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## Standing Committee on Official Languages

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EVIDENCE

**Thursday, April 25, 2013**

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**Chair**

**The Honourable Michael Chong**



## Standing Committee on Official Languages

Thursday, April 25, 2013

• (1530)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC)):** Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the 77<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages on this Thursday, April 25, 2013.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108, we will proceed with the study on second-language official language immersion programs in Canada.

Representatives of two groups will appear before us today.

[English]

We have Mr. Thompson and Mr. Shea from the Quebec Community Groups Network.

[Translation]

We also have Ms. Bourbonnais and Mr. Le Dorze from the Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers.

Welcome, everyone.

First we will hear evidence for an hour and a half until 5:00 p.m. Then we will take 15 minutes to discuss committee business, that is to say the witness list for our study and its calendar. There will be votes in the House at 5:15 p.m. That will give you enough time to get to the Centre Block.

[English]

As there were no witnesses able to come next Tuesday, there will be no meeting next Tuesday. We'll continue the study on Thursday next week. So your chair has given you two hours of your life back.

Without further ado, we'll begin with an opening statement from the Quebec Community Groups Network.

**Mr. James Shea (Member, Board of Directors, Quebec Community Groups Network):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon Mr. Chong, Mr. Godin, Mr. Dion, and members of the committee.

[Translation]

I would like to say hello to my former colleagues, Mr. Le Dorze and Ms. Bourbonnais, from the CAIT.

[English]

The QCGN, the Quebec Community Groups Network, is represented today by Stephen Thompson, our director of policy, research and public affairs, and me. My name is Jim Shea. I'm a

member of the Quebec Community Groups Network board of directors. I am a proud resident of Aylmer in the City of Gatineau.

I also served as the executive director of Canadian Parents for French from 2002 to 2011. I served as a teacher and principal in the provinces of Quebec and Ontario. I was one of the pioneer educators—I didn't label myself that, but other people did—of Ottawa's bilingual programs and retired as a superintendent of education in Ottawa to pursue my passion for linguistic duality in Canada with Canadian Parents for French. I'm pleased to continue my advocacy as a member of the board of directors of the Quebec Community Groups Network.

We understand that the committee will be hearing from the Quebec English School Boards Association and other experts within our community's education sector who will be able to answer specific questions on access, capacity, waiting lists, best practices, and efficiencies. The QCGN is here today to explain the importance of second official language programs to Canada's English linguistic minority communities, that is, the English-speaking community of Quebec.

The Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages noted the popularity of immersion programs among English-speaking families and the years of efforts that our parents have put into campaigning for improvements in the teaching of French in English language schools. Our school boards “place considerable weight on ensuring that their students are fluent in French”, and immersion programs are a vital component of these efforts.

English-speaking Quebec is rightfully proud of French immersion, a product—a genesis, if you want—of parents in Saint-Lambert, Quebec finding a better way to provide their children with the language skills they would need to live and succeed in Quebec and, of course, in Canada. We quote the Lester B. Pearson School Board in the Senate committee's report:

Quebec English schools have always been at the forefront of second language teaching and learning, and were responsible for the development of internationally recognized French language immersion programs. We have perfected the teaching of French through immersion to the extent that people come from the world over to learn our methods for acquiring a second language.

We want this committee to understand that becoming bilingual is not an altruistic pursuit for English-speaking youth in Quebec. Bilingualism is not a matter of simply expanding opportunities or acquiring a desirable asset for potential employers. For that story, we urge the committee to hear from French-speaking parents in Quebec about their efforts to ensure that their children learn both official languages.

Bilingualism for English-speaking Quebec is a matter of getting a job. It is an economic necessity.

For example, data contained in a research report recently published by Canadian Heritage and the Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities demonstrated that the baseline salaries of unilingual English speakers are 18% less than those of unilingual French-speaking Quebecers. The salaries of bilingual English speakers and unilingual French speakers are at par, with bilingual French speakers earning 12.6% more than both of these cohorts.

Bilingualism is not a silver bullet for finding a job. Despite overall higher levels of education and high rates of bilingualism within our population, the 2006 census data shows an overall unemployment rate within the English-speaking community of Quebec that is 2.2% higher than that of the French-speaking majority.

• (1535)

Speaking, reading, and writing French are clearly critical skills in finding a job in Quebec. For example, in the lower north shore, where learning French is difficult, the bilingualism rate among the English-speaking population is 22%, compared with 65% across the entire community. When the fishery collapsed, residents were forced to leave not only their home villages but their home provinces to find seasonal work because of a lack of French language skills.

Along la Côte-Nord, English-speaking unemployment was 28.7%, as compared with 10.9% for the majority. The promise of good jobs in the future mining industry of northeastern Quebec is not accessible for members of this isolated English-speaking community, in large measure because the population does not have the French skills to acquire the required technical and trades training and provincial certification.

You as a committee will learn from the experts who appear before you during this study that French immersion is not a matter of simply teaching subjects in French. Immersion teaching is a specialized skill that requires long-term investments on the part of schools, school boards, and teachers. Intensive French instruction for our community is a tangible necessity, because being fluent in the language of the majority is absolutely necessary for an individual's economic future in Quebec.

Economic prosperity is one of six strategic priorities identified in our community's "2012-2017 Community Priorities and Enabling Strategies" document. To us English-speaking Quebecers, economic prosperity means greater access to employment and educational opportunities and higher levels of bilingualism.

Bilingualism is the key to the economic prosperity of English-speaking Quebecers and the resilience of our communities. For our children and grandchildren, French immersion is how we get there.

Thank you very much. Merci.

• (1540)

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Shea.

Now we will hear from the representatives of the Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers.

**Mr. Philippe Le Dorze (President, Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers):** Good afternoon. My name is Philippe Le Dorze and I am President of the Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers.

Can you hear me?

**The Chair:** Yes, that is fine. We will—

**Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC):** It is usually possible for us to hear you without microphones.

But that is not possible today, Mr. Chair.

[English]

**The Chair:** The technicians are going to straighten it out. Meanwhile, just use your earpiece to turn up the volume.

Go ahead, Monsieur Le Dorze. You have the floor. We can hear you through our earpieces.

[Translation]

**Mr. Philippe Le Dorze:** As I was saying, I am President of the Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers and I am employed by the Pembina Trails School Division in Winnipeg.

I in turn would like to say hello to Mr. Shea, my former colleague and neighbour of the CAIT in Ottawa.

