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Chair

The Honourable Michael Chong

Standing Committee on Official Languages

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• (1530)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC)): Welcome to the 81st meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Today is Tuesday, May 21, 2013. Pursuant to Standing Order 108, today we are studying second official language immersion programs in Canada.

Joining us this afternoon are Ms. Sims from the Université de Saint-Boniface,

[English]

and then Mr. Young and Mr. Sokalski of the Winnipeg School Division.

Welcome to all three of you.

I understand that you want to take your 10 minutes each, combine them into one 20-minute presentation, and speak on behalf of your two respective organizations. Without further ado, you may begin with your opening 20-minute statement.

[Translation]

Mr. Raymond Sokalski (Teacher, Kelvin High School, Winnipeg School Division): Mr. Chair, honourable members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, thank you.

The three of us are educators from Manitoba and we are pleased to appear before this committee today to talk about our experiences, our best practices and our recommendations to the federal government regarding the teaching of French in a predominantly English-speaking environment.

My name is Raymond Sokalski and I have taught social science in the French immersion program, at the high school level, for 23 years. I have spent most of that time teaching at Kelvin High School, close to downtown Winnipeg.

I am proud to be accompanied by my two distinguished colleagues: Chris Young, who is a history teacher in the international baccalaureate program, at Kelvin High School, and Laura Sims, who is a professor in the Faculty of Education, Université de Saint-Boniface. We have known each other for a long time as educators, and we are also former students of the immersion program.

Our presentations will first highlight how the immersion programs we pursued when we were young had an impact on our entire lives. We feel we must warn you that the description of our individual paths may seem a bit detailed because we wanted to show that the immersion programs we participated in and the community

organizations that we joined have been supported by the federal government for many years and should still continue to receive that support.

Let me tell you about my personal experience. I come from a family of immigrants. My parents were manual workers and they enrolled me in the first short immersion program established in Manitoba in 1975. My classmates came from various backgrounds: single-parent families, working class, wealthy families, and so on. The six years I spent in this program and the enriching experiences I gained in my courses left their mark on me for the rest of my life. Our Canadian history textbooks came from Quebec; they were published by the Parti Québécois government, which was new at the time. We had the opportunity to benefit from the conferences held at the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface, the Génies en herbe competition, the public speaking competition, exchange trips and special guests, all funded by the federal government.

During my first year of university, I was a page here in the House of Commons. That was in 1981, when the Constitution Act was passed. Three years later, I went with a group of volunteers to Sri Lanka as part of the Canada World Youth program. Thanks to those two programs, I became friends with a number of young francophones. All my short-term jobs, whether with the Canada Day committee, in Manitoba, at Service Canada or in Asia, with Alliance Française, were the result of the language skills I had acquired in the immersion program. As a result of those experiences, I completed my Bachelor of Education degree at Université de Saint-Boniface. I was one of the fewer and fewer anglophones who went to the francophone campus.

I have so far had the privilege of teaching some 7,000 students. My wife and I have two children. Since the day they were born, 14 years ago, I have been speaking to them in French 80% of the time. It is their paternal language. As a result, our family has become one of the new species of bilingual anglophone families who live in western Canada.

All of this started with the immersion program, which began 40 years ago in four schools in Manitoba and which now includes thousands of students across the province. Those students are changing the demographics and our vision of this country.

• (1535)

Mr. Chris Young (History Teacher, Kelvin High School, Winnipeg School Division): Good afternoon.

Mr. Chair, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

Bilingualism and federal jobs have transformed my life. At the age of six, I was enrolled in the long immersion program. In grade 10, I entered the international baccalaureate program, which, unfortunately, was offered in English only. After high school, I had little opportunity to speak French and I felt that I was slowly losing my ability to speak the language.

A phone call changed everything. I was hired to work at the Lower Fort Garry National Historic Site. That is where I found my love for French again and I regained the confidence to speak it.

During those three years, I talked to hundreds of francophones, many of whom came from all corners of the globe. Not only did those conversations make me more open-minded, but they also inspired me to travel across Canada and around the world. After I received my first university degree, I wanted to have a French experience and I went to Paris, France, and elsewhere in Europe. I was often an informal ambassador when I talked in French about Canada and its complex history with the people in those countries.

As a student, I also had the great honour of living with 10 other Canadians and of working at the Vimy Ridge memorial centre. Thanks to various cultural exchanges, I developed a better appreciation of our country's diverse regional perspectives. At Vimy Ridge, perhaps because I lived with two Quebecers—an anglophone and a francophone—I became fascinated with Quebec and its history. Later, still driven by this passion, I moved to Montreal to finish my master's degree. My thesis dealt with a riot against conscription in Quebec City during World War I. Being the first anglophone from western Canada to write about this topic, I am proud to have provided a unique perspective to the writing of history.

All those opportunities, which shaped me as a young man, allowed me to develop as a student, as a Canadian and as a citizen of the world.

[English]

Dr. Laura Sims (Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education, Université de Saint-Boniface): Hello. It's an honour to be here with you today. My name is Laura Sims, and for me, education is hope.

In this context—this might seem crazy, but please indulge me—I think it's worthwhile to remind ourselves of the larger importance of what we do as educators and as elected representatives in a pluralistic society. For the next minute or so, I invite you to reflect upon the following question: In Canada, what is the beauty of creating bilingual citizens?

Feel free to write down your ideas. I'll give you about 30 seconds. Think about it. In Canada, what is the beauty of creating bilingual citizens? You still have another 10 seconds to think through your ideas.

Thank you very much. Hopefully we'll later be able to explore this question in more detail.

With this in mind, my presentation will be in both languages. I consider being bilingual a way of showing respect to both linguistic communities.

[Translation]

Prior to appearing before you today, I asked myself the following question: how has immersion changed my life?

I can honestly say that learning French and having access to all sorts of authentic immersion activities gave me an opportunity to have a much richer life in terms of experiences, adventures, friendships and educational and professional opportunities than I would have had otherwise. I think of immersion as encompassing all the formal and informal educational experiences offered in Canada and elsewhere.

Like Raymond, I started in the immersion program when I was 12. Later, I was able to discover Quebec and Acadian culture through the Summer Language Bursary Program. That allowed me to better recognize our cultural diversity and the issues facing our communities. The learning of French as a second language opened my eyes to the value and usefulness of learning other languages and it gave me the linguistic foundation to learn them more easily. As a result, I was able to learn Spanish as well.

By speaking three languages fluently, I was able to easily travel around the world—in Africa, Europe, Asia, Canada and Latin America—and make new friends everywhere I went. I was able to study in Latin America and conduct my master's and PhD research in Spanish. This skill also allowed me to develop professionally, because I was a teacher for ten years in the French immersion program in Winnipeg and in the English immersion program in the Dominican Republic. I was then able to manage a project developed by the Canadian International Development Agency in Central America and Canada.

In my current work at Université de Saint-Boniface, I am absolutely delighted to be able to teach in French and to do my research in the three languages. Working at the Université de Saint-Boniface, the only francophone university in western Canada, has directly and authentically allowed me to better understand my community, particularly the contributions of the Franco-Manitoban community.

• (1540)

Mr. Raymond Sokalski: I am now going to talk about our best practices.

As a teacher, in the classroom, I see that we obtain the best results when we provide students with authentic experiences, either in or outside the classroom. In my classes, the students and I decide together what the best ways are to express ourselves with more confidence in our second language. At first, it is important to work hard with the students so that they understand the importance of speaking French with each other. They gain the confidence through exposure to authentic situations.

