



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Official Languages

LANG • NUMBER 022 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, May 6, 2014

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Chair

The Honourable Michael Chong

Standing Committee on Official Languages

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● (0845)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC)): Today is Tuesday, May 6, 2014. Welcome to the 22nd meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108, we are here to carry out a study on the economic situation of Canada's minority linguistic communities.

We have three groups of witnesses today. We will first hear from Mr. Robillard and Mr. Lévesque, who represent the Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences.

[English]

We also have Mr. Morrow and Madam Dennison from Canadian Youth for French, and, appearing as an individual, Dr. Galbraith, professor of economics at McGill University.

Welcome, everyone. We'll begin with Monsieur Robillard.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Robillard (Vice-President, Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences): Mr. Chair, members of the committee, I am Michel Robillard, Vice-President of the Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences, RESDAC. I am accompanied by Normand Lévesque, the organization's director general.

Thank you for this invitation to appear before the Standing Committee on Official Languages to express our views as part of your study of the economic situation of Canada's minority linguistic communities.

For more than 20 years, RESDAC has been mobilizing its strategic partners around the social project of improving literacy and skill levels among francophone adults in Canada, who would in turn fully engage in their communities' civic, economic, social and cultural life, and thus contribute to their growth and development.

As Angel Gurria, Secretary-General of the OECD, said, skills have become the global currency of the 21st century. According to the OECD, skills transform lives and drive economies. To that end, it is crucial that the whole population of a given country, as well as its workforce, possess skills for life.

The OECD goes on, stating that the way we live and work has changed profoundly, and so has the set of skills we need to participate fully in and benefit from our hyper-connected societies and increasingly knowledge-based economies.

What about Canada? What about skills development among francophone adults, supporting employment and supporting the growth of our communities across the country?

Ten years ago, Canada's situation in terms of essential skills was clearly problematic. Results from the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, PIAAC, published in October 2013, are just as clear in demonstrating that the problem is still unresolved. Are we on the wrong track?

Canada's performance is less than stellar, leaving the country in a difficult situation. Canada ranks at the OECD average in literacy. However, it has a higher proportion of its population at the highest but also at the lowest levels in literacy. Canada ranks below the OECD average in numeracy, and a higher proportion of Canadians are at the lowest levels in this area. Canada is rated above the OECD average in problem solving in technology-rich environments. However, 17% of Canadians did not complete the evaluation because 11% of them did not have the basic computer skills and 6% of them opted out of the computer-based assessment.

Canada has a larger proportion of adults at the lowest proficiency levels in all three targeted domains, compared with the OECD average.

An important and disturbing fact to note is that official language minority populations tend not to perform as well as official language majority populations—except for anglophones in Quebec—but differences vary across provinces.

If skills have become the global currency of the 21st century, our bank is in debt. Our line of credit is seriously threatened by rating agencies, is it not?

The time has come for innovative and dynamic responses. The implementation of 21st century skills for the 21st century will be an intricate challenge, requiring that we act together with all our partners. There is danger in waiting. New requirements are constantly emerging in terms of training, employment and economic development. Now, more than ever, we need to devise innovative and bold policies.

While similar to those faced by the majority of Canadian adults, issues of skills development among official language minority communities are amplified by other types of obstacles. Results of the 2003 survey and those of the PIAAC demonstrate it quite clearly. Literacy skills establish a foundation for learning all other skills. They also form the basis of training services provided to adult learners, for them to learn, work and contribute to their communities' economic development. In the Canadian context, it is not sufficient to apply an all-encompassing approach in terms of policies and programs designed to increase literacy levels and skills development among francophone adults.

Progress made in terms of innovation, research, expertise development, and community mobilization and involvement is currently jeopardized by the absence of a well-defined vision and adequate funding for organizations and institutions devoted to skills development. We must promptly act together with all our partners.

● (0850)

The presence of networks such as RESDAC across the country, as well as of key players from provincial and territorial governments, economic agencies and training centres is a guarantee of success. It is up to the federal government to recognize this and to provide concrete support to these best practices.