[English]

You didn't lose a beat, Jim. It's good to see you in such fine form.

[Translation]

As the authority on French immersion in Canada, the Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers is a professional organization that brings together immersion educators from all parts of the country.

[English]

The Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers supports and enriches immersion pedagogy by offering educators professional development, research, and networking opportunities.

[Translation]

The CAIT stimulates research and innovation, and is set apart by its many accomplishments and its willingness to push the envelope to help grow French immersion.

I would like to start by mentioning some facts about French immersion.

We have come a long way in 40 years. In the area of second-language learning, about 350,000 English-speaking Canadian youth are registered in French immersion. Never before have so many Canadians been able to speak both English and French. Today, 5.4 million Canadians can speak both official languages, compared with 2.8 million in 1971. That is virtually twice as many.

Learning a second language is even good for your health. Recent studies have shown that bilingual people are better protected from cognitive diseases such as Alzheimer's.

French as a second language programs in Canada are growing: immersion registration has increased by 10% in recent years. In fact, immersion programs are on the rise nearly everywhere across the country despite the often negative demographics of school populations.

[English]

Immersion is and will remain the best program to learn French as a second language. Students achieve a high level of competency in French and do so without affecting their mother tongue or their knowledge of other subjects. It is therefore essential to maintain and expand access to immersion programs because demand is increasing in many areas of the country.

[Translation]

Despite immersion's popularity, much remains to be done to ensure that everyone has equal access. Immersion has proven its worth, and Canada is renowned worldwide for its immersion programs.

However, each province and territory delivers its immersion programs differently. Some institutions limit the number of enrolments, while others charge extra fees to cover transportation costs. Accessibility is not guaranteed for all Canadians.

The CAIT firmly believes that all students should have access to a French immersion program, regardless of where they live.

In some provinces such as British Columbia, for example, immersion is like a lottery: only the lucky ones get in. We object to this state of affairs. Every parent who chooses immersion for their children should have access to it, and they should not be charged additional fees.

Immersion should be accessible to students in both urban and rural areas. Generally speaking, immersion programs are fairly accessible in urban areas. However, many rural areas are underserved. For example, in a school board in Ontario, the immersion program offers 100% of classes in French in an urban area and only 50% of classes in French in a rural area.

We need a common vision for all the provinces and territories. It would be advisable to support adding more immersion classes in rural areas and in places with high demand.

● (1545)

[English]

Many school boards do not provide transportation for students enrolled in the immersion program. Transportation should be provided at no cost for both urban and rural students.

[Translation]

In the next Roadmap for Linguistic Duality, targets should be set to increase accessibility to immersion programs for all Canadians. The provinces and territories should set rules governing the creation of new immersion classes offered by school boards, according to the principles of equal access. For example, Manitoba has established policies governing immersion programs and access to them. It is a good example in that regard.

Immersion should also be accessible to newcomers. Immigrants are often excluded from immersion programs. They are not encouraged to enrol, and in some cases they are even discouraged, despite the impressive results allophone students obtain when they are admitted. Currently, there are no federal, provincial or territorial policies in place to ensure that allophone students and their parents are aware of immersion programs so they can apply.

Allophones have a strong interest in learning both official languages since they see it as a valuable asset in the labour market. Many studies have shown that the children of immigrants do very well in immersion programs, and often achieve better results than allophones born and raised in Canada.

According to a study by Canadian Parents for French, 80% of allophone parents did not receive any information about French immersion programs in the education system. Despite the efforts of various educators to discourage them from applying for immersion programs, support for linguistic duality and French as a second language remains high among allophones. In fact, 60% said they believed that learning both of Canada's official languages would be an asset for their children, and 40% enrolled their children in French immersion programs.

[English]

In the next road map for linguistic duality we should be thinking of establishing goals and strategies to boost learning of French as a second or third language for allophones or newcomer Canadians.

[Translation]

Immersion should also be accessible for students with learning disabilities. Our first instinct is often to keep students with learning disabilities out of immersion programs. Many people think that immersion is for gifted students. However, research has shown that allophone students with learning difficulties are no more at risk in a French immersion classroom than they are in an English classroom. These students achieve even better results in French than students enrolled in a regular French program.

In many institutions, there is a lack of specialized immersion services for students with learning difficulties. It is important to provide support for children, parents and immersion teachers by giving them the tools they need to help children with learning disabilities succeed and benefit from all the advantages of bilingualism.

The points of entry into immersion programs vary from one institution to another. There are essentially three entry points: early immersion, which is for students in kindergarten and grade 1; middle immersion, in grades 4 and 5; and late immersion, usually in grades 7 or 8.

The type of immersion program and the level of intensity of the program help determine the level of language proficiency. Early immersion programs generally produce better results than the other programs. However, in Canada, there are no standard entry points. In New Brunswick, for example, early immersion is no longer offered despite the number of studies showing that French immersion programs have no negative effect on English-language skills and that, on the contrary, they improve students' skills in French. All researchers have reported that learning a second language improves students' first-language skills.

In my opinion, the entry point that should be favoured in giving Canadians the broadest choice is kindergarten or grade 1. Having students start immersion in kindergarten and providing students who have difficulty with support measures ensure the greatest diversity within the immersion program.

However, this does not mean that access should be limited to early immersion. We also need to encourage jurisdictions to offer a variety of entry points so that everyone has access to French immersion and so that we have sufficient numbers to offer the full range of courses at the secondary level.

Each parent should be informed about immersion programs and entry points, as well as the level of language proficiency associated with each option.

Secondary and postsecondary programs are also a concern. In some cases, students leave immersion programs in high school to prepare themselves for postsecondary studies in their first language, which is often English, citing the lack of courses in certain subjects, timetable conflicts or simply a general weariness.

Continuation of French-as-a-second-language studies at university is therefore important to the success of immersion at the high school level.

In 2009, the Commissioner of Official Languages published a study titled *Two Languages, a World of Opportunities* on second-language learning at Canadian universities. The study found that few institutions offer immersion programs or related support services that allow students to take courses in their discipline taught in their second language. Mr. Fraser also noted the limited cooperation and low number of partnerships between French- and English-language universities in Canada. Moreover, second-language policies and language-proficiency requirements are lacking. The study identified several ways forward, including promoting content-based learning, providing opportunities to use the language in social settings and maximizing the use of resources, such as professors, small classes, learning assistance, tutors and new technologies, to name only a few.

