recommendation...Nathan referred to centres. We need these kinds of centres to legitimize those activities, to legitimize indigenous knowledge and science.

If I could put that building somewhere in the University of Winnipeg, do you know what that would mean to the aboriginal community in the inner-city area? We are saying, we welcome you; you come and visit us. We need to have those centres.

Thank you very much.

● (1015)

The Chair: Thank you.

Can we move to Mr. Stanton?

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to both of you for taking the time to join us here today. I found your presentations very informative and insightful.

I take it, very clearly, that the very best interventions, in terms of advancing post-secondary education for native peoples, are really investments in the ECE, K to 12 regime. It occurs to me there are really two realities for native peoples: the reality of federal schools on reserve and those that are off reserve and, I'll say, integrated.

I have a situation in my own riding with Beausoleil First Nation, which is on an island. Through the early childhood years and K to 8 they're at their first nation, and it's a different reality, and then for 9 to 12 they have to leave their community for three months, because of the ice, and board in other non-native homes to go to high school.

You mentioned a lack of information about measuring these kinds of outcomes, but I wonder if you could speak even anecdotally about how those two different streams have created different outcomes for native people. Are there any lessons to be learned from that one stream versus the other, that being on reserve, where it's just native children going through the education system, enriching their culture, as opposed to those who have been in an integrated situation—Métis, non-first nations, natives—and what are the differences in those two outcomes?

● (1020)

Mr. Nathan Matthew: The difference in outcome hasn't been that great. Both first nations schools and public schools are challenged, in terms of success, generally speaking, in attendance, retention of students to grade 12, or to whatever grade they go to, and gaining specific academic skills. There's still a challenge there on both sides, so I don't see either....

The ultimate solution is making sure the first nations have the jurisdiction to run their own education programs in the same fashion. We should have jurisdiction over a whole lot of other things as well. But for education very specifically, in first nations schools, where the schools are run by the community, the experience parents have, in terms of making decisions to the benefit of their own kids, is really a benefit to the community, in terms of just oversight and responsibility for learning. There's a lot of capacity at that level, in terms of the adults, and I think that's a real benefit that's really not measured.

On the public side, often the kids are just away to a public school and there are very few provisions for first nations parents to be involved, certainly in the governance aspect. In terms of where we've been on both sides, in terms of first nations and public schools, there are still challenges.

In B.C., the challenge for first nations schools, until recently, and certainly it still is—-we were underfunded up to 30% less for first nations schools compared to public schools of the same size and location. Research has shown that. We recently, last year, have made a change in the province of B.C. in the way Indian Affairs allocates funding for first nations schools. We're still challenged, of course, and that's something that has to be dealt with. The public schools have signed a 6% increase in teachers' salaries, and there is no balance on the first nations side to reflect that, because we're competing for teachers as well.

There are challenges, and they are the reasons for there being more benefit on one side or the other, depending on how well either side can be supported by first nations and how well they can attend to the concerns and the circumstance of first nations people.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Blaney.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Thank you, Ms. Young and Mr. Matthew, for coming here to share your experiences with us.

My question is directed to Mr. Matthew.

We were told that you were actively involved in negotiating a three-party agreement between the Government of British Columbia, the federal government, and First Nations, with a view to making significant improvements to education at the primary and secondary levels.

Could you give us a brief overview of this agreement and tell us which components will combine to produce positive results? What key components will increase the number of school graduates, since surely this is the objective sought?

This agreement is often held up as a model and I'd like to know which components are responsible for making it a success. Can you also tell me why real results will be achieved over the next seven years, instead of hearing people say that this was merely another agreement born of good intentions?

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Matthew: We signed the memorandum of understanding several years ago; I think it was in 1996. The province, the federal government, and first nations agreed to work together to improve the success of aboriginal learners, first nations learners, in both public schools and first nations schools.