We need long-term support through significant funding. The implementation of the Roadmap for Canada's Official Languages 2013-2018 is lagging behind in the area of skills development and social partnerships. The federal government's commitment dates back to March 2013 and has yet to materialize. We have no information regarding the implementation of this focus area, and none of the actors within the skills sector have had access to this funding. The lack of funding jeopardizes the progress made in recent years, and prevents economic and government stakeholders from working with quality community partners.

The government must increase policies and measures that allow the Canadian population to develop skills on an ongoing basis. It must also ensure that less qualified individuals—who are not likely to engage in training and who may benefit less from training provided by employers and established services—can escape the vicious circle of low skills and low income.

The government must transform the wealth of data on skills and their impact on Canada, its population and its development, into tangible opportunities to design and implement policies, programs and funding frameworks that meet the needs of OLMCs in terms of employment, economic development and skills development.

Last, we must improve our understanding of the labour market and the economy within OLMCs, as well as issues, challenges and best practices related to skills development by actively supporting research and innovative projects.

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for your interest.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Robillard.

[English]

Now we have Mr. Morrow, of Canadian Youth for French.

[Translation]

Mr. Justin Morrow (President of the Board, Canadian Youth for French): Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the invitation to appear before you to discuss the economic situation of minority linguistic communities.

As consumers, employees and employers in those communities, we are very pleased to be able to share our views with you.

[English]

Virtually present with me today is Christie Dennison, who is the vice-president of CYF's board of directors, who's in New Brunswick, who understands the reality of young English Canadians, and who has also worked for an economic development agency for the past number of years. We'll probably be calling on her a little bit more in the question and answer period.

[Translation]

Before I begin, I would like to update you on the developments that have taken place at CYF over the past year.

We have still not received a confirmation of our funding for this year, but it was suggested that we apply for a programming grant. We intend to benefit from that status to move the organization forward with our stakeholders.

Four areas of our strategic direction have changed since the last time we appeared.

First, we wish to increase our administrative capacity.

Second, we want to increase our membership. Any individual or organization that commits to advancing the organization's mission and vision can become our member. That includes employees and employers.

Third, we want to build a bridge between our members and francophone communities. We have to continue the work we have done with Manitoba communities last year and refine our provincial mandate.

Fourth, we want to continue developing the Discover Zone, which, as you know, is our tool for establishing a connection between anglophones and the francophone economy.

● (0855)

[English]

There are two areas that I'd like to draw your attention to. One is our vision. Over the past year, we were able to gain a greater understanding of the environment in which we're working, and we have come to realize that there's a huge gap between our government's investments in official languages and the economy.

[Translation]

We want to bridge that gap, and that's why we decided to change our vision this year. Our vision is that of a Canada where the majority of the population speaks both official languages and sees that as a competitive advantage that will make our country a leader in the global economy.

[English]

Note the link to the economy there. This will be expanded on a little bit later in the presentation.

The second point that I want to draw your attention to is with regard to the Discover Zone. Over the past year, we were also able to gain a better understanding of this reality. Unfortunately, the reality is that it's going to cost us quite a bit more to get it off the ground than we'll be able to receive through grants. We've therefore put the Discover Zone on hold for the time being while we explore our options to figure out how we're going to generate the seed money required to do so.

It should also be noted that, since day one, Canadian Youth for French was developed around a business model that would allow it to one day be self-sufficient from government funding. Our goal is still, and always will be, to be self-sufficient of public funds.

[Translation]

Now, we want to help you with your recommendations on how the Government of Canada can support official language minority communities, so as to build sustainable and growing economies.

[English]

Before getting into the recommendations, I'd like to refresh your memory about the first time I was here before you, back in March 2012. At that time, I tried to get you to think outside the box a bit and to guide you toward directing the roadmap investments toward the creation of a bilingual space, a space that values the cultural differences while respecting the integrity and history of both languages, in order to create the Canadian ideal. One day in my lifetime, Canadian Youth for French will realize its vision of an officially bilingual majority, but we won't be able to get there until we start consciously preparing for it.