●(1550)

[English]

The Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers firmly believes that universities have an important role to play in the training of young bilinguals to help the public service recruit some 5,000 bilingual employees per year that will be needed over the next few years.

[Translation]

Immersion teachers are proud to contribute to Canada's linguistic duality. Always looking to improve the quality of education, they are concerned about the shortage of bilingual teachers. Schools sometimes hire teachers who do not have adequate language skills or do not know the methods for teaching living languages.

Educational resources have improved in the last few years, but they are still rarely adapted to immersion and are often simply translations. There is a need for immersion-specific resources.

**The Chair:** Pardon me, Mr. Le Dorze.

[English]

You've gone for 12 minutes now.

I'm going to seek the consent of the committee to allow the witness to continue his opening statement. I think it would take another three minutes. Do I have the consent of the committee to give him the three minutes to finish his opening statement?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Le Dorze, you have the floor. You may finish your presentation.

**Mr. Philippe Le Dorze:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Given that immersion teachers work for anglophone school boards, professional development in French for immersion teachers is rarely available. There is a need for professional development opportunities tailored to the needs of immersion teachers so that they can keep abreast of new educational practices.

Here are a few possible courses of action: improve language and cultural skills during studies by offering intensive language courses, exchanges and extended stays in a second-language environment; encourage education faculties to enhance their basic training programs for second-language teachers; provide teachers and other teaching staff with varied professional development and ongoing training opportunities; provide support and mentoring services to new teachers; provide a professional development program on managing second-language programs for school administrators; encourage the production of educational resources specific to immersion and that are not translations.

I will briefly talk about the fact that there are no common tools in Canada to assess bilingualism levels, whether in the education system or by employers in both the public sector and the private sector. This means there is no common language to describe the various levels of bilingualism.

What does it mean to be bilingual? Without common tools to define bilingualism, students can, and often do, underestimate their linguistic abilities and believe that they are not qualified for a bilingual position. The reverse is also true. Adopting a common framework for second languages for Canada would help establish a common system for assessing the language skills of students in second-language programs.

Young people would have the benefit of knowing how bilingual they are on an internationally recognized scale. They could then gauge their learning in a real-world context, take a greater interest in learning their second language, increase their confidence in their abilities, and better promote themselves to potential employers in Canada and around the world.

There is an assessment tool that is very well made and increasingly popular among parents, students and teachers in Canada. It is the DELF, a diploma consistent with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, the CEFR. It is used to assess language skills in four areas. Recognized internationally, the DELF is valid for life. Nearly 300,000 people earn it every year, including more than 5,000 from Canada, and that number is rising fast.

Moreover, the DELF for schools is completely consistent with the language skills targeted by the various FSL programs across Canada. Some jurisdictions have even based their curriculum on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. However, the provinces and territories do not have a common approach that would allow them to exchange expertise on language skills assessments and use the CEFR to that end.

• (1555)

[*English*]

The Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers believes it's time to initiate steps towards the establishment of the national language assessment tool for French as a second language for schools, universities, and professionals. Our association would be more than happy to lead this national project with the participation of ministries of education. No doubt we have the expertise in Canada. We simply need to work together to create this new Canadian tool.

[*Translation*]

Educating young Canadians through French immersion helps guarantee a bilingual future for our country, a future where recognizing the value of English and French also makes us value the other languages spoken in Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you for your speech, Mr. Le Dorze.

We have an hour and five minutes for questions and comments.

We will begin with Mr. Godin.

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

I would like to welcome you all to this meeting.

[*Translation*]

I will begin with you, Mr. Le Dorze. You talked about teachers. One message emerged from testimony that we heard here on Tuesday. It appears that several teachers—not all, of course—do not really have appropriate training for teaching purposes. That is mainly the case in the provinces where there are smaller numbers of bilingual people, which makes it more difficult to find teachers.

Is that correct?

**Mr. Philippe Le Dorze:** The number of potential candidates for immersion positions is a problem.

For example, if a position is advertised at an English-language school in my school board in Winnipeg, management can receive 50 to 70 applications. For a French teaching position at an immersion school, management will receive six applications, three of them from candidates who do not speak French.

Consequently, it is very difficult to find teachers who are capable of taking on the responsibilities of a French immersion teacher in regions in western Canada.

[*English*]

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Mr. Shea, there is the same problem if you look at Quebec. I don't know what it would be in Montreal, but in Rivière-au-Renard, there's not a big majority of anglophones, and I think they have difficulties. As a matter of fact, when I was going around, even in Sherbrooke they had difficulties because of the population that they have.

At the same time, when it comes to the teachers, do they have adequate, and I wouldn't say training, but competence to do it?

**Mr. James Shea:** I will speak as an educator, because that's my background. In order to teach French immersion, knowledge of the language is critical, but so is training.

You can't just take a francophone from a francophone environment and say, "You are going to teach French immersion". There are specific training skills that are required to understand the dynamics within the context of learning the language from another perspective.

There is an element of attracting teachers and keeping them, but there is also the element of training so that the teaching-learning experience is successful. It's a specific *métier*, if you will, to be—and I'm not speaking for the teachers here but as someone who has worked as one.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Do you believe that in the federal government... because education is the responsibility of the province, right?

• (1600)

**Mr. James Shea:** Yes.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** There's no question about it. It's in the Constitution, and we're not going to open the Constitution today. It's in the Constitution.

**Mr. James Shea:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** What can the federal government do? You have the road map. You have all kinds of money. It would be the same thing with Winnipeg or anywhere across the country. What can the government do with their road map and the money? If you look at part VII of the Official Languages Act, the government has the responsibility to promote the language and maybe it could help. Maybe it could play a role in bringing all the ministers of education together across the country to try to find solutions. It wouldn't be to get into the program and what they do, but money is always welcome, right? It helps.

[*Translation*]

What recommendations would you like to make to the government?

[English]

**Mr. James Shea:** From my perspective, one of the challenges is a function of numbers. If you were to hire a science teacher, for example, it would be no different whether it was a science teacher or a math teacher: the money is the same to hire a teacher.

Sometimes with learning French as a second language, when you have small school communities, for example in la Côte-Nord where you have a small student population, there is an element of sometimes having to teach two things at the same time. If you're trying to teach two options at the same time, you reduce the groups and, therefore, you need additional dollars to support the teachers, because you're teaching two subjects at the same time.