At Kelvin High School, two years ago, our immersion team launched a series of oral evaluations for all the students, both individually and in small groups. We use an interdisciplinary approach.

For instance, a natural science teacher works with a social science teacher to meet individually with students for 20 minutes and ask them questions about an article they chose. That is how we try to make our interviews with the students authentic. We give them an opportunity to interact intensely in their second language and to receive words of encouragement, as well as suggestions to improve their oral skills.

Role-playing games are also part of authentic activities. For instance, we recreated the negotiations that led to the signing of Treaty 5 with the Cree at Norway House. We also simulated parliamentary debates on Senate reform. I swear I wrote that a few weeks ago. In addition, the students are becoming more familiar with francophone artists by coming up with their own interpretation of the social issues raised by the Cowboys Fringants or Congolese rappers.

When I prepare my lessons, I see there is a need to dig deeper to find authentic, pan-Canadian educational resources for second language learners. In my view, that is where the federal government could play a role. I think we need more documentaries that tell Canada's full history, in both languages.

One example is the television series *8^e feu*, which was recently produced by CBC/Radio-Canada. It is an outstanding series. In many cases, this is the first time my students have had an opportunity to listen to French-speaking aboriginal peoples talk about current issues in connection to Canadian history. In addition, the series offers a national vision from coast to coast to coast.

I am afraid this series is the exception to the rule. For instance, if you try to find the trial of Louis Riel in the Radio-Canada archives, you will search in vain. It is surprising, given that Riel's vision was that of a province promoting the two linguistic communities, as well as the aboriginal communities, in western Canada. Yet the popularity of the series *Canada: A People's History* was remarkable. So the examples of lack of resources are many. We could talk about that during the question and answer period afterwards.

The same goes for textbooks, quizzes and other educational resources. Learners and educators need more resources that are the result of collaboration between artists and writers, producers and documentary filmmakers or historians and political scientists from both linguistic communities. We must tell our stories more and make them resonate across Canada in the French language.

• (1545)

Mr. Chris Young: As with all teachers, my life experiences are part of what I bring to the classroom. The opportunities that I had, whether it be because of the federal government—often in a bilingual environment—or as a student and as a teacher, enabled me to grow professionally.

At a conference at the Historica-Dominion Institute in Montreal, I talked about the past, present and future of our country with other teachers from across the regions.

At the teachers' conference, I learned a lot about our parliamentary system. I also came to appreciate Ottawa's bilingual spirit.

Next summer, I will be in France and I will participate in *The Cleghorn War and Memory Study Tour*. Together with 18 Canadians,

I will gain a better understanding of the role of our anglophone and francophone soldiers in the two world wars.

For educators, these experiences outside the classroom are rich and invaluable, but the students are the real winners. In the classroom, they will be exposed to a wider range of viewpoints. They will better understand their country and the entire world. They will be better citizens.

In my classroom, because of my own experience, I have always taken the time to teach the history of French Canada. I try, as much as possible, to show my students multiple perspectives when studying topics such as the October crisis, conscription and the referendums in Quebec.

For instance, at a seminar last week, my students looked at various articles about the battle of the Plains of Abraham and the conquest written by anglophones and francophones. As a facilitator, I led the discussion by incorporating personal stories from my studies in Montreal and my visits to the Plains of Abraham. I think those practices help anglophones in the west to better understand a new and complex history, and at the same time, to develop empathy for the struggles of French Canadians.

Our students and teachers can often experience history and the French language outside the classroom. For a number of years, Raymond and I have taken our students on a historical walk of the city. In Saint-Boniface, our students interpret the heritage of Métis leader Louis Riel by going to see the controversial statue and his tombstone. For some students, it is their first contact with a French-speaking community and their first visit to Université de Saint-Boniface.

I recently organized a class trip that was a little more ambitious. I organized a trip for students to France and Belgium to visit the Canadian battlefields of the two world wars. It was an authentic and meaningful experience for my students. Not only were they exposed to a rich history, but they were also immersed in French and Belgian culture. We visited several Canadian cemeteries. To pay tribute to the dead soldiers from our school, my students created a memorial video that was partially bilingual. For the 100th anniversary of Kelvin High School, which took place last year, the video was presented to our students and the community.

[English]

Dr. Laura Sims: I teach in a faculty of education in a francophone university. I think that one of the most important elements of forming future teachers for immersion and supporting current ones in their professional development is providing them with meaningful opportunities to live the language, to understand its importance, and to constantly be able to develop their French language skills. This means supporting cultural organizations in the communities where we live so that all citizens can partake and benefit.

To inspire students, teachers need to be passionate about what they're teaching, and they need to be knowledgeable. For teachers and students alike to enrich our cultural literacy, this can come from living the language through literature, local theatre, arts, sports, historic sites, festivals, and museums.

It comes from having authentic resources that reflect our collective identity. It comes from experiencing francophone cultures across Canada and the world through fantastic programs like the summer language bursary program, Canada World Youth, and Katimavik. It comes from being able to study and work in both languages throughout this country.

In supporting educational institutions like the Université de Saint-Boniface and French language cultural organizations in minority contexts, like the Festival Théâtre Jeunesse or the Maison Gabrielle-Roy, it increases our cultural competency and our social integration as Canadians.

• (1550)

[Translation]

Mr. Chris Young: We feel that the federal government has an important role to play in promoting bilingualism. We have two recommendations.

First, the government should provide more funding for educational resources for immersion students and resources that support the teaching of Canadian history.

Second, we feel that the government must continue to support authentic experiences from which students and teachers can benefit outside the classroom. It is because of these various programs and the support provided to museums, exchanges and community groups that the three of us are here today and are able to tell you about our experiences.

Mr. Raymond Sokalski: Official bilingualism has added value that inspires us as educators. It is the asset that comes from a broader vision of our country and our world. I invite you to take a look at the photo I brought with me. For those who do not have it in their hands yet, there is a historical plaque at the Forks National Historic Site of Canada, which is supposed to explain the creation of Manitoba. It is one of the points of interest that our students look at when they are gathering information in the historic neighbourhood and in Saint-Boniface to study the French fact in Winnipeg.

This plaque is also on the wall of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

[English]

As you can see, in the English version, Riel seized power from an ailing Governor Mactavish.

[Translation]

However, in the French version, we learn that the residents of Red River formed a provisional government.

A unilingual observer would not notice this major difference between the two historical summaries. Our immersion students, having benefited from certain resources, having met with people and having visited the real places, notice the difference right away. This example is a symbol of everything this teaching program has to offer, more specifically everything that the underlying programs and federal resources have to offer.

This is not only about access to a language that was not theirs at the outset, but also about access to multiple perspectives on the world that allow them to be better able to find their own identity

through the perspectives of others. This is what we need to promote, protect and enhance.

[English]

Dr. Laura Sims: In conclusion, I invite you, when thinking about programs linked to immersion, to be profoundly inspired. The value of bilingualism is much more than can be quantified in simple economic terms.

Learning additional languages contributes to our social cohesiveness as a nation through better communication and improved cultural competency and acceptance.

It contributes to personal growth, and it contributes to our economy by providing opportunities and the flexibility for Canadians to work anywhere in this country.

It also allows us to enrich our cultural identity as francophone and anglophone Canadians by permitting us to create a collective identity, one that respects and supports the other community while at the same time incorporates a fuller and richer Canadian pluralistic identity.

Thank you very much for your time.

The Chair: Thank you to our witnesses for their opening statements.