[Translation]

That is why our first recommendation is to include in your study the participation of official languages majority communities.

I think you should examine Canada's economic situation, so that your recommendations on how the Government of Canada can support those communities would help build a sustainable and growing Canadian economy based on official languages. Please note that this includes English and French, as well as minority and majority communities.

[English]

This doesn't take anything away from minority communities in our economy. We need that strong economy to be able to provide for our demographic, our membership.

[Translation]

Quebec has some companies that need employees from English Canada to be able to expand outside the province. There are also companies in the rest of the country that want to use a more bilingual workforce in order to expand into non-anglophone markets.

[English]

Maybe that's what you're practising with this study. That's why I suggest that you ensure the participation of official language

minority communities. But at the end of the day, you're always going to go back—and everything we do goes back—to what the purpose of the study will be, which separates Canada's economy into two, the anglophone and the francophone, while we should be concentrating on one entire unit of the Canadian economy, one solid thing.

[Translation]

So, by working together, we will make the most of the competitive advantage stemming from our two official languages in order to build a sustainable and growing Canadian economy.

[English]

Our second recommendation would be for you to take a long look at the funding programs that are currently delivered through the Department of Canadian Heritage in order to see if the terminology that is used reflects today's reality.

In the Official Languages report of 1994-95, in addition to education, investments were made in two areas: support of official language community organizations and promotion of dialogue. In 2011-12, investments were made in the development of official language communities and the enhancement of official languages, in which we can find the promotion of linguistic duality.

To summarize, the terminology surrounding our investments in official languages over the past 20 years hasn't really changed all that much, which would imply that the environment hasn't really changed all that much either. But I would argue that we've come a long way since the last referendum in Quebec and that our investments since that time have done what they were supposed to do.

I couldn't find any statistics from today, but I'll give you an example from 2006, which will give you a good overview of what I'm talking about. Between 2003 and 2006, the Commissioner of Official Languages reported that the percentage of Canadians in favour of bilingualism for all of Canada went from 56% to 72%, an increase of 16% over three years in the appreciation for official languages. Moreover, in 2006 more than 80% of Canadians between the ages of 18 and 34 were in favour of bilingualism for all of Canada. This was in 2006, and with the investments made over the past eight years, I can only imagine that this number has continued to increase a little more.

When we talk about the promotion of linguistic duality, which is what we're investing in and what the programming says we're investing in, is our goal to get this number for those who support official languages to 100%? That's what I'm looking at there. That's kind of what I'm seeing. At the same time, our informal research has shown us that 5% to 10% of all high school graduates graduate from an immersion program, yet if we look at that 5% to 10% three to five years later, only 5% of that 5% is continuing to use their second official language on a regular basis.

Therefore, by investing \$112 million a year in second language learning, only 2.5% of high school graduates really benefit from their bilingual capacity, so again, why are we investing in second language learning? Is it to promote linguistic duality or to create more bilingual employees that will boost Canada's economy? The verbiage should reflect this reasoning.

To go back, I have two recommendations. One is to ensure the participation of the majority communities in this study. The second is to conduct a review of funding programs delivered through the Department of Canadian Heritage in order to make sure that the terminology used reflects today's reality and gives thousands of young English Canadians across the country an opportunity to contribute to and support the building of sustainable francophone minority economies.

[Translation]

Thank you.

• (0900)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The next speaker will be Dr. Galbraith from McGill University.

Dr. John Galbraith (Professor of Economics, McGill University, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee.

I am not representing any group. I was asked to address the committee, I guess to provide some general economic perspective. I'm the chair of the economics department at McGill. I guess, particularly having heard the previous speakers, I'll begin with a general overview of I think some things we should keep in mind in looking at the kinds of programs that I imagine your committee is thinking of and perhaps try to avoid losing sight of the forest for the trees.

You, I presume, are interested in general in the economic position of all minorities in Canada, linguistic minorities in particular, and more generally in things that will encourage economic growth and development in Canada. Economic growth depends, of course, on investment, and that means human capital investment, as I think both the previous speakers have touched upon, and also investment in physical capital.