Of course, we've been talking with the province. We've had an association with them for quite a while. It seems that we've had a longer association with the federal government, and of course we have our own aspirations. All parties said they wanted to do something about the terrible circumstances in education for first nations learners. We finally said we'd agree to work together on the issue, rather than having a kind of spy versus spy or an adversarial position. There are many reasons to argue about who is responsible, how much money is needed, and what should be done, instead of getting together and putting our best efforts towards collaboration and cooperation. So we did that, and we challenged the federal government for a signature in terms of an agreement.

After that, we invited other major stakeholders: the teachers' union; the BCTF; the trustees of about 100 school districts; the superintendents; the treasurers' association; and the B.C. College of Teachers. All of the significant players who had responsibilities for various aspects of governance, certification of teachers, and curriculum agreed to work together. We meet regularly on a quarterly basis. There are quite a few of us of those stakeholder groups around the table, and we set objectives for ourselves. Each of our organizations agrees to participate and take the responsibility for certain aspects and for working together on it.

Interestingly, one of the first priorities that we identified was racism. All parties agreed that racism was a real thing in British Columbia and it had to be dealt with. Another aspect was to get more first nations aboriginal teachers into the system. We developed an aboriginal teacher education program or a strategy to provide more teaching by first nations aboriginals in the public and first nations school system.

By working together, we feel that we all have a responsibility and we're accountable to each other. Nothing is formal, and we don't write reports to government or anything like that. But amongst ourselves, we report back to our own constituent bodies. We feel there's more collaboration and working together than there was before.

I think that in some of those areas, particularly in the area of data gathering, we've been able to work together and have agreed that, yes, it's important to have identification numbers for first nations learners. We can track the students from public systems into first nations, and back and forth, and none of the students falls into the gap.

We can look at statistics. Throughout the province we now have a comprehensive data-gathering exercise in the public school system that shows how we're doing in terms of graduation rates, success on provincial exams, attendance, and that type of thing. It's something that's significant in all areas of the province. All districts receive their own reports in terms of how aboriginal learners are doing in the system.

We're now working jointly on projects for data gathering in the first nations school system. Of course, there's no such thing, and there's no budget for it. But we're working toward a program in which we can have compatible data-gathering processes so that we can share information with the province and with the other stakeholder groups.

That really is it. It works for us. We feel we're working together, and if we have a real concern, we know we can sit down at the table at least every three or four months and bring the issue up. It's really dealt with, depending on whom you talk to, more or less effectively.

● (1025)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move to the Liberal side.

Mr. Russell, do you have some questions?

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good morning.

First of all, I certainly want to give heartfelt thanks for the testimony you have provided here this morning. I want to honour Mary's story. I've heard only a portion of it, but I think it's vitally important to understand the human aspect of what a lot of aboriginal students go through to reach the heights you have reached. Mr. Matthew talked about role models. Well, there are a lot of role models in this room, and you two are among them. I look at Gary Merasty, a fellow aboriginal person, who has accomplished things.

In my own right, I came from a community of 50 people on the coast of Labrador. We had a one-room school until grade 8. We had no water and no sewers in our community until 1990. There were no telephones until 1990. So I understand somewhat. And Mary's story reminded me that we have to keep remembering our roots—where we come from—and the challenges we have as we go through.

This is not an easy study we're undertaking as a committee. It has huge breadth and depth. We're going to have to try to focus on concrete recommendations that we can put forward and to which we can have the government respond in order to advance the issues of aboriginal post-secondary students in particular. I don't think we can lose sight of the primary and the secondary, and of what's happening even at the community level.

We have a human resource shortage in the country—that's what everybody tells us—in almost every occupation, from doctors, nurses, and lawyers, right down to people who are going to drive the oil trucks in the Alberta tar sands. A lot of people look to aboriginal people as a pool of human capital—for want of better words—or as a human resource, but I don't see the emphasis being put on aboriginal people to fill the void that people say exists in society.

I think that's an overarching message. Are we not valuable enough to invest in, or, in other words, to meet what corporations want, or what government wants, or what companies want? I'm very concerned about what that message says to aboriginal people in general, because we see cuts when we should be seeing money being invested.

I find that the committee's study and the witnesses' study—not to take anything away—really focus on university. There seems to be a propensity towards university in our discussions, whereas the post-secondary imbalance is much more than that. It involves the trades, the technical colleges, and all of these other types of programs that are out there.