One of the factors is to recognize within a minority language situation in Quebec—and I realize that's like walking on eggs from a language and education perspective—that supports are going to have to be put in place so that the English-speaking community will be able to master French, because they need it to graduate high school, quite frankly.

If you have a higher dropout rate because English-speaking students are not learning French, obviously there's a crisis there, and we have to find ways of addressing that.

I'm not here to speak from a school board perspective, but the Quebec Community Groups Network wants to be able to participate in the community with the learning of two languages, as opposed to just the learning of English. Sometimes additional dollars to provide the additional resources are critical, particularly where you have small student numbers.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Besides for providing money, is there another role that the federal government could play?

**Mr. Stephen Thompson (Director, Policy, Research and Public Affairs, Quebec Community Groups Network):** We can take the Canada-Quebec agreement on health as an example. Part of the money that's provided is for a project that's run out of McGill University, which provides English language training to francophone health professionals.

You may know that Quebec recently abandoned the idea of having intensive English in French schools. It was largely an HR issue. They didn't have the English teachers to do it.

If federal money were provided to help train English teachers for the French system, that might be something the federal government could do, but that's not the English-speaking community talking there.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

I am now going to give the floor to Monsieur Gourde.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses for appearing.

I will speak to Mr. Thompson.

According to what witnesses have told us, it appears to be difficult to find teachers. Where do these teachers mainly come from? I imagine they come from Quebec or Ontario.

Are there any other places in Canada where bilingual teachers who also meet all the other criteria for becoming a teacher can be trained?

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Thompson, you can go first, and then we'll hear from Monsieur Le Dorze.

**Mr. Stephen Thompson:** I think the people to answer your question in detail, Mr. Gourde, would be from the Quebec English School Boards Association, who I believe will be invited, hopefully, to provide testimony for this study. Our general understanding is that the bulk of our teachers come from Quebec universities: McGill University and Bishop's University.

• (1605)

[Translation]

**The Chair:** All right.

Mr. Le Dorze, you have the floor.

**Mr. Philippe Le Dorze:** Thank you.

In Manitoba, the Université de Saint-Boniface trains teachers who will work in the French-as-a-first-language education systems and in immersion programs.

The number of immersion students is four times greater than the number of students in the French-language schools. The number of people trained at the Université de Saint-Boniface is not enough to meet the demand. Other faculties in western Canada also train teachers who will work in French-language and immersion schools in all provinces: the Campus Saint-Jean, the University of Regina, Simon Fraser University and others. The same is true in Ontario: some programs aim to train teachers, but there are not quite enough.

Quebec and the francophone regions of Acadia used to take part in exchanges and recruitment efforts to hire immersion teachers. That practice is ongoing, but it is much less widespread than it was 25 years ago.

There should be an exchange with Quebec so that it can send francophone teachers to western Canada. We could send people to teach intensive English-language courses in Quebec. I should say in response to the previous question that working in this way and making this kind of thing possible would be one of the possible roles for the federal government.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Are enough people enrolling in the programs, or are they full? Are we at risk of a teacher shortage? We are going to have a problem if we want more Canadians to take immersion courses but there is a shortage of teachers. We can have a lot of good intentions, but if we do not have the people to meet the needs of the schools, I do not know what we will do.

**Mr. Philippe Le Dorze:** That is where we stand at the present time. It is still possible to increase the number of spaces in the faculties of education for students training to teach French. The federal government will probably have an important role to play by continuing to make a significant effort to promote Canada's official languages in all areas.

In addition, creating a national second-language skills assessment tool would help the entire education community. It would help clarify skills targets. The federal government definitely has an important role to play in this area even though it is a provincial jurisdiction.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Does anyone else want to answer the question?

**The Chair:** Ms. Bourbonnais and Mr. Shea, do you have any comments?

**Ms. Chantal Bourbonnais (Director General, Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers):** I would like to make a brief comment.

One of the ways to help improve language skills is the entire question of teacher-student exchanges. This would make it possible to organize extended stays in francophone environments. This is another way. The number of teachers is a factor, but so is the quality of those teachers. We must really focus on the language skills of immersion teachers.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Gourde.

Mr. Dion, you have the floor.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks very much to the witnesses.

At the risk of asking you to repeat yourself, I would simply like you to give us a list of recommendations you would like to see in our report. Your recommendations must focus on the federal government's role, as you described it and as my colleagues have described it as well. Mistaking us for the provinces will not be much help; we are not the provinces.

Ideally, in view of what you said, could you summarize or restate the recommendations you want to make to us?

I will put the question first to Mr. Shea and Mr. Thompson.

[*English*]

Perhaps you could start, please.

**Mr. James Shea:** What we attempted to present was the nature of the English-speaking community as it is. I'm sure you understand that. We are not here to speak on behalf of the educational institutions.

As the Quebec Community Groups Network, we represent more than 37 English-speaking organizations across the province who want to participate in Quebec's community. We recognize—

• (1610)

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Excuse me, Mr. Shea. I understand. I would like to have your clear-cut recommendations now.

We have only a few minutes, and you were beginning to explain who the network is. I know who the network is. I want to have your clear-cut recommendations.

**Mr. James Shea:** Well, if I may, Mr. Chair, recognize that there are barriers, and some of the barriers here....

There's the point that I made with respect to small English language communities that may have 100 students in their school. The potential to be able to teach French as a second language in an immersion capacity is a function of being able to provide them with the resources and the dollars to do that while maintaining.

It's a matter of finding a way to support the English-speaking communities in Quebec as a minority, as the French language minority communities are sought outside of Quebec.

**Mr. Stephen Thompson:** I think our key message today to the committee, Monsieur Dion, is that bilingualism is a key tool for our economic success. Bilingualism is what allows us to work in Quebec. It's a matter of economics for us. Immersion is a tool.

Perhaps as a committee you could link for our minority community the importance of bilingualism and immersion as an economic tool.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Maybe I'm not clear enough. I'm speaking about solutions. I understand the problem. What are the key solutions that you think the federal government should do—money, and what else?

**Mr. Stephen Thompson:** It may not be money, Monsieur Dion. It might be the redirection of programs.

Immersion right now is considered, for example, an educational problem and is dealt with by Canadian Heritage. It is dealt with in federal-provincial education transfers.

But if bilingualism is looked at as an economic problem, then it becomes a matter for HRSDC, and within their skills training, HRSDC now has a responsibility, or could have a responsibility, in helping to raise the bilingualism rates with the English-speaking community of Quebec to ensure our economic success.