Before we begin with Monsieur Godin, I want to point out to members of the committee that the clerk has given you copies of the Canada-Manitoba Agreement on Minority Language Education and Second Official Language Instruction 2009-10 to 2012-13. It was sent to you by e-mail. I would ask you to reference this document because this is the document the federal government uses to fund both minority language education and second official language instruction in the province of Manitoba.

The analyst is looking for suggestions and recommendations on how this agreement, which expired about a month ago, on April 30, and which needs to be renegotiated for another five years, can be improved upon.

It's a thick document, in both official languages, which your offices received by e-mail this morning.

I would ask you to make sure your questions are focused on improvements to this federal-provincial agreement. It would be of great help to us in drafting the report.

I think we have a couple of extra copies if you want to refer to them during the committee meeting.

[Translation]

Mr. Godin, go ahead.

• (1555)

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

I would like to welcome our witnesses. I see Ms. Sims met with Acadians and fell in love with Acadia. Welcome.

I listened to your remarks and that makes me want to send all three of you to meet with the Prime Minister, as ambassadors, to promote bilingualism and to give him the message that the judges of the Supreme Court and officers of Parliament should be bilingual. That would send a clear message to all Canadians that the government respects both official languages and that bilingualism starts at the top. Would you agree with me on that?

Mr. Raymond Sokalski: Yes.

Mr. Yvon Godin: That does not seem to be getting through.

Ms. Sims, would that be a good idea?

Dr. Laura Sims: Yes.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you.

Mr. Young, you also talked about how important student exchanges are. You talked about it twice.

And Ms. Sims, you talked about Katimavik.

Dr. Laura Sims: Yes.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Did the government make a mistake by ending the funding for the Katimavik program?

Dr. Laura Sims: May I add something? You can see that I am—

Mr. Yvon Godin: I am asking a question, but you can answer it however you would like.

Dr. Laura Sims: I would just like to say that we are here as individuals. I am not speaking on behalf of Université de Saint-Boniface, where I work. I also work at Kelvin High School.

I just wanted to tell you that I am not representing anyone else other than Laura Sims, just like my colleagues are representing themselves only. In my view, this is an excellent program. I have never participated in it, but my understanding is that it was excellent and I would like it to continue. I know the funding was eliminated, but I would like it to continue because it is an excellent program.

Mr. Yvon Godin: What do you think, Mr. Sokalski?

Mr. Raymond Sokalski: I was just going to add that everyone who learns a second language goes through a period of turmoil. If you were to start learning a new language in a classroom, which can only be a sterile environment compared to the real world, you would probably not go through this turmoil.

I am talking about the experience of being truly immersed in a completely new society. That is when you realize why you are learning the language. You realize that you are learning the language to develop those types of relationships. Those moments occur when you participate in programs like Katimavik, when you are in a completely new place, surrounded by people who are nothing like you. That type of experience is quite rare, but we need to reproduce it as much as possible. Katimavik is one example. Canada World Youth is another, just like the Encounters with Canada program and the Forum for Young Canadians. We tried to give you a few short examples of those programs in our remarks.

Mr. Chris Young: I will quickly say that I did not participate in Katimavik, but some of my students did and they thought it was an absolutely incredible experience. They travelled across Canada and met various communities. They said the experience has changed them. As I said in my presentation, I feel that those programs are

very, very important for our country, for bilingualism and for becoming more open.

• (1600)

Mr. Yvon Godin: I also wanted to talk about the age at which young people should start immersion school.

When there were changes to the age, I must admit that the people of New Brunswick were disappointed. Even the anglophones were disappointed. I would have never thought that 350 anglophones would protest outside the Legislative Assembly in Fredericton and say that they wanted to learn French. When the provincial government said that the program would start in grade 5, parents showed their opposition to this measure. Finally, the government brought it down to grade 3. However, experts say that the younger you start, the better it is.

You are experts. You do not want to talk on behalf of your institutions, but I would like to hear what you have to say as individuals. You are teachers. At what age and grade do you think immersion should start?

Mr. Raymond Sokalski: I started in grade 7, just like Laura. So you have two products of short immersion, and Chris is a product of long immersion. To me, the key is the support and extracurricular activities offered in any given immersion program, whether it be short or long. To me, that is the key. It is important to know what professional support comes with a given program.

Mr. Yvon Godin: In terms of professional support, previous witnesses have told us that instructors were lacking the experience or the required skills. They rushed in this field without really having the required skills. In your view, what support can the federal government provide to assist in acquiring those skills?

Since education is subject to provincial legislation, we are walking on thin ice. Given its jurisdiction over the area and in light of section 43 of part VII of the Official Languages Act dealing with the advancement of both languages, what type of funding can the federal government provide to help the provinces with those types of programs? What would you recommend to the government?

Since the federal government's purse is bigger than that of the provinces, what could it do to help the provinces with education?

Mr. Chris Young: I was in an immersion program until grade 9. Then I was in the international baccalaureate program (IB), which was offered in English. So I was losing my French.

Instead of going to the college, I went to the University of Winnipeg where I obtained my first degree. I would have liked to do my studies in French, but it wasn't possible, because the courses were offered in English only. I went outside the province to study history.

In terms of recommendation for the provincial and federal governments, I would recommend implementing more immersion programs at the post-secondary level in universities where it is possible. I know this is possible at the University of Ottawa. I think law students at McGill University also have this opportunity. That is what I would have done. As I said in my speech, it is thanks to the national program offered at Lower Fort Garry that I speak French today.

An anglophone from Winnipeg, who is not familiar with the francophone community and who only studies in English at the University of Winnipeg, will not have an opportunity to speak French. The student could enrol in courses provided by the Alliance Française or other courses like that, but that takes a lot of self-motivation.

As I said, Lower Fort Garry was my door to speaking French again.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Ms. Bateman, go ahead.

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank our witnesses for being here with us today. You are extraordinary witnesses and dedicated teachers. You make a huge difference in the lives of your students, which is a great accomplishment, in my view.

I would like to clarify some things. In connection with the issue we are discussing today, it was mentioned that a large part of the memorandum of understanding between Canada and Manitoba has to do with the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine, DSFM, which is one component of our education system.

Mr. Chair, is it possible not to use up my question time, since I am just trying to clarify this?

In my view, it is very important to fully understand that this memorandum of understanding includes the DSFM and the immersion programs in schools. Our witnesses today are from immersion schools only. It is very important to make that distinction in our deliberations. In addition—

• (1605)

The Chair: Ms. Lecomte, very quickly please. Could you clarify that point?

Ms. Lucie Lecomte (Committee Researcher): Do you have a specific question about the document, Ms. Bateman?

Ms. Joyce Bateman: It is very important for all the members of the committee to fully understand that the memorandum of understanding that you suggested as our framework for today's study, includes things that go beyond the experience of our great witnesses, such as DSFM, for example.

I will—

The Chair: What does DSFM mean?

Mr. Raymond Sokalski: It is the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: It is in the document. It is a good lesson.

[English]

I should have read this, but I only received it at noon today. It's very important that we understand it's a part we cannot expect our witnesses to speak to today. They have a wealth of experience on the immersion program. I just wanted to make sure we understood, because I was going through this and thinking that I don't think this is exactly.... Although maybe we'll get some other witnesses who could speak to this.

[Translation]

As I said, my children benefited from your skills as a teacher. I am really lucky.

My question follows on your question, Ms. Sims.

[English]

What is it that makes bilingualism important to any of us?

[Translation]

Mr. Young, you talked about your experience with history and the research conducted by your teachers.

Mr. Sokalski, you always incorporate aspects such as immigration in your social science courses. Could you tell my colleagues about your experience, the reality you have discovered and the enrichment that comes from integrating the history of our country into another language?