Can either of you comment on what's being done with a focus on post-secondary education, for instance, when we talk about entrance requirements? Entrance requirements for trade schools or technical colleges are not as rigorous as they are for university, generally speaking. I'm not saying we should downplay ourselves either and say, okay, just because we don't meet grade 12 qualifications, we'll all be shuffled off into trades college. But there are valuable life experiences and careers at that level as well. I think we should also talk about that a little bit.

I'm just wondering if you guys can focus on it, because my experience is that there are some good things happening, like those at the University of Winnipeg, and even at Memorial University of Newfoundland, and at universities in B.C. What is being done at the trade school level, for instance, with a view to cultural retention or language retention? Is the same sort of thing happening at that level? Can any of you speak to that particular experience?

● (1030)

Mr. Nathan Matthew: I think when you say the entry requirements might be a little less than for post-secondary, in many cases they're not. The entry into a lot of the apprentice areas requires math and science now in ways it didn't before. That's becoming a real challenge. I know in B.C., and probably across the country, students' success in math is significantly low. So that's a barrier; there's something there. Certainly industry seems to be paying more attention to this issue than government. I know in B.C. and Alberta, the industry—the body that needs the workers—is going out in various ways and trying to get them.

On the federal side, with Indian Affairs in particular, they don't have a real interest in trades training. Human Resources and Social Development Canada is involved in that area. I don't know if the two bodies really connect and collaborate in a fashion that would be to the full benefit of first nations. I'd like to see the AHRDAs be a little more connected with first nations. The AHRDAs tend to deal with a lot of off-reserve interests, and that's a challenge as well—there's no direct connection to first nations governance.

The other is around using social development funds to support education. I think there's some real potential there. They can support learners through social development dollars to assist them in going through their post-secondary training. I think there's a lot of benefit in that in terms of combining some of the dollars that are out there already so as to take the pressure off. Certainly there are a lot of opportunities.

The other issues are on adult education. In B.C. we have adult education possibilities for first nations in the public school system. That doesn't exist across the board. I think there should be appropriate support for adults to attend secondary schools. That's a huge cost saving. It's a lot less expensive to educate learners in public schools than in universities and colleges. You can stay in your own community, or closer to your own home.

I think there are a lot of opportunities, and if we could just become a little more flexible in our funding and maybe a little bit more collaborative with other departments, we could access dollars that currently aren't available.

● (1035)

The Chair: Mr. Bruinooge.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Again, I want to pass along my thanks to both the witnesses. Of course, Mary comes from my home city, and having had the chance to tour her facility, I must say it is a great and welcoming place for aboriginal people to come to in the city of Winnipeg.

When you mentioned that there have to be more advanced schools out there, in terms of their aboriginal programs, I would have to say that the University of Winnipeg probably is one of the most advanced, especially with some of the things they're doing in terms of the way they're utilizing aboriginal education in science.

I have an initial question I'd like to ask Mary.

In terms of your experiences, you've achieved a great degree of success. You have your doctorate, which is fantastic. In terms of anybody's education, it's a very high achievement. I guess I'd like you to talk about how you've succeeded in spite of all the negative influences you've had. You must be able to point to some things that aided you in the process you went through in your life to get to this point, because clearly you were successful.

Ms. Mary Young: I talk about my parents quite a bit. This is very specific: my father taught me how to fish one day, and he showed me how to cast the line. I kept doing that, and he went and stood over there, where he knew he would catch fish. I was getting quite bored. I was getting impatient, and I thought, "I'm not enjoying this", but I kept doing it anyway. Then all of a sudden I felt a tug and I panicked, and I started trying to reel the fish in quickly. A voice from over there said, "[*Witness speaks in her native language*], Mary; let it go every once in a while. [*Witness speaks in her native language*]; it will get tired after a while and you will know when to bring it in."

I cried out for my father to come and help me. He never ran down from that hill. He showed me guidance from where he stood. He taught me about patience. He taught me about perseverance. He honoured me, because he believed I could do it. So when you ask me to remember, I remember that afternoon as if it just happened.