The question is, what role can the Canadian government be playing in ensuring that appropriate investments take place among minority linguistic communities and in general among those who can contribute to economic growth? By far the most important of these, of course—and this is where I want to suggest that we not lose sight of the forest for the trees—by far the most important role, I think, that the government can play in this, which the Canadian government has traditionally done very well, is simply to protect the rights of minorities and the conditions for investment, the creation of new businesses, and, in general, the installation of physical capital, conditions that encourage people to invest and to make communities grow, whether by linguistic minorities or not.

As I say, if we look around the world at the way things generally work, the Canadian government has an excellent record of doing this. We don't want to be complacent about that, of course, but at the same time I think we should keep in mind that by far the most important thing the Canadian government has done in this area is simply to create those general conditions and maintain them, and to also maintain a climate in which people know that they can count upon these things.

There have, of course, been some lapses. There have been situations in which minorities have felt that they lack the certainty about the future or the stability necessary to make investments.

In particular, in Quebec there have been periods of substantial uncertainty, which have no doubt impeded investment here. It's a commonplace here in Quebec, not only among the English or other linguistic minority groups, but among francophones, that the situation of uncertainty that has existed, certainly in the past and less so now, I hope, has been an impediment to investment.

The record of the government in providing these conditions is of course not perfect—we live in a difficult world—but it has been very good, and I think we need primarily to keep our eye on those successes and try to maintain them.

If we look beyond that at barriers that may arise to investments, both in education and in physical capital, and also at the question of what specifically—if anything—the government might think of doing in the way of programs to address these things, I think that again we have to take an overview and ask what problems exist that can't be solved through the normal mechanisms for individuals making investments. What are the barriers that sometimes arise, such as barriers in access to capital, that the government may help people in overcoming?

Now, there are some circumstances, certainly, in which access to capital markets is a problem. One frequently hears, for example, of cases in which women in developing countries have very limited access to capital markets and where programs to provide capital have made a substantial difference.

There's little indication I can see that Canada is in this position. On the whole in this country we don't experience the overt discrimination against minorities that exists in some places, certainly not at an institutional level, and certainly not involving the official languages of the country. I think it's unlikely that English or French minorities in this country experience restricted access to traditional capital markets through banks or other forms of financing for business.

• (0905)

I think that if we are going to be considering programs to address problems in the general pattern of access to the requirements for investing, we need to look carefully at what is wrong and needs to be fixed and consider whether existing programs are still doing their jobs. We need to look at these things in the context of some sensible policy design for the problems that are being solved.

I think the general principle that should underlie all attempts to address the economic position of minorities is access to these forms of investment in education and human capital and physical capital that allow people to improve their economic situation. I think we need to evaluate programs very carefully, whether or not they've been existing for a long time, to ask whether they're helping us to achieve that and whether they're overcoming some genuine barrier.

That's all I'll say for now. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Galbraith.

Now we'll have about an hour of questions and comments, beginning with Monsieur Godin.

[Translation]

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

I would like to welcome our guests, including Ms. Dennison, who is participating by videoconference from Fredericton, New Brunswick, which is my province. I also want to thank Mr. Galbraith, who is a professor at McGill University.

I will begin with Mr. Robillard, from the RESDAC, the Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences.

In your statement, you said that the roadmap was lagging behind in the area of skills development programs. You say that you have had no information regarding the implementation of this focus area of the roadmap.

Is that right?

Mr. Michel Robillard: Yes.

To date, we have received very little information about the roadmap, the criteria, the programs, and so on. Given the expertise we have acquired and the partnerships we have established with the provinces and territories, we could use the roadmap to build innovations in literacy and basic education for Canada's official language minority communities.

Mr. Yvon Godin: We are now in the month of May. However, in the field of education, preparations normally need to be made in advance. Those in charge have to know whether a program will be in place or not and whether funds will be available.