Thank you.

Mr. Raymond Sokalski: I teach grade 9 students in Manitoba. They are 14 years old. In three or four days, they will be having parliamentary debates in the classroom, which will be set up like the House of Commons with the government side and the opposition side. They will deal with the classic issues, if you will, but also with current issues.

This year, we will be debating the role of the monarchy, given that a young prince and a not-so-young prince might come to the throne in a few years. With a view to enrichment, we will deal with immigration issues. For instance, we will talk about the number of refugees who should be admitted in the economic class and family class respectively.

Our challenge is to create opportunities for students to speak with confidence about research they have carried out in French. That requires as much creativity as possible. Sometimes, it is a little challenging to find materials that are appropriate for their language level.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Could the other witnesses also comment on this?

• (1610)

Mr. Chris Young: My approach is very similar.

I try to encourage creativity as much as possible, to make history come alive in my classroom, to show students that history is very dynamic and that there are multiple perspectives. As I said earlier, I incorporate many personal experiences in my classes.

Mr. Raymond Sokalski: While listening to Chris, I thought about the fact that it is increasingly possible for young people to interview former students who are now much more comfortable speaking French.

For instance, when we look at issues dealing with immigration, each student must find someone who has a personal immigration story. I often asked former students to speak French in interviews with my 14-year-old students. They would tell gripping stories such as running away from Afghanistan or the Congo. When we talk about the Congo, we are talking about francophones, people whose mother tongue is French.

Those experiences are really precious for students, because they are authentic. In addition, it is not the teacher speaking in front of the classroom. We try to avoid that approach as much as possible.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Madam Sims.

Dr. Laura Sims: Could I add something?

The Chair: Yes, go ahead.

Dr. Laura Sims: Again, I hope you guys don't think I'm crazy for adding these things.

I teach at this francophone university. I'm an anglophone by birth, and I'm a firm believer that we all have something to contribute.

I teach at the Université de Saint-Boniface in the *faculté d'éducation*. I teach all the courses linked to diversity, cultural diversity, and to aboriginal perspectives. I am not aboriginal; if you look at me, you'll see that I'm pretty white-bread. Nonetheless, I believe that as anglophones we all have something to contribute as allies within a bilingual country.

Certainly, like Ray and Chris, I love to bring people into my class, because we need.... For example, in my aboriginal perspectives class, I bring in aboriginals and we do a sweat and all sorts of things, because I think that.... Also, some of my students are from Togo. They don't speak English, so you think of what you have to do to bridge the gap. Because all the courses are done all the time in French, it means we have a translator there who's doing translation for my students. Rather than just looking at things as a challenge, you look at what solutions you can find to do this in French too.

Another thing is—again, hopefully you won't think I'm crazy—sometimes I think about what if people were colours, like such-and-such a personality is a vibrant orange, or red, or maybe beige, and I say, “Ah, imagine...”. One of the things that makes us vibrant as a nation is that I think we're this vibrant palette of different colours, and lively, and I fear, in the monotone of unilingualism, of becoming beige.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Sims.

We'll now go to Monsieur Dion.

[Translation]

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

My thanks to the three witnesses for joining us today.

Could you tell me what you think about the Canada-Manitoba agreement and the action plan for official languages in Manitoba, if you happened to take a close look at it?

How could we improve it?

Dr. Laura Sims: We have not seen the document.

• (1615)

Hon. Stéphane Dion: That is a bit of a problem because that is what we need to look at.

I greatly admire your life stories, but, as a legislator, I want to be able to assess what I can do. You made two suggestions, but I am not sure whether they are already part of the Manitoban government's plan. If so, the work would be done twice. We cannot include anything in our report without checking it.

You talked about educational resources. Is there anything in the plan about that? In addition, you will understand that it is difficult for the federal government to create a fund for educational resources. It is somewhat outside our jurisdiction. I can't think of a single federal official who is familiar with educational resources. Usually, those who are familiar with the area work at the provincial level, not the federal.

Could you please remind me what your second suggestion was?

Mr. Chris Young: It had to do with increased support for students and teachers to have authentic experiences outside the classroom. We are talking about programs such as the Youth Forum, Katimavik and Explore.

In terms of educational resources, we are wondering whether the federal government could provide funding to the authors who write textbooks for immersion students, for example. A few years ago, one of Raymond's students, an anglophone from Winnipeg, wrote a history textbook in French. Of course, the perspective is always slightly different.

Perhaps you can talk about it.

Mr. Raymond Sokalski: It was a former student who did his PhD at Laval University. His name is Matthew Rankin and he is a former Kelvin High School student. He did his PhD in history at that university. He wrote a textbook that is great for us who study Canadian history in French in western Canada. Not only does he focus on the major anglophone and francophone issues in Quebec, but he also puts special emphasis on the fight for the French fact in western Canada.

In terms of educational resources, we fully recognize that this is largely a provincial matter. However, when you go to the website of the Historica-Dominion Institute and you click on a quiz, you can only do it in English. I think it is unfortunate that there wasn't a bit more funding for the institute to be able to develop quizzes in French.

That is what I am thinking about.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Okay. It is clearer. Thank you.

Mr. Raymond Sokalski: Yes, there is a whole range of CBC/Radio-Canada programs. Some are in English, but not in French. There were programs like *Canada's Next Great Prime Minister*. In French, *La Plus Grande Personnalité canadienne* has a website but no video. There are small 10-minute clips.

That is what I need as a teacher.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I think immersion schools are doing well. Your suggestions might help improve things. However, I am not sure that the overall learning of French is going well. That is what I am worried about.

According to the data before me, there are 181,000 students in the Manitoban public system. The number is going up. There are about 5,000 students in the francophone division. That number is also going up. There are about 21,000 students in immersion schools. That number is going up. That's good.

But here is the bad news. The learning of French in regular English-speaking schools—I think we are talking about 61,000 students—has dropped significantly. In 1990, there were 90,000 students. This means that the number has dropped by one-third. The situation is similar in the private sector. So approximately 94,000 English-speaking students have virtually no opportunity to learn French in Manitoba.

How do you explain that? Immersion schools are in a sense the façade that hides a drop in numbers. This drop is of great concern to me.

Mr. Raymond Sokalski: Are we talking about students enrolled in basic French courses?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Yes, in regular schools, not immersion schools. I am not saying that immersion schools are irregular.

Dr. Laura Sims: I don't claim to be an expert in the area, but in elementary schools, the person teaching all the classes now has to teach French as well, the so-called basic French. Imagine teachers who are not comfortable speaking French or do not speak it and still have to teach it in grades 3, 4 and 5. It is difficult. As I mentioned, teachers must be passionate about what they teach.

The policy has changed. It is now no longer required that French be taught by someone who speaks it very well. Students may start having negative experiences and developing a negative attitude towards the language.

• (1620)

Hon. Stéphane Dion: That is another issue. The French courses that 61,000 students are taking in those schools are perhaps of lesser quality than before. The fact remains that 94,000 students do not even have the option of taking French courses.

Dr. Laura Sims: Yes.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: That is what the statistics I have say. In addition, that number is going up.

I don't know whether, from your positions in immersion schools, you are able to see this drop in other types of schools and if you are able to explain the trend.

Mr. Raymond Sokalski: No. We came here to talk about immersion. We are seeing an increase in immersion enrolment. You

mentioned there was an increase. I am happy to see that, there seems to be less stress around registration in Manitoba, compared to other provinces. Parents who wish to enrol their children in an immersion program can in fact have access to one.