When I worked at the University of Winnipeg, when I first got there, somebody gave me six months. They said, "She'll only last six months." That attitude was so prevalent in the seventies and the eighties, because people believed we couldn't hold on to a job.

I started looking for allies. I started at the U of W in 1984. I knew there were people in the university who didn't believe in what I was trying to do, which was to welcome aboriginal students and make them believe they belonged in university.

Many times I walked out of that university and I questioned, "What the hell am I doing here?" So I started looking at my education. I'd finished my BA, and I thought, "If I'm going to encourage aboriginal students to go to university, I better go and get some more education." So I started taking native studies at the University of Manitoba, because I didn't know anything else. That's what we do sometimes when we are not informed, when we don't know what career we want. It was by accident that I was able to do my post-baccalaureate certificate in education.

One day I wanted a new chair for my office, because I had hand-me-downs all these years. The person who purchased the chairs said, "Mary, you know, if you had a PhD, you could get a new chair." I thought, "Okay, I'll try that."

I finished my master's degree, and then I was hooked. I was hooked on schooling now.

I had to move away to Edmonton. My husband stayed in Winnipeg. Do you know how many days I ate my words there? When I counsel and advise aboriginal students since, I say, "Study. This is how long you should study. You should read, do your homework."

It's difficult. It's difficult when you miss your family and your children because you can't afford to bring them with you. There were days when I could have quit my PhD and my master's. But I have a responsibility to my nieces and nephews. I have a responsibility to my community. I have to give something back, and that's the way I did it.

● (1040)

When I got back to the University of Winnipeg after my leave, the office I had was shared by the student adviser and the transition year coordinator. There was another office off the student lounge, and the liaison officer was there. And there was a little space that was going to be my office. The room had pipes. They weren't covered. There were holes in the wall. One day this elder, a good friend of mine, came in to visit me. He sat down and he burst out laughing and he said, "This is the kind of office they give you for a PhD?" There are times when you have to laugh. Otherwise, if I didn't see the sense of humour in those situations, man, I'd be dead. And I didn't want to give up.

So [*Witness speaks in native language*], I honour all of you today for inviting me and for recognizing my achievements, because sometimes I still don't believe I did it. *Gitchi-Meegwetch*.

The Chair: Thank you.

We move on to the Bloc, Mr. Lévesque, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Good day, Ms. Young, Mr. Matthew.

I'm very impressed. I'm wondering if this kind of ambition is only seen in Manitoba. This past summer, I met an Ojibway woman, in Sweden, no less. She works at the Canadian embassy in Sweden and speaks four languages. She had to learn all of these languages in order to integrate into society.

Is the situation in other provinces similar to what we're seeing in Quebec? I'm not familiar with provincial jurisdiction over education matters in other provinces. I also have no idea of the number of First Nations living in the other provinces.

Quebec has negotiated an agreement with one First Nation pursuant to which various communities have agreed to meet under the direction of a grand council. Since the negotiation of this agreement, this nation has evolved so quickly that it has become a very important partner for Quebec.

I listened to Mr. Matthew share his vision of education with the committee. With respect to post-secondary education, I have already taken an initiative similar to what he suggests. I come from northern Quebec and I'm trying to establish a First Nations centre. It would be linked to the university campus, but would allow students to remain true to their aboriginal culture. I was very impressed by what Mr. Matthew had to say. What he described is very similar to what we are trying to do.

Ms. Young, you mentioned the turnover rate among the teaching staff which can be attributed in part to the lack of respect for aboriginal culture. Mr. Matthew hinted at racism. I'm wondering if we can establish a link of that nature. In our region, those First Nations that have not banded together are struggling more to get by. When members of these communities come to a large city, their behaviour is more aggressive than the Cree, for example, which leads to feelings of resentment among the general public. People in fact do not distinguish between the various First Nation communities. I don't know if you've experienced similar problems in your respective provinces, but that's what we're seeing in Quebec right now.