**The Chair:** Perhaps I could assist you here, Monsieur Dion.

In your opening statement, you said that in the lower north shore, learning French is difficult. What would be the solution to that issue?

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** I'm looking for a solution that's relevant to the mission of the federal government.

**Mr. Stephen Thompson:** The mission would be to provide targeted funding, in this case for isolated communities that don't have the educational access that they require and the economic development access that they require, recognizing bilingualism as a tool of economic development, working in partnership with the Government of Quebec.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Mr. Le Dorze and Ms. Bourbonnais, what would your recommendations be?

**Mr. Philippe Le Dorze:** I think that valuing the second languages and promoting access to immersion across the country would be a step in the right direction. That is not yet the case. Making immersion programs accessible across the country would be consistent with the remarks that my two Quebec colleagues just made.

I would also add the following recommendations: that linguistic and cultural skills be improved; that exchanges be promoted; that faculties of education be encouraged to enrich their basic training programs for second language teachers; that other university faculties be encouraged to offer bilingual programs to accommodate incoming bilingual students who still need to improve their second-language skills; that professional development be promoted for teachers in the form of mentoring for new immersion teachers, for example, and that development courses be offered for school administrators who, in many cases, do not speak the second language and need second-language training. Lastly, I think that the federal government could encourage the production of educational resources specifically for French immersion. Translated material is extensively used at the present time.

Chantal, do you want to add something?

• (1615)

**Ms. Chantal Bourbonnais:** Yes. I would add the entire issue of immigration and the federal government's role in promoting immersion programs when newcomers enter the country. The idea here is for them to be made aware of the immersion programs offered.

I am also thinking of national standards for language skills. Philippe talked about that earlier. I am talking about a common framework of reference for languages. That would help determine whether people who claim they are bilingual are sufficiently bilingual to work at Tim Hortons or in the public service. If we had Canadian standards, the world would know what it means when people say they are bilingual to a given level.

There is also the mobility of teachers and school administrators among the provinces and territories. I believe the federal government could facilitate mobility.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** You seem to be off to a good start.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Dion and Ms. Bourbonnais.

Mr. Trottier, you have the floor.

**Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to our witnesses today.

My questions will be somewhat similar to those of Mr. Dion and Mr. Godin. The federal government's role in education is, in a way, the basic problem for us. It is clearly a provincial responsibility. So we are looking for ways to add value to this immersion issue. The demand is there, particularly in my region. In the Toronto area, more than 25% of students are enrolled in immersion programs.

Immersion programs have been around for many years. However, it happens that, even after 12 or 14 years of immersion, graduates do not really feel they are bilingual or really francophone, despite all

their efforts. I believe you touched on that point in your presentation, Mr. Le Dorze, when you talked about what is being done outside the schools, the exchange programs, for example.

As you are no doubt aware, sometimes immersion in a city such as Toronto is not really immersion. Students speak English in the yard at recess and, once they have left school, are immersed in a city where English is entirely predominant

What can the federal government do to correct these immersion deficiencies? When we talk to people who have spent years in immersion schools, it is frustrating to see that they do not yet master the language.

**Mr. Philippe Le Dorze:** Manitoba's immersion situation is currently different from that of Ontario. In most cases, immersion is a creature of the school divisions. Consequently, what is called immersion in one school division may correspond to a 50% program starting in grade 4. The skills that students acquire will be related to the intensity and quantity of French and to the number of years spent learning it.

In some cases at the secondary level, it is enough for students to take 30% of their courses in French for the program to be called an immersion program. However, in a semester system, that may mean not taking a French course for a year. Is that really immersion?

With regard to management of the types of programs, the federal government could, for example, encourage the provinces to find a common definition of what constitutes an immersion program rather than leave it to each of them to do what it wishes.

They do a lot very early on and afterwards no longer know what they are doing. It would be a good idea to have rules establishing the number of hours of contact in French immersion, from start to finish, so that that is clear and everyone does virtually the same thing instead of having this umbrella called immersion that is very different from one place to another.

Manitoba did that, and I believe it has been very beneficial for immersion students in that province. It established an immersion curriculum policy defining how immersion is done back home in Manitoba.

I think that would be part of the solution.

The other is also related to the idea you raised in your question concerning the different skills of immersion graduates. We should have a national tool to determine the level of French language proficiency of all Canadians, regardless of where they graduate, whether it be from immersion, core French courses or university. A tool for determining proficiency levels would go far. Immersion parents would be delighted to have that kind of tool emerge and be developed in Canada.

We currently use the DELF. It works and is beginning to spread across Canada. However, I think we should have a Canadian tool one day.

• (1620)

**Mr. Bernard Trottier:** All right, thank you.

Sometimes there is conflict between French-language schools and immersion schools. You are probably aware of the problem. This concept of rights holders is not really an issue in a city like Toronto. Everyone has a right to attend a French-language school. It is an issue based on heritage or the language of the parents. Everyone has a right to do it. That is now the situation in Ontario. Consequently, parents enrol their children in French-language schools even if they do not speak a word of French. French-language schools are being used as immersion schools.

How can we solve this problem? Francophone parents complain that this dilutes the quality of French in French-language schools.

Have you addressed this issue in Manitoba or elsewhere in the country?

**Mr. Philippe Le Dorze:** It is increasingly a problem. We have heard about it in British Columbia, where French-language school systems were accepting virtually anybody.

I also know that, in Manitoba, more than half of students starting kindergarten in the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine do not speak French. They are then francized. This is a serious problem that reflects the changing nature of the francophonie in minority communities.

The French-language school system in Ontario is managed by francophones. They accept everyone because they understand the necessity of doing so. That can clearly have an impact on the schools offering immersion. However, if you think about it, it helps francize many students. That may be one way of operating.

Promoting bilingualism will clearly attract more young anglophones wishing to learn French, and that has value.

**The Chair:** All right, thank you.

I give the floor to Mr. Galipeau.

**Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to welcome all our witnesses.

I have been following the discussion. I particularly appreciated the questions asked by Mr. Dion. The witnesses' recommendations are about money.

It is suggested that we could resolve this issue using national means, whereas this area of activity is exclusively subject to provincial legislation under section 93 of the Constitution Act, 1867.

I heard what Ms. Bourbonnais said on the subject. I sense her anxiety and I share it. However, I did not hear any good suggestions about ways to circumvent section 93.