We began our consideration of the roadmap in early 2012, but it was only in 2013, if not later, that we obtained a positive response. The government bragged about the \$1.2 billion in the media. It claimed that it made no cuts to the roadmap, even though \$130 million from Immigration Canada was transferred to it.

However, your comments are in line with those from the communities, which are increasingly wondering what has happened to the roadmap. I think it must have gone to the United States. In any case, it is not on the same path as Canada. This program's role is to foster communities, to help them grow.

Now that we are conducting a study on immersion and similar considerations, we are starting to hear from communities that they have not received any money, that the situation is lacking clarity, that they no longer know where they are headed. In principle, roadmap funding should be available. I would really like to know how this situation will affect you and how you will manage to do without this government support. The government bragged all last year that it has never cut the roadmap's budget. It stated that this was the only program where no cuts were made. However, what we have been hearing makes it seem like no money has been provided through this program.

• (0910)

Mr. Michel Robillard: I will let Mr. Lévesque answer.

Mr. Normand Lévesque (Director General, Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences): Thank you for the question.

I have two comments about the roadmap.

The interesting thing is that the roadmap includes a component on skills for employment. However, as you pointed out, we have had no information about this for a year. That jeopardizes organizations that have developed expertise on skills and employment. Expertise on skills for employment and the labour market is difficult to develop for minority and majority communities, although we are now discussing minority communities.

The funding set out in the roadmap has still not been distributed, but what is even worse is that no mechanism has been announced so far. After a year, we are starting to think there is a problem. We are talking about the roadmap, but we could also talk about a skills development program for which we submitted a funding application at least a year ago. And we are not alone. About 30 organizations across the country are in the same situation. Those lags jeopardized organizations that represent official language minority communities and the expertise acquired. In addition, the provision of programs has been slowed down.

Skills development, both for minority and majority communities, is done in conjunction with the provinces. Slowdowns for organizations result in slowdowns in terms of relationships and the implementation of programs adapted to and in line with provincial programs. Skills development cannot be done any which way. At least, if that were the case, it would be dangerous. It would jeopardize our organizations.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I would like to now hear Mr. Morrow's take on this issue.

I am happy to see you again, Mr. Morrow.

This government was not just elected, so it doesn't have to consider everything from the ground up. Those were excuses they used in 2012. At that time, the government was saying that it was examining everything to align itself correctly and produce a roadmap to help organizations. Do you feel that this assistance is being provided to you or do you feel simply forgotten?

Making random announcements on programs in the media without doing anything on the ground will certainly lead to a balanced budget and a paid off debt.

Are you receiving any of that money? Do you have the impression that the money is available?

Mr. Justin Morrow: I assume that the money is available, but we have not yet received it. Apparently, this is the normal process.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It's not there if you have not received it.

Have you received it?

Mr. Justin Morrow: Not really. We have not received much. We received some funding last year, but....

Mr. Yvon Godin: I would like a clear answer. Answering with a "not really" doesn't work. When I go to the bank, I don't want them to tell me that my pay has not really been deposited. I want to know whether it has been deposited or not.

Have you received the money?

Mr. Justin Morrow: We have not yet received the money this year.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you. That's what I wanted to know.

I assume this situation affects your organization.

Mr. Justin Morrow: Yes, it does.

Mr. Yvon Godin: The same thing must be happening in New Brunswick. Is this situation affecting the organization in New Brunswick?

Ms. Christie Dennison (Vice-President of the Board, Canadian Youth for French): Of course. Just like Justin Morrow, I represent Canadian Youth for French. We can confirm that we have not received our funding or the contribution agreement for this year. We are in talks right now. Even though we are told that the funding is coming, we have received nothing yet. Yes, that slows down—

Mr. Yvon Godin: If it is coming by train, the railway tracks are being removed in New Brunswick, so you will not receive it.

What discussions have you had? Were you told when you were going to receive the money?

Ms. Christie Dennison: No, not as far as I know.

That has actually slowed down our activities a great deal.

Mr. Yvon Godin: So the situation is affecting your organization.