With respect to education funding, bearing in mind, naturally, respective provincial jurisdictions and existing laws, would you opt for providing funding to the provincial government to allow it to set up a committee of aboriginal leaders from each province to make decisions, or would you rather have the federal government provide education funding directly to a association of First Nations in each province?

Finally, is the lack of respect toward your culture a problem noted at the government level or among certain segments of the population?

● (1045)

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Matthew: That's an interesting question. Yes, I think the attitudes towards first nations people come from a very high level. The Prime Minister and the cabinet of this country have made decisions, purposeful decisions, that have excluded first nations from the benefits of full citizenship in this country for many years. The quality of life that Canadians just take for granted in many cases is just a dream for first nations in terms of socio-economic well-being. So yes, I think it's a political issue.

Yes, I believe there should be funding set aside for first nations organizations in the regions to negotiate for themselves what they believe to be appropriate provisions in post-secondary education, whether it be for their own institutions or for public institutions.

I know that in the province of B.C. we have a post-secondary education committee that's not very well funded—the funding isn't secure—but we have many first nations that come together to think for ourselves about what's good for our learners in post-secondary institutions. We do that without any security of funding down the road. We got funding for this year—it's bits and pieces—but we come together knowing that it's important for us to represent ourselves, to develop our own institutions, but to develop our interests in public institutions and to represent ourselves there in the sense that we're the only ones who can talk about culture and we're the best ones to talk about the interests of our own learners.

I'm not sure how we could mandate it, but I think if you provided funding for provincial first nations organizations, they would get to the point where they would be signing agreements with the province and with the post-secondary institutions about policy and about the direction and the manner in which those institutions and those governments can support first nations post-secondary learners.

Really, I think it's important that first nations represent themselves and that this government support that representation, just the coming together, having meetings, having discussions with government and post-secondary institutions. I think that's really important. How it fits into the funding package, I don't know, but I think it's necessary that it be done, and there's a band of funding to support first nations organizations to represent themselves.

● (1050)

The Chair: Before I go to Mr. Albrecht, the chair would like to have the pleasure of asking a question.

One of the statements you made, Mr. Matthew, was with regard to funding. We've been assured by the department that the funding per student is equivalent to that of the regular public school in British Columbia, or any other place in Canada. In fact, in northern Canada it's significantly higher than the average.

When you talk about funding, are you talking about the per student funding or are you talking about the organizational curricula of funding that needs to happen to provide that framework and that direction to implement policy and actions that are going to increase the number of graduates from K to 12 who are also going on to post-secondary education?

Mr. Nathan Matthew: When you talk about the per student funding, is that combining the total education budget that INAC has, or is it per student in terms of elementary, secondary, and post-secondary? Do you discriminate your funding packages?

The Chair: I'm saying that in the province of British Columbia it's about $5,500 per student. That's what the school districts or boards get for funding, and we have been told that the same amount is being given per student for first nations students.

Is that a correct statement?

Mr. Nathan Matthew: For first nations learners from reserves who attend public schools, the federal government pays exactly the same block rate for that seat in the public schools. That's what the province bills us, or you guys—the federal government—for the education of status on-reserve learners.

In terms of how much it costs to run a school, where our schools are located we are challenged right now in being able to provide the same level of service that the general public takes for granted in public schools, that is, to pay salaries that are appropriate, to provide professional development, to provide transportation, to provide facilities and operation and maintenance of our facilities. In all of those factors there is inequity. In total it has to do with economies of scale.

The other related issues are second- and third-level services. The Province of B.C. has the Ministry of Education to make all the decisions and the laws. On our side there is very little provision for that kind of service to provide direction toward education and to set up education in the way the province does. Yet the expectation of the federal government when it provides us with the money is to provide the same level of service. Actually, we sign on the line saying that we're going to do that when in fact we know we're not getting sufficient money to accomplish it.

That's a big issue.

● (1055)

The Chair: Yes. That's the answer I wanted.

Mr. Albrecht hasn't had an opportunity to speak. He's the only one.

Mr. Lévesque.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: There were two parts to my question. You intervened before Ms. Young had a chance to answer my question concerning the turnover of teaching staff.