Have you spoken to the Council of Ministers of Education, which brings together all the provincial ministers?

•(1625)

**Ms. Chantal Bourbonnais:** It is difficult to talk to those people.

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** They are not that approachable?

**Ms. Chantal Bourbonnais:** They in fact refuse to listen to community groups. We invite them to our meetings and try to keep

them informed, but it is not always easy to influence CMEC on educational matters.

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** The force of inertia is strong, is it not?

**Ms. Chantal Bourbonnais:** However, we do have a tool, the roadmap, which establishes targets, objectives and priorities for five years.

In my opinion, the federal government's role is very much linked to the roadmap in that it gives guidance and establishes priorities and targets. The roadmap serves somewhat to guide the provincial ministries of education since education remains subject to provincial legislation. However, the federal government has a major role to play in official languages.

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** We have invested more than \$1 billion in the roadmap. So we are serious about this.

However, I find it interesting that you tell me the Council of Ministers of Education suffers from inertia. Perhaps it does.

**Ms. Chantal Bourbonnais:** It may not suffer from inertia, but it is not necessarily open to the influence of community groups.

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** I would like to ask you a personal question. Do you come from Ontario?

**Ms. Chantal Bourbonnais:** Yes.

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** When I was a young boy, the man in all the Bourbonnais families in all the francophone villages of eastern Ontario was a cheese-maker and the woman was a teacher.

**Ms. Chantal Bourbonnais:** That is the same family.

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** Dolorès Chartrand taught me and my sister. The same was true of all my children.

**Ms. Chantal Bourbonnais:** There are a lot teachers in my family.

[English]

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** Mr. Shea, you and I have been to war together before, and I really, really am grateful for the work you've done with Canadian Parents for French. You are a pioneer. Thanks to the work that you've done in your career, Canada is a better country, and I thank you.

**Mr. James Shea:** May I respond, Mr. Chair?

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** No, I'm not finished.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** I'm also glad that you're now with QCGN, because you can do good work there too. They need it. That's a group that I see as defending the English language in Quebec. As a francophone in Ontario, where I've had to face many challenges over the years and have fought for them, I appreciate the work that QCGN does.

In the past I've noticed that their official publications were not in Canadian English, but U.S. English. I give you that as a challenge: to make sure that in protecting English for Quebecers, you protect Canadian English. Now you can respond.

**Mr. James Shea:** May I respond, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** Yes, you may.

**Mr. James Shea:** You may appreciate that as an English-speaking Quebecer, we feel we're under attack. In different jurisdictions there are debates taking place with respect to the use of the language. Quebec Community Groups Network represents 37 different associations across the province, some in Montreal, some in Maniwaki, some in the la Côte-Nord, and wherever.

It's a matter of economic survival. Part of that economic survival is the continuation to learn English, but it's to maintain the English language school boards. I'm not speaking on their behalf, although I happen to be a school trustee in Quebec as well—I wear many hats—but I'm not speaking from that perspective. The reality is the champions of French second language learning in Canada are the English language school boards.

True immersion for my grandchildren

•(1630)

[Translation]

is taking place in the French-language schools.

[English]

There's a certain reality here. Even though they attend French language schools, they form part of an English-speaking community.

The federal government, I believe, has a responsibility to support and maintain these English-speaking communities. It does so by funding, for example, the QCGN. We're not afraid of losing the English language; the reality is you want to be able to...

[Translation]

It is like French-language development.

[English]

You know when you talk about being perfectly bilingual, well I'm still working on my English, so to speak, even from an American's perspective. Speaking the language and learning the language, being able to read and write, and being able to graduate high school, being able to graduate and work in nursing or in medicine, is a real challenge.

We have to find a way to ensure the English-speaking community can learn the French that it wants to learn.

**The Chair:** Okay, thank you very much, Mr. Shea.

[Translation]

**Mr. Royal Galipeau:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Benskin.

[Translation]

**Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP):** Thank you.

Thank you for being here today.

It seems to me that, when you learn any subject in your own language, you succeed because you live in that language. You speak your mother tongue at home and you play with your friends in your mother tongue. That is something that is lacking in the anglophone and francophone immersion communities. When I went to immer-

sion school, I did my studies in French in Quebec, but I spoke English when I went home.

[English]

There were a couple of people even yesterday who talked about exchange programs and the ability to live for a period of time within the new language that you're learning. This is something that doesn't, in my opinion—and somebody can slap me if I'm wrong—fall into that provincial quagmire on education that we have had throughout this whole study.

This is something which I think falls into the category of support, of complementary programs, that could be developed through the government in terms of offering the opportunity for those in immersion programs to apply for an exchange in that language, and on the other side as well, teachers offering programs that can properly educate or train immersion teachers to teach in this very specific world.

Would anybody care to elaborate on whether that makes sense or not?

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Mr. Le Dorze, you have the floor.

[English]

**Mr. Philippe Le Dorze:** I certainly agree with Mr. Benskin, who just mentioned the possibility of increasing support for exchange programs.

[Translation]

Several programs are already in existence. Organizations are working toward this. Increasing opportunities for young anglophones to experience French culture in Quebec has an extraordinary impact. The stories of young people who visit Quebec and who suddenly realize why they are learning French are of inestimable value. So let us do it.

**Mr. Tyrone Benskin:** Thank you.

**Ms. Chantal Bourbonnais:** I have two points to raise on that subject.

One of the ways to contribute to this is teacher training, for example. I know that this is an area of provincial jurisdiction, but it definitely helps when you subsidize organizations such as mine. For example, every year our organization organizes an immersion conference where 600 teachers from across Canada come and take professional development training. In their school boards, teacher training days are rarely granted for French and immersion techniques. They engage in professional development when they come to us and our partners in the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers. The money you give us is used for those teachers.

My second point is that French-language learning does not occur solely in classrooms, but also in the community. One of the possible actions is to build a bridge between francophones and francophiles. Immersion programs will be better off only if they are supported by strong francophone communities that welcome these types of programs. We have an open francophone community. Consider this example: if my son marries your daughter who is in immersion, my grandchildren may attend a French-language school, and French will continue to flourish in Canada.

I believe that people in immersion must also be offered genuine experiences. Speaking French only in the classroom is not enough since one student merely speaks to another who has the same accent as he or she. We must promote exchanges, but also programs in which open communities can offer immersion students authentic experiences.