Ms. Christie Dennison: Yes.

Mr. Yvon Godin: The government is publicly saying that, in order to advance economic development, our country needs educated people, employable and trained individuals. Today, you are telling us that the money is not there.

Yet the roadmap has been there since 2002, not since yesterday. Initially, it was the dear old Dion plan, which subsequently became the roadmap. The name was changed to a roadmap. It seems to me that a roadmap should show the way across the country, in New Brunswick, Quebec, and wherever minorities are. However, you have not even received the money yet.

• (0915)

Ms. Christie Dennison: I know that ACOA, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, has received a portion of the roadmap money and is getting ready to hand out the money. ACOA is in the process of receiving project proposals from eligible organizations.

Mr. Yvon Godin: ACOA is in the process of receiving project proposals, but haven't you been submitting project proposals since last year? I believe Mr. Robillard said that proposals have been submitted since last year, but nothing has happened yet.

Have you been submitting proposals since last year without receiving any funding yet?

Ms. Christie Dennison: No.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Could she just finish her answer?

The Chair: Okay.

Go ahead, Ms. Dennison.

Ms. Christie Dennison: We have received no money yet. The proposals have not been approved yet.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Gourde, go ahead.

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

My thanks to the witnesses for coming to our meeting.

As my mother would say, it may have not happened yet, but it has not been refused yet either. Things can't be rushed if we want them done properly.

My first question is for Justin Morrow.

You know that official language minority communities are facing considerable challenges. Are there advantages and disadvantages to that? What can we do to help them improve their economic situation?

Mr. Justin Morrow: To help improve the economic situation of minority communities, we work closely with the FCFA and the Société franco-manitobaine or the Franco-Manitoban community. These two organizations are open to the idea of expanding the francophone space precisely to advance the economy of minority francophones. They are starting to turn to us because we are the gateway to Canadian anglophones who speak French and who want to be part of the Canadian francophonie. As a result, they open up to us. We are working closely with the province of Manitoba, which is a provincial model, to design tools to help Canadian anglophone youth access the economy of francophone minority communities.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: In your presentation, you said that things were going well for young people and that they were encouraged to learn French. However, once they enter the labour market, things become challenging. After three, four or five years, they actually seem to have forgotten their second language.

What can we do to prevent those types of situations?

Mr. Justin Morrow: Right now, young people receive support in elementary and secondary school and through some other programs. However, there is no support when they graduate from high school.

[English]

When they leave high school and get into the workforce...there's a period of about three to five years when they're either going to college or university or they're travelling. In those three to five years, without any support in their second official language, they are losing that bilingual capacity. They're losing that capacity to be able to go into the job market and into their careers with the bilingual capacity that they worked so hard to obtain in their younger years.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Are Canadian companies making sufficient effort to offer interprovincial internships? For instance, engineers from out west could be asked to come work in Quebec for two years and vice versa. The same thing could be done with any other occupation.

Is that an initiative that could be promoted, or is it already in place? Perhaps some companies are already doing that. Have you seen anything like that?

Mr. Justin Morrow: We have not seen that, but it is a good idea if opportunity knocks. The problem is that companies in English Canada don't have a central voice to say what they want from the francophone side. Those types of exchanges need to take place between organizations and companies.

At Canadian Youth for French, we are in the process of developing an organization department from among our members. The idea is for the organization to engage companies that seek to have bilingual employees, so that we can help them find francophone companies and give them the tools to develop bilingualism within their company.

That is a good idea and there is a will in that direction. We just simply have to bring those people together so that they can receive support, especially young Canadian anglophones doing post-secondary studies or something along those lines. They need support and a common voice to move things forward.

● (0920)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: You are talking about young Canadians. They are probably young people between 18 and 25 years old. Instead of getting foreign workers, would it not be possible to send these young people for three months in the summer to work in a restaurant in Alberta? Instead of setting up programs, we could promote bilingualism indirectly. That might work.

If a number of students from Quebec were guaranteed a job for three months in an anglophone province, I am sure that they would try it out. Perhaps the reverse would also be true.