My students practically come from all over Winnipeg. They come from both poor and well-off neighbourhoods. There is a good mix and it does not seem that anyone has to spend the night in a parking lot to be first in line to enrol their child. The supply and demand seem to be relatively balanced, and we are happy about that.

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

[Translation]

Thank you.

Mr. Gourde, go ahead.

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

It was interesting to listen to your remarks, especially when you talked about your opportunities to learn French as anglophones. Please stop me if you think I am going too far, but we would like all Canadians to have those types of opportunities so that anglophones can speak French and francophones can speak English. Our study deals with immersion schools. As we know, this is a provincial matter, but the federal government can provide some support.

Mr. Sokalski, I really liked what you said about the CBC/Radio-Canada programming.

Could an extra effort be made to provide you with more French-language materials, such as anglophone programs, or francophone programs that can be translated into English, or programs in both languages at the same time? We have already talked about that in committee.

Would those tools be beneficial to you by helping your students do their work?

Mr. Raymond Sokalski: In a word, yes.

However, I have mixed feelings about the issue, because there could be problems. I am definitely interested in having access to programs for francophones in Quebec. I currently have access to programs such as *Pérusse Cité*, where a deputy minister gives advice to a fictitious environment minister in Quebec. So I already have access to that type of programming.

The issue is not having access to an English translation of those French-language programs, because the French is quite clear. The problem is that those programs are so focused on Quebec that their usefulness for my students in Manitoba is open to question. By watching those shows, they can get an idea of Quebec reality and hear Quebec expressions. That is all very useful, but I would like to see someone come up with the same type of programming that focuses on a federal minister instead so that my students can better understand the federal system in Canada.

I will list other programs for those who are not familiar with *Pérusse Cité*. Some programs poke fun at politicians, such as *Et Dieu créa... Laflaque* or its English equivalent *The Rick Mercer Report*. Right? Those programs try to educate Canadians while also criticizing some aspects of the government system. It is not a lesson per se, but rather an appealing way of delivering a lesson.

Rick Mercer talks about Canada as a whole, but perhaps he does not talk enough about French Canada. It is true. What I am looking for is something in French that talks about all of Canada.

• (1625)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: You will understand that financial resources become limited sooner or later.

Just now, you talked about Katimavik, which costs almost \$30,000 per person and only about 500 people can participate a year. Is it better to fund programs like that or is it better to give 5 million young Canadians a chance to have access to tools that help them with their personal development?

We must make a choice. Do we give an opportunity to many Canadians to learn the two languages or to only 1,000 people a year? It is important to make that choice.

In your view, what should we do? Should we favour the masses or the elite?

Mr. Raymond Sokalski: That must be a difficult choice. If you put it that way, I don't envy you. It must be very difficult, especially when you are talking about \$30,000 per participant. That is unheard of. It is difficult to keep the authentic aspect, but it is really important to do so. However, the fact that the Katimavik program costs \$30,000 per person must call the whole program into question.

When I participated in the Canada World Youth program, I stayed with host families. Are we trying to preserve or to create community-based programs by investing the necessary funding to do so? I don't know. If memory serves, the participants—

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Let's go back to tools. As teachers, are there other tools that could provide you with the support you need?

You need a foundation, but the students are able to make some progress on their own. My children learned English in school, but today they are able to have conversations and go further by watching TV and using computers and electronic tools.

Would it help you a lot if the federal government invested in other programs and tools that would benefit the majority of students?

Mr. Chris Young: I think we mentioned a number of them in our speech.

Mr. Raymond Sokalski: We talked about authentic experiences, exchanges, visits to museums and historic sites with francophone guides who are very comfortable speaking the language. When the students visit a fort or look at a statue, the guides, whose first language is French, interact with a group of young people and give them an opportunity to have a certain experience. That is what we are looking for as teachers, once we are outside the classroom.

Dr. Laura Sims: Cultural organizations rely on grants. When we turn to what the federal government can do, I think about our context. In Winnipeg, we have the Cercle Molière theatre, the

Maison Gabrielle-Roy museum, the Lower Fort Garry National Historic Site, the Forks National Historic Site. However, it is difficult for us to have access to tours in French, because only one or two people can give those tours. It is very important for people to be able to present, share and create those experiences in both languages.

Mr. Chris Young: Even if the French-language educational resources are better for anglophones and even if, when they receive their high school diplomas, their spoken French is better, if they do not have an opportunity to visit the country and to become familiar with various perspectives at the post-secondary level, it will be very difficult for them to keep up their French. We know that.

Once they start university, many of our graduates no longer practise the French they have learned, which, in many cases, means that they will be losing it. It is difficult to be a politician. I know that you need to make decisions and that money is limited, but I think those programs are really important.

• (1630)

The Chair: Okay.

Thank you.

Mr. Trottier, go ahead.

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

I am very happy that you are here today. Manitoba feels a bit like home to me. My father grew up there; he attended a French school in Saint-Norbert and studied at the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface. He told me stories about his philosophy and Greek exams when the school was still a classical college. I fully understand the challenge that comes with studying in French in a place like Manitoba, but I feel that you are up to the challenge.

I would first like to briefly clarify my comments, given that we will not talk a lot about this topic. In terms of Katimavik, it was \$28,000 a year per participant and the drop-out rate was 30%. I really share your point of view on the importance of authentic experiences. Immersion is important, but you need more than that. That has been my experience as well. I have met with young students who were in immersion for years, but who did not acquire the confidence to use their French-language skills in the community and in the world in general. In that sense, authentic experiences are important.

You also talked about history. And that is always problematic, especially when we talk about the teaching of history by the federal government. The provinces are sometimes sensitive to the issue. I would like us to talk about authentic experiences in today's context. I think it is a good topic and we could talk about it in broader terms in committee.

Could you give us some examples of authentic experiences or tell us about your ideas in a more current context rather than historical? I actually think that students are more interested in the present than in the past. History is important, but it does not always awaken the same interest.

Mr. Chris Young: I discuss current events with my students almost daily. What I teach does not only pertain to the present. I talk about current events, but I always relate them to history, so that the students can understand better and see how this can affect them.

Last year, I organized many activities to mark our school's 100th anniversary. My students helped me. That is a good example. Not only did they learn a lot about the past of our school—which was attended by Marshall McLuhan, Neil Young and Fred Penner—but they also met those people. I organized a day dedicated to the school's history, and 52 people came to speak. All of them had graduated from Kelvin High School or had taught there. The students who introduced those individuals and served as their ambassadors had an opportunity to meet them and really establish connections between the past and the present. I think the experience was truly amazing.

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Regarding what you said about authentic experiences, I think it's important for students to actively participate.

Mr. Chris Young: Yes. Exactly.

Mr. Bernard Trottier: I think that, as an educator, you understand that students learn more when they are actively involved than when the education is provided passively.

Mr. Chris Young: Yes.

Mr. Bernard Trottier: What kinds of immersion programs or activities allow students to participate actively, aside from actual immersion schools? You were telling me about certain experiences, such as trips to Europe. How do such initiatives help students participate and really get involved?

•(1635)

Mr. Chris Young: I did not touch on this in my presentation, but two years ago, I organized a trip with my students to visit World War I and World War II battlefields.

The trip was not just about going to Vimy Ridge and learning about its history—although that would have been a good experience too. A few months before our departure, I ordered the military records of the soldiers who had attended Kelvin High School. I assigned each of my students a soldier who had died in World War I or World War II. They conducted research for a few months. They visited the soldiers' homes—if they still existed—to take photos. They contacted their living descendants. We then went to the cemetery to visit the soldiers' graves. Each student made a presentation on their soldier's life. I think that was a truly authentic experience. In fact, I know it was because the students were so affected by the experience—I was taken by surprise.