• (1635)

**Mr. Tyrone Benskin:** Thank you, Ms. Bourbonnais.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Chisu, please.

**Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I would like to thank our witnesses for their presentations.

Thank you very much for your contributions to our study. As you well know, Canada is a country with enormous linguistic diversity, yet both official languages continue to be very attractive to all of Canadian society.

What are the main challenges facing immigrants with respect to official language learning? We are receiving 250,000 immigrants per year in this country. Do the current programs adequately take these challenges into account? I would like it if you could give me and the committee some information.

We have one province in Canada that is officially bilingual. That is the province of New Brunswick. I loved being at the Summit of La Francophonie in 1999 in Moncton. At that time, I never, ever dreamed that 15 years later I would be here in the House of Commons. It is very important to know what we can learn from the province of New Brunswick, which is officially bilingual. We are looking at bilingualism at the federal level, so we don't need to reopen the Constitution, as Mr. Godin said, because we have the same scope.

How are these immersion programs working in New Brunswick? Are there some lessons learned that we can adopt in the other provinces to make our country a better place to be bilingual? Bilingualism is very important for economic purposes, as you mentioned. To be able to work, the more languages you know, the better it is, and the better it is to find jobs. That is very important for our society and for our country.

Especially to return to the immigrant issues, how are we dealing with this? You are a Canadian organization. Can we learn some lessons from New Brunswick?

**Ms. Chantal Bourbonnais:** The challenge we face in immersion in regard to newcomers to Canada is more about getting the word out

that it's okay to go into immersion and not...that you will be learning English when you're in the immersion program.

Right now what we're saying to immigrants is to not go into immersion, because they need to learn English first, but what we're realizing is that the children in immersion are learning English, and they're learning French, and they're doing better. The problem is that the parents don't know that they can do that. Often they're turned back at school, where they're saying, "No, don't go to immersion."

The challenge is to say to these people that immersion is for everyone, not just for people who were born here. It's for every child who wants to learn a second language.

• (1640)

**Mr. Corneliu Chisu:** I just want to correct you. In my riding of Pickering—Scarborough East, which is close to Toronto, a lot of immigrant parents want their kids in immersion.

**Ms. Chantal Bourbonnais:** Yes.

**Mr. Corneliu Chisu:** It is not a question of not being willing to do it. They are very conscious about bilingualism in Canada. They want to help their children; however, they don't have the possibility because either they are discouraged or there are not the means to provide this education.

**Ms. Chantal Bourbonnais:** I know that Canadian Parents for French and ACPI are really trying hard to educate school principals and school boards to accept that all parents who are asking for immersion should have access to it. We're trying hard to promote this idea.

**The Chair:** Okay, thank you very much.

Madam Michaud.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to welcome you and thank you for your presentations.

I have a few brief questions about trying to adopt national rules for immersion programs, particularly in rural areas.

Earlier you mentioned the fact that there was already a lack of resources for accessing existing immersion programs. The demand may not be as great in all regions. If you establish a national definition of immersion programs, how will the rural regions, which do not necessarily all have the same resources, be able to meet the criteria that might developed?

[*English*]

**Mr. James Shea:** Since it came back to me, I'd like to address the question.

**Ms. Éline Michaud:** Sure, definitely.

**Mr. James Shea:** I don't want to speak for school divisions, but if you have an English language school that has perhaps 100 students, and the next nearest school might be 50 or 80 kilometres away, the element of even being transported to another school for another program is not necessarily possible. That school community has to take a decision whether they want enriched French or advanced French. It's kind of a one-size-fits-all, but the reality is children learn at different rates. If this school community is going to offer a dual-track program, and that's how you address it, that's a function of having additional resources, and that function is having additional teachers to be able to support that. That's one of the issues and one of the concerns.

You just can't write off 100 children who are in an English language school who require French language instruction to be able to graduate high school. In a sense, it's a barrier to their completing high school, and that's a travesty—

**Ms. Éloise Michaud:** Yes, I understand what you're—

**Mr. James Shea:** —notwithstanding where, and recognizing that there are other challenges in the province in which I live that are quite significant with respect to language.

**Ms. Éloise Michaud:** I will interrupt you here, Mr. Shea, because I do understand the point you're making. In my riding, I have the Portneuf Elementary School. There are 80 students so I do know a bit of the challenges there.

I would like to hear from Madam Bourbonnais or Mr. Le Dorze.  
[Translation]

Both of you may answer.

**Mr. Philippe Le Dorze:** First of all, Ms. Michaud, it is up to the provinces to define immersion programs. At the national level, we can definitely propose best practices for immersion programs from kindergarten to grade 12. It would be up to the provinces to implement them and to show leadership in that area rather than show tolerance toward school boards that want to create French immersion programs.

Remember that French immersion was created because parents demanded it. Parents associated with Canadian Parents for French asked the school boards to create French immersion. It was not the school boards that decided, out of any great generosity, to create French immersion. It was the parents who demanded it.

Perhaps it is time for the provinces to provide a framework for what already exists and to clarify how things should be in each of them, with the idea of supporting—

• (1645)

**Ms. Éloise Michaud:** You talked about the broader framework that is used in Europe, the CECR. It could be adopted as a framework for determining what really constitutes bilingualism. Each province and territory could be allowed to decide on how to achieve that standard, which might be adopted in Canada. That is what I understand from your remarks. Is that correct?

**Mr. Philippe Le Dorze:** Absolutely.

**Ms. Éloise Michaud:** Thank you very much.

Do I have any time left to ask another question?

**The Chair:** Briefly.

**Ms. Éloise Michaud:** All right.

I am going to come back to you, Ms. Bourbonnais.

You told us about the enrolment of newcomers in immersion programs. Let us set aside for the moment the lack of information provided before or at the time of their arrival. Tell me instead what challenges those students face once they enter an immersion class.

**Ms. Chantal Bourbonnais:** I do not think I have a list of specific challenges. Immigrant children adapt to immersion programs very well, often better than others. They do well.

**The Chair:** All right, thank you.

Ms. Bateman, you have the floor.

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses for being here today.

A special welcome to Mr. Le Dorze, since he works in my riding. This is very important for children.

You mentioned a shortage of bilingual teachers. This is a very serious problem. You said that the schools sometimes hired teachers who did not have French-language skills, as in the case of a completely anglophone mother whose two children study in an immersion program. That is serious.

What do you think is the solution to that?