[*English*]

The Chair: We have a format here—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Ms. Young didn't have an opportunity to respond.

[*English*]

The Chair: —that we have to follow, and Mr. Albrecht hasn't had an opportunity to pose a question. I'm going to ask Mr. Albrecht if he would ask his question, please.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will just add my words of thanks to both of you for appearing here today.

I certainly resonated with much of your story, Ms. Young, especially as it relates to your experience with your parents. I applaud you for bringing that component to the table today because many times that aspect of education is not given the kind of support it needs, especially as you identified the cultural and the spiritual roots that make you who you are today.

Also, with regard to determining the content of education, Mr. Matthew, in terms of your signature on the tripartite agreement, I assume you're a proponent of that and eager to see that succeed in the K to 12 area. I would certainly agree with you that it has the potential to also be one of the huge measures of success for post-secondary education.

I have two questions. One is for Ms. Young.

You mentioned a big problem with teacher turnover, and I'd like you to address that briefly, if you could.

Then regarding the grade 12 graduation certificate and how much shortfall there is in terms of the people accessing that certificate and having adequate preparation for post-secondary, could you identify, Mr. Matthews, some of the reasons for that and then what numbers of people are enrolled in that interim preparatory course that you mentioned? Where does the funding come from? I think you mentioned it's primarily from the students themselves. Are there any other avenues of funding?

Could I ask Ms. Young to respond? Her response to my question might satisfy some of Mr. Lévesque's question as well. That was the intent.

Ms. Mary Young: Can you repeat the question, please?

Mr. Harold Albrecht: It was simply the problem with teacher turnover as it relates to having enough staff to do the kinds of educational achievements everybody can do.

The Chair: Be really brief because we're running out of time. I'd just ask you to be concise. We're supposed to finish at 11 o'clock. We have another group coming in.

Ms. Mary Young: One of the things we're pushing as first nations communities is that we hire aboriginal teachers. Those aboriginal teachers are being taught by the same education system. We're not preparing them.

That's my answer.

The Chair: Mr. Matthews.

Mr. Nathan Matthew: We're challenged with teacher turnovers. Number one, we don't have enough first nations teachers, and we're looking for ways of getting more, in terms of strategy. There are teacher training programs across the country and they really deserve added support from the federal government.

We really do have to keep up with matching competitively salary and benefits for professional teachers in our schools. Across Canada, rural and remote areas are challenged anyway. I know in B.C. they are. The non-native schools in rural or remote areas just can't keep teachers because the teachers want to be somewhere else and you have to pay them a little bit more. The situation is even more significant in first nations communities.

On grade 12 certificates and the preparation for university, what was the question there?

Mr. Harold Albrecht: It was primarily dealing with funding for that interim program, and also with the numbers of people in that program.

Mr. Nathan Matthew: I don't have any stats on that; Indian Affairs would have them, and that would be a question to ask. But there's a very large volume of adult learners or young adults who have not completed grade 12. We know that from the stats of those who don't complete. There's a big pool of learners out there, so we're not wanting for students.

Concerning program restrictions, in many cases students going into college prep programs are limited to one year, and I think that's the significant part about the funding. There should be a two-year allocation of funds for those learners. There's a whole lot of catching up to do in terms of skills, and you simply can't do it in one year. In some cases, they're expected to take four courses, and they just burn out right away. They can't maintain the course load because of their having been challenged academically.

Certainly there are large numbers, there's a great potential, and it's one of the areas where there's a real benefit in providing resources because there are so many.

Just as a message about closing the gap, there's a commitment, at least at the first ministers meeting, with the accord, to 10 years. If we're going to close the gap, those kids are now in grade 2, so we're already challenged and we don't have a lot of time. The circumstances haven't changed a lot in the last little while. We really have a lot of work to do if we're going to get positive results for first nations.

● (1100)

The Chair: Thank you. I'd like to thank both of the witnesses for answering the questions so effectively and for giving us both their personal and academic experiences.

Thank you again.

The meeting is adjourned.

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