As I said earlier, we made a video in order to share that experience with our school and community. We even had an opportunity to meet some of the descendants who came to visit the memorial chamber we had created to tell this story.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dionne Labelle, go ahead.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your testimony.

It may have looked like I wasn't listening earlier, but while I was taking in what was being said, I was doing research. I am mostly concerned about the statistical aspect Mr. Dion talked about.

We are meeting in committee to assess the immersion situation and the quality of the work done in immersion schools. At the same time, we need to look at how the federal funding from the Roadmap is being used to support English as a second language teaching.

I was looking at the Statistics Canada data. In Manitoba, in 2006, there were 75,545 students taking French as a second language courses. In 2011, there were 70,000 of them, or 5,000 fewer students. Meanwhile, between 2006 and 2011, there was an increase of 1,500 students in immersion. Effectively, 3,500 fewer students are being exposed to French. So youth bilingualism in Canada is either stagnating or declining altogether.

As legislators, we will soon face a dilemma. Should we continue to invest in support for immersion programs? When it comes to bilingualism, does our society benefit from investing in immersion programs, or should we redirect that money toward support for general French as a second language teaching programs? I am convinced that students who come out of immersion programs are individually more bilingual than the majority of those who take French as a second language courses at the primary or secondary level.

That being said, overall, youth bilingualism is declining, and fewer and fewer young people are exposed to French. What should we invest in? That is the key question we need to answer.

Mr. Raymond Sokalski: I may be an expert in one area, but not in another. I am not very familiar with immersion on a national level, but I know a bit about it on a provincial level. If my understanding is correct, the Manitoba statistics indicate that enrollment in immersion is increasing annually. Consequently, the total number of immersion graduates is also increasing. I hope that means you will notice a change, even if it may be imperceptible at first.

We see more and more anglophones who are living in French at home. My children are now 11 and 14 years of age. I have been familiar with the public speaking contest since participating in it as a child. I can tell you that an increasing number of families are faced with a dilemma every year. They wonder in which category to enrol their child. For instance, my children suggested that I enrol them in the francophone category because I speak to them in French. I am wondering about that myself.

I know that things have changed significantly since I was enrolled in the program in the 1970s and 1980s. I would not want to see immersion decline, as all the figures apparently indicate that fewer people are exposed to French. Immersion seems to be working well, and I do not want it to lose ground.

•(1640)

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: I understand what you are saying, but I would like to come back to Ms. Sims' comments about the basic education provided at the primary and secondary levels by teachers who don't have a good grasp of the language they are teaching. In my region, the situation is reversed. English teachers do not speak English. I think that's an important aspect. Shouldn't the federal government help the provinces ensure that the quality of core French teachers improves?

Ms. Sims.

Dr. Laura Sims: That is a great comment. It is important to answer those questions.

Let us take the example of the Université de Saint-Boniface. I work there, but I am not exactly married to the institution. However, I do believe that this is a good school where many authentic activities are taking place. It is the only francophone university, and it offers the FIT program—or French Immersion for Teachers. That program is aimed at people who teach core French. It supports their professional development and gives them an opportunity to see that the francophone community is alive in our area. That's very important.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: That's the basis of my concern. I do not want Canada to have a two-tier education system in second language learning. That would mean having immersion schools where teachers are clearly amazing, and a public system where teachers do not meet the normal requirements for second language education.

Thank you.

The Chair: Than you, Mr. Dionne Labelle.

Mr. Galipeau, the floor is yours.

My apologies—it is actually your turn, Mr. Chisu.

[English]

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

To the witnesses, thank you very much for your presentations.

I understand you learned a second language. You were exposed to the second language.

You have also been in Europe, right? Can you tell me how these languages are taught in Europe? In Switzerland they have four official languages.

You were speaking about Vimy Ridge. I was in Ypres, Belgium, which is not in Wallonia, but in a Dutch-speaking part.

Mr. Chris Young: That's right.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: It seems to me that the languages are taken up with ease. There are no problems around it. People love speaking more languages. For me, any language you speak is a culture multiplier.

I'm asking you, from your European experience, how can we get these two beautiful languages, these two great languages, *le français* and English, spoken in this beautiful country? We talk a lot about

money and everything else, but our goal is really to have two languages spoken well.

What are your recommendations on this one? I know that the provinces deal with education and so on, and our hands are tied in certain ways by the Constitution and so on, but what can we do at the federal level to promote these languages? I'm not talking about forcing somebody to speak the language, i.e., otherwise the person won't get that job or something, but about how we teach with ease and show the beauty of these two languages.

What are your recommendations from your experience, including your experience in Europe, and probably in other milieux where you taught both languages?

•(1645)

Mr. Raymond Sokalski: When we speak of Europe, we're speaking of a continent where within the space of an hour or two you are completely immersed in a different culture, in a different society. That is the beauty and the headache of Europe. For me, it's the beauty. For the people who suffered war there in the past, it was the headache.

If you want to take a class on a trip from Spain to Flanders, you can organize that. It may take a two-day journey, an overnight somewhere, but you'll be there. For Canadians, we are defined by our geography. If I want to take a group of students from my high school to someplace where no one speaks English, that's an undertaking.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: We have *la belle province*; we have Quebec. Why are we not using the opportunities that we have?

Dr. Laura Sims: Absolutely. I also lived in Europe, and I work in Latin America. Sometimes I have to explain to my buddies down there that Quebec is 3,000 kilometres from where we live. They'll say, "I'm coming to Montreal. Can you come for coffee?" I say, "It's far."

Voices: Oh, oh!

Dr. Laura Sims: Absolutely it would....

I've often asked how come some of the European countries—not all the European countries—get it so right with learning other languages.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: No, I'm from Europe, so I know how it is.

Dr. Laura Sims: Yes, but there are certain.... For example, my French friends are super useless in English. My English friends are absolutely useless in any other language. But in Germany, they're awesome in English. In Switzerland, many speak other languages too.

You think, what is it that makes a certain context so fantastic? I don't know the answer, except for....

A voice: Proximity.

Dr. Laura Sims: Proximity.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: I just want to tell you that in the European Union, there are now 20 official languages. That is incentivizing people—

Dr. Laura Sims: Absolutely.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: —to learn more languages. It's not forcing them. It's—

Dr. Laura Sims: —inspiring them.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Yes, it's inspiring them.

We have this great opportunity to do that.

Dr. Laura Sims: Absolutely.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: We should go to action, not to.... We are talking too much.

Mr. Chris Young: Just very quickly, with regard to Quebec, at our high school we don't run a trip to Quebec right now. We have in the past. At our junior high, we do. That's an experience that our students have had, although certainly we could do more of that.

I just think it goes back to, once again, these authentic experiences that we can have outside of the classroom that ultimately give us this inspiration.

For me, when I got that job at Lower Fort Garry, initially it was a job. I got a summer job; great. But very quickly it became this incredible opportunity to practise the language, to meet people from all over the world, and to be absolutely inspired to work on my second language.

That's the kind of opportunity we need. And that wasn't forced. That was a federal government program where there was an opportunity to speak a second language.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: So you see an opportunity—

Mr. Chris Young: Yes.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: —that the federal government, without interfering in the education, would eventually encourage and—I don't know about the money for it—put some effort into these kinds of exchanges.

Mr. Chris Young: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: I'm just telling you this from the army perspective. I was in the Canadian army. It was absolutely enjoyable to know every province. For example, I know people from Quebec who served in the armed forces. They settled in British Columbia, in Chilliwack. They loved it, and they brought culture, and they brought openness and so on.