Mr. Le Dorze, perhaps you could answer that question since it is based on one of your comments.

**Mr. Philippe Le Dorze:** We could advertise the wonderful teaching profession and talk, for example, about the opportunities available to high school students and much more quickly identify those who might be interested in that profession. The sooner they know it, the sooner they will make an effort to develop their skills and the more qualified people we will have who intend to enter that noble profession. That could help offset the shortage of immersion teachers.

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** Thank you.

What do you think, Mr. Thompson?

[English]

**Mr. Stephen Thompson:** Just thinking back to the questions from Monsieur Dion, and also from Mr. Benskin and Mr. Galipeau, to your question, ma'am, about what the federal government can do, there are lots of areas where the federal government works that are not the federal government's jurisdiction. The federal spending power is all over Canadian politics.

[Translation]

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** Yes.

[English]

**Mr. Stephen Thompson:** Education is a provincial responsibility, no question, but not at the college level and not at the university level.

Where can the federal government directly reach into? It can directly reach into the colleges and it can directly reach into the universities. The federal government already spends money in universities for specific research questions or specific areas of federal interest.

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** We already spend money on French immersion, too, so it's a very important thing.

•(1650)

**Mr. Stephen Thompson:** You do, ma'am, but through the provinces.

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** Yes. Oh, I know we do a lot through the provinces.

**Mr. Stephen Thompson:** What I'm saying is that if it's a question of where the federal government can reach out to make a direct impact on the production of qualified immersion teachers, it's in teachers colleges, in Canadian universities.

[Translation]

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** All right.

My next question concerns the possibility of sharing professional development opportunities. Once again, I refer to Mr. Le Dorze's comments. He said that it would be desirable to offer teachers professional development opportunities during working hours. It is clear in my mind that this is essential in all professions.

We have school divisions in Manitoba, such as the Pembina Trails Division. I was previously chair of the Winnipeg School Division. We also have the DSFM, which offers a program entirely in French. Is it possible to share professional development opportunities for teachers?

I would like to hear your comments, sir.

**Mr. Philippe Le Dorze:** Yes, that is done. On February 3, 2014, the Éducateurs et éducatrices francophones du Manitoba, the EFM, and an agency of the Manitoba Teachers' Association are organizing a training day on the theme of French-language instruction. All teachers in the province in immersion and French as a first language are invited.

This is a recent initiative. It was held two years ago. The day was previously intended for immersion teachers. However, the EFM expanded it to involve French-language instruction.

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** Thank you, sir.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Dionne Labelle, you have the floor.

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP):** Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for being here.

According to a study conducted by the Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers, there is a shortage of immersion teachers. However, there is also another important factor, the drop-out rate among practitioners, which is approximately 30% in the first five years of their teaching career.

What happens? Why is the drop-out rate so high among immersion teachers?

**Mr. Philippe Le Dorze:** With your permission, I can answer your question, Mr. Dionne Labelle.

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle:** Yes, do ahead.

**Mr. Philippe Le Dorze:** The drop-out rates are typically the same for all programs. This is a phenomenon among new teachers. It affects both new immersion teachers and those in the French-language and English-language programs.

The statistics often vary from region to region. We know, for example, that the drop-out rate does not reach these thresholds among graduates from the Université de Saint-Boniface.

Mr. Karsenti's study was conducted three years ago, I believe, and it generally describes what is happening. The profession has some work to do to provide better reception and treatment for new teachers. It must really be a profession of learners. It must also acknowledge that new teachers are in the position of learning. We need to manage this aspect more effectively.

This is not the situation of second-language immersion programs alone.

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle:** I would nevertheless like to continue on this subject.

In your study, you identify five probable causes for teachers dropping out of immersion education.

The first were the difficult working conditions involved in immersion and instruction in French as a second language, the lack of teaching resources and the relationship challenges involved in teaching. There was also class management, as teachers sometimes have difficult clientele. I imagine this is common in other fields. There was also initial training and the teacher's choice of career.

Is the association currently addressing these factors? Is it trying to solve some of the problems identified in the study?

•(1655)

**Mr. Philippe Le Dorze:** We have established forums for new teachers. These are professional development opportunities for teachers who have recently started working. We held one in Newfoundland and Labrador in 2010, I believe, and another one in the Moncton area. We offer professional development opportunities to new teachers to meet some of their needs in managing the challenges they face in immersion classes.

So we are working to that end, but it is also up to the school boards offering immersion to work along the same lines.

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle:** Does the Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality provide you with support to enable you to assist immersion teachers? Do you receive support?

**Mr. Philippe Le Dorze:** Yes, we have that support.

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle:** That is good.

I have no more questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Dionne Labelle.

[English]

Mr. O'Toole.

**Mr. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have one question, and it's specifically in relation to page 4 and students with learning difficulties.

My daughter's in grade 1 in French immersion in Ontario. We're very proud of her. You identified a perception that many have about French immersion, that it can be for gifted children or for children without learning disabilities. How does your association continue to update your teachers on how to address the needs of students with learning disabilities within an immersion classroom?

**Mr. Philippe Le Dorze:** Certainly ACPI promotes immersion for all learners. We get the message out that teachers need to be inclusive and to recognize that decisions either to stay in the program or to leave it belong strictly to families and not to anybody else. Those put teachers in a position of conflict of interest, which is something they should never put themselves in.

We try to educate our educators. Last Friday we had a conference in our school division with somebody from the States who does research on all the good things that are occurring to youngsters who are learning a second language, who, even though they struggle, achieve similar or better results than they would achieve if they were in a one language program. We're promoting the news that learning a second language is actually really positive for all learners, even those who are struggling. Learning that second language, even though you're struggling, is still positive. It may even be better for you than not struggling and learning just one language.

A lot of the challenges stem from the wrong metaphor. People think that languages occupy space in the brain, so if you have two languages, your brain is overwhelmed. Well, that's not the right metaphor for the brain. The brain works differently. Having two languages is actually a good thing. Even though you're struggling, learning that second language makes you better and stronger in many different ways, cognitively included.

ACPI recognizes that and works to educate teachers and parents in that sense. The press is being quite helpful with that, pointing out a lot of studies that show that learning languages is extremely positive in all facets. We're learning more and more as we go on.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. O'Toole, for your question, and Mr. Le Dorze, for your answer.

We will suspend briefly for a couple of minutes to allow our witnesses to depart.

I want to thank our witnesses for their testimony.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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