These exchanges among ourselves are very important. We are a big country, but with very few people.

•(1650)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Chisu.

Madam Perreault.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Manon Perreault (Montcalm, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank our witnesses for joining us. I had a number of questions for you, but you have answered most of them already. So I won't ask them again.

You know that Canada is very linguistically diverse owing to new arrivals. When those people come to Canada, one of their biggest challenges consists in choosing between French and English. What

goes into their decision? Is one language being promoted more than the other? Is one option being encouraged over the other?

Mr. Raymond Sokalski: The reality in Winnipeg is that, when they arrive, most people expect to be integrated into an anglophone community. Without giving the issue too much thought, they enrol their children in the school closest to them, which, statistically speaking, will probably be an anglophone institution.

However, I would like to add that, in the immersion courses I teach—especially in high school, where some students drop out because they are not given the paraprofessional support they need—my students make up a very mixed group compared with what I saw at the beginning of my career. Today, I see many children from immigrant families, like my own. A number of students come from Asia, Africa and Latin America.

I am picturing my current ninth-grade classroom, a third of which is made up of foreign students. Their family comes from abroad. Those people have chosen immersion and are among the biggest believers in the system's effectiveness. Moreover, since they already speak two languages at home, adding a third one makes perfect sense to them.

Dr. Laura Sims: I would add to that that the francophone community in Winnipeg is currently growing thanks to new arrivals. They mostly come from North Africa and black Africa.

Today, 40% of the Université de Saint-Boniface student body comes from elsewhere. That's a very high proportion. Their presence—which is extremely enriching and important—is helping revitalize that francophone community. Some of them are immigrants, and others are refugees. Some of them do not speak English. So they speak only French and perhaps their mother tongue. Their presence in Winnipeg is positively enriching.

Ms. Manon Perreault: If I understand correctly, their first choice is to learn English, since they are steered toward anglophone schools.

Dr. Laura Sims: That depends on where they are from. If they come from francophone countries, they will enrol in the Franco-Manitoban School Division or in immersion schools. As for the English-speaking immigrants, they enrol wherever they want.

Ms. Manon Perreault: Or vice versa.

I clearly recall that I started studying English in Grade 5, and I continued with those studies in high school. Of course, we had somewhat the same problem you were describing earlier, that of English teachers not speaking English. But I thought that sort of approach had changed over the years. I must say I'm very disappointed to hear that is still a problem in our schools. I know it's a provincial matter, but I can't wrap my head around the fact that we still have that problem in 2013.

Earlier, we talked about promoting bilingualism among students. Do you do any promotion activities targeting their parents as well, to make them understand how important learning a second language is? It has not just social benefits, but also financial ones. Do you reach the parents?

Mr. Raymond Sokalski: With parents like Ms. Bateman, who instinctively seem to understand the value of both languages, it's as though we're preaching to the choir.

When I listen to the principal and vice-principals at Kelvin High School promoting our three programs—the International Baccalaureate Programme, the immersion program and the regular academic program—they never say anything discouraging about any of the programs. Their comments are only encouraging.

But I don't know what kind of information is provided to parents who are thinking about enrolling their young children in those programs beginning in junior kindergarten or kindergarten. Unfortunately, I can't elaborate on that for the committee.

• (1655)

Ms. Manon Perreault: It's difficult, I understand.

Mr. Chris Young: It's difficult for us to give you more details, seeing as we're high school teachers. We aren't very familiar with the reality of kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers, who really have a role to play in those key discussions with parents early on.

Ms. Manon Perreault: Yes, you're right. But I was referring mostly to high school. That was what I was wondering about.

That brings something else to mind. Do you have the sense that your students have a solid appreciation of the value of a second language? Ms. Bateman said earlier that her children had that appreciation and were living it. Do all of your students truly have that understanding?

Mr. Raymond Sokalski: It's evolving. I am going to be very frank. A large chunk of my students who are in their first year at Kelvin High School have already been studying French for 10 years. And many of them still see French as nothing more than a school subject. They know they have to get good grades and do their homework so their parents don't get on their case. At 14, they don't yet see it as something that will change their lives and open up all kinds of doors, because they haven't yet been exposed to any of those opportunities.

As they progress through their four years at high school—in most Manitoba schools, it's four years—they come into contact with professionals who give talks on career day, they see graduates and they participate in more exchanges. It is usually during their high school years that they go on those trips. By the time our students reach Grade 12, we see about 5% to 10% of them really showing enthusiasm and passion for preserving the language, whereas the other 90% have yet to acquire that appreciation. They haven't experienced that defining moment that makes them realize the value, but some of them will eventually.

The Chair: Very good. Thank you.

[English]

Mr. O'Toole.

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

Thank you, all, very much for your passion today. I think you're all examples of the tremendous opportunity that French immersion education provides.

Dr. Sims, my answer to your question from the beginning is opportunity, collaborative leadership of our country, and expanding horizons. I didn't forget.

Dr. Laura Sims: Thank you.

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Nor do I think you're crazy. I think you're passionate, and that's appreciated.

In the last few weeks, as we've been hearing from a variety of witnesses regarding these four decades of French immersion across Canada, a constant challenge that's been raised both by students who have gone through the program and teachers is the lack of engagement in the second language post-high school. There is a drop-off, and a lot of students who are keen to engage don't have avenues to do that.

Would each of you potentially comment on how you think the federal government might be able to work on issues related to that?

It seems in your case, Mr. Young, that you opted in and out of language and reaffirmed your appreciation, and that was good for you.

We've all touched on the challenge of education being a provincial responsibility, but the consistency with which we have heard this comment leads me to think that the federal government may have a role in targeting some grants specifically for maintaining that post-high school engagement.

Mr. Chris Young: As I said earlier, possibly there could be more opportunity for immersion at the university level. I think that is possible, because we're seeing that at certain universities. That would be incredibly useful for French immersion students to maintain their French. The biggest thing is confidence. It's really that. It's just confidence. I had really lost my confidence. I'm not speaking as much French now as I used to because of the courses I'm teaching at the high school level. I'm teaching a lot of IB, international baccalaureate, classes right now, so I'm not teaching those classes in French. Being here today and speaking my second language, there is an issue of confidence.

• (1700)

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): You're doing a great job.

Mr. Chris Young: Well, thank you. Merci. That, to me, is the biggest thing. Once again, I would say we need to preserve and possibly increase opportunities, such as being able to work at some of the national historic sites or work for the federal government in different capacities where you can practise your second language.

Mr. Raymond Sokalski: I would also add—and this is part of what I wanted to say to Monsieur Gourde earlier—that every year we usually have a student just graduated from university placed in our school. I believe their position is paid for by the federal government. They provide career advice and organize contacts between students and people in the workplace to speak about their careers. It's a federal government position. The person works with Reesa Averbach every year—I'm looking at Ms. Bateman—

Ms. Joyce Bateman: —and is funded through Service Canada.

Mr. Raymond Sokalski: That's through Service Canada. We have wonderful, dynamic young people whom the high school students can identify with. They can sit down with them and talk about their resumés with them. Every year there's a jobs fair held in our school.

Wouldn't it be great if a school like Kelvin, which has immersion, were earmarked to always have that position filled by a young person who's bilingual and who's looking to bring in speakers who are bilingual so students can see an engineer, a dentist, and a disc jockey who also speak French? I fear that perhaps somebody who isn't bilingual might not think about that and might just say, "I have a dentist here and I have a cinematographer there, and I'll bring them in". Of course, you won't always be able to find that ideal combo, but that would help.

Dr. Laura Sims: One thing the federal government can do is to support educational institutions that teach in French and provide an immersion context, such as Université de Saint-Boniface. I believe in Regina there's a campus, not a full university, but a section of the university, as there is in Alberta and in B.C. There is also Pointe-de-l'Église in Nova Scotia, among others, as well as Université de Moncton. There are a whole bunch.

With respect to collaborative leadership and the initial question of whether we agree with the idea of having all these different positions that have to be bilingual, in order to have an inclusive country that represents all of us from coast to coast to coast, we have to provide the time and the training so that we can all function well in both languages. If that is truly our goal, that means we're taking a person from the Northwest Territories who's a "keen bean" and who wants to be part of it and saying, "Great. We're going to help you with your language skills. If you don't speak both official languages, we're going to help you out so you can participate fully within this government structure". That to me is so that we have an Inuk voice—let's pretend—and then we also have someone who can function in the two official languages.

Another part is that for post-secondary education at a master's and doctoral level there are NSERC and SSHRC grants and lots of federal grants, but there are getting to be fewer and fewer of them, which I think is highly unfortunate. I think this year fewer than 25% of people got them, and there is a lot of competition for them. I think it would be wonderful if people were encouraged to study and say, "Okay, I'm going to research this in my master's or doctoral degree, and I'm going to research it in my second language". Why not?

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Sims.

Monsieur Rousseau.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all three of you for your remarks but, above all, for your passion. That struck me right from the outset.

You raised the issue of whether bilingualism was different from respect for the language. That was the first thing you said that struck a chord with me when I was listening to your comments.

I would say that, in Canada, we are forced to learn another language, English or French, if only because we can't access services in our own language. Bilingualism, then, becomes more instrumental than anything else. In other words, it's a way of seeking out services that should actually be available in both official languages across the country. I find that reality a bit troubling. Personally, I feel as though I am in an immersion environment right now.

I was born in Quebec and am proud of my language. I am a French-speaking Quebec-born Canadian in North America, and I wear that label with the utmost pride. I try to convey that message no matter where I am in the parliamentary precinct. It can be difficult to access services in our language. On other committees, I have heard numerous witnesses—deputy ministers and senior officials—who did not speak a word of French. To me, that is unacceptable. As I said, I see my experience in Parliament as an immersion class. I thought I was bilingual before I got here, but that wasn't entirely the case.

I also want to tell you about my daughter's experience; she is now 18. In Grade 6, when she was 12, she started taking an immersion program, half the year in French and the other half in English. Today, she doesn't even have an accent and is perfectly fluent in both languages. So I have no doubt about the value of immersion. It is tremendously valuable. I spoke English well before. I was good enough to carry on a conversation with someone, but I have learned a lot of new English words, especially here, in Parliament.

When we're focusing on bilingualism in Canada, we should have access to services in our own language, all over the country. The Eastern Townships have a large English-speaking population, and sometimes it's impossible to find French-language services. I'd like to hear your thoughts on that.

• (1705)

Mr. Raymond Sokalski: I am going to answer that by sharing two observations.

We do a role-playing exercise in which we recreate the signing of Treaty Five and students play the roles of the Cree, the Métis and the white negotiators. When it comes time to sign the treaty, two versions are handed out, and one of them is written in French. The exercise is actually done in French. The white negotiators clearly see what the clauses, criteria and so forth are, and they sign the treaty. Then, a student hands out the second version to the Cree. The entire text is written in wingding characters, in other words, symbols, and they can't understand a word of it.

So they ask what we want them to sign, and we tell them that all they have to do is mark an X to sign, that the agreement covers everything they have just discussed and that they have nothing to worry about. That is when we see authentic reactions. The students say, "You're asking us to sign, but we have no way of knowing that what we just spent three days negotiating actually appears in the agreement". So they are told, "it's this way or the highway", otherwise everything they've discussed could go out the window. What you said made me think of that exercise.

My second observation has to do with something else that is taught in the Canadian history class. Manitoba has both official languages but is not a bilingual province. Legally, the difference in the terminology is quite significant. Services are available in French in areas where they are deemed necessary by the government. They aren't guaranteed. That has been the source of many problems and conflicts for Manitoba's French-speaking community.

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Yes, Ms. Sims? Go ahead.

Dr. Laura Sims: I would just like to add something, and I am speaking solely for me.

There's a thought I often have. I long for the day when people across the country can speak both official languages, as well as other languages. I often tell my students that we're living in a transitional period in our history and that it takes a long time for a language to be learned and for that transition to really happen. I am, however, impatient.

[*English*]

Come on, guys, giddy-up.

[*Translation*]

But I think it's also important to emphasize the value of people's knowledge, whether those people are unilingual or bilingual. Sometimes that means building bridges. For example, I work with francophones who speak only French. If they want access to French-language services, there has to be at least one bilingual person there who can help them. That doesn't mean everyone in the office has to be able to speak French to deliver the service, but that support would at least help with the historical transition towards a more bilingual society.

Coming up with solutions is key. If the goal is to deliver services in French and English, then we have to figure out what we need to do to get there. Does everyone have to speak French? That may not be realistic given the resources that would take. But can we hire someone who is fluent in both official languages?

[*English*]

For sure.

[*Translation*]

Absolutely, because that would help bring about the transition. We would become a bilingual society, one that does what it can given the situation and the resources available. In turn, that may do more to motivate others to learn French, an effort that would highlight the importance of both languages, depending on the situation.

• (1710)

The Chair: Very good. Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Young, the last word goes to you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chris Young: Very briefly, I would just say that wasn't a problem when I worked at Vimy Ridge. The 10 students who worked there all spoke both languages pretty well.

It was, however, a major challenge when I worked in Lower Fort Garry, because out of the 50 students who worked there in the summer, only 15 could speak French. So any time we had French-speaking visitors, they would ask for someone who was bilingual and that was the person who would take them on the tour. When I started working there, I didn't think I was at all bilingual. But I became the one responsible for those visits, because I had had the chance to improve my French skills the previous year and because I had gone to Paris the year before that. My last year there, I even gave our former Governor General a tour in French. I never would have imagined I'd be doing that when I started that job.

The Chair: Fine. Thank you kindly.

I want to thank our witnesses for their comments.

[*English*]

We'll suspend for a couple of minutes to allow our witnesses to leave the table and then we'll reconvene in public, not in camera, for consideration of the two motions that we've been given notice for. This meeting is suspended for two minutes.

• (1710)

(Pause)

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We are now resuming the 81st meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. The proceedings will continue in public as we discuss the two motions Ms. Michaud provided notice for.

Mr. Gourde would like to speak.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: I would like the proceedings to continue in camera.

The Chair: Very well.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, the floor is yours.

Mr. Yvon Godin: How are you supposed to ask for the opportunity to speak? I indicated to the clerk that I wanted to speak.

The Chair: According to the list, Mr. Gourde is first, Mr. Rousseau is second and you are third.

Mr. Yvon Godin: We have a motion. Don't we have to start with that?

The Chair: Everything is taking place as it should.

[*English*]

It's in order. There is a motion before the committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Mr. Chair, point of order. Can we have a little order please? We expect a modicum of decorum, after all.

[*English*]

The Chair: Would members come to order, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: We have a motion in front of the committee. The motion has been moved by Monsieur Gourde that this committee go in camera. It's a dilatory motion; it's not debatable. Therefore the chair will call the vote on the motion.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The motion has been adopted. We will pause for a minute to allow the committee technicians to take us in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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