Mr. Justin Morrow: In fact, I worked with an engineering student from the University of Manitoba, who was an immersion student. I asked her if she thought about going to Quebec to do a summer internship. She said no and that she would not know where to start.

Anglophones do not receive help to find available opportunities. Given the market in Manitoba, Quebec companies would like people from Manitoba to come and hone their French skills and increase bilingualism at the Quebec headquarters. Then, those people would go back to their home province. Young people and companies do not get enough help for that. There is a great disconnect between the economy and our clients, our young Canadian anglophones who wish to contribute to the francophone economy.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: I have one last question, more general in nature.

From a language point of view, how could your organizations help any Canadians who are looking for jobs outside their regions, which would enable them to gain work experience?

Mr. Morrow, my question is for you. Mr. Robillard can answer afterwards.

Mr. Justin Morrow: Ideally, Canadian Youth for French works through the Discover Zone, which you are very familiar with. This tool connects companies that offer jobs and those looking for jobs.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: What do you think, Mr. Robillard?

Mr. Michel Robillard: The question of economic development in minority communities is very complex. It is important to realize that economic development also means social and community develop-

ment. In addition, strong economic development in language communities increases their appeal: people are drawn to jobs in stronger communities.

RESDAC promotes literacy and basic training. We know that several million Canadians are weak in literacy and basic skills and that they have a hard time finding jobs, among other things.

RESDAC is trying to accomplish something. The provinces and territories are working with us. So we are a group of territorial and provincial partners. We are working on designing innovative models that develop relationships in official language minority communities. We conduct research and provide information.

Interestingly enough, we are now working with provincial coalitions in four provinces, where we are setting up what we call the integrated model. This model makes it possible to train people with low literacy skills not only in technical matters, but also in terms of essential skills, such as reading, counting or working with computers.

Usually, those programs last about 14 weeks and then we can quickly help those people find work. Not only do we help them find jobs, but we also strengthen our small language communities.

To have access to training and education, you often have to go to big cities. However, in the small communities where we operate, we are able to help those people find jobs.

We noticed another interesting thing. When we train people in small communities in resource regions and then we help them find jobs with companies that have trouble recruiting employees, the outcome is beneficial for the companies, the communities and the employees alike, not to mention that the employees regain their pride.

RESDAC's role is to work with provincial and territorial coalitions and to help those people find jobs, in addition to providing local companies with skilled workers.

● (0925)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Robillard.

Ms. St-Denis, go ahead.

Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.): I would first like to go back to my colleague's question about funding.

You say that you have some nice projects in mind, but that it's a whole different ball game if you don't receive the money for them.

Do you have any suggestions? You are sort of in a difficult position: you are waiting for money from the government, but the money is not coming. It is difficult to have a word with the government or to make any suggestions. Do you have any solutions or ideas of what to do to get the money a bit faster?

Mr. Michel Robillard: It is a question—

Ms. Lise St-Denis: It is a complex question.

Mr. Michel Robillard: That's right.

RESDAC and the provincial and territorial coalitions work on various matters. We are proposing interesting projects. In addition, we know that governments are interested in our projects, because they have invested in our projects in the past.

We are increasing our efforts to determine where we can save money. We also want to be more competitive. We are therefore setting up a whole internal mechanism to make sure that we can move forward a little. However, if we don't get the funding, we will actually have a hard time implementing our programs, which I think are very important.

The development of literacy and basic training means economic development for our small communities. We are looking at possibilities within our organization, but we need to receive the money at some stage.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: Do you think there are other explanations for this situation? For instance, the government might want to keep the money for something else or even to balance the budget. Perhaps that has nothing to do with it either.

What do you think?

Mr. Michel Robillard: I am not an economist by training, and federal and provincial budgets are always very complex. If I give you an answer, I may well be walking on thin ice. I am not an expert in the issue. We are experts in literacy and basic training.

I will therefore let the current government and its officials worry about deciding what the best course of action is.

Mr. Normand Lévesque: Here is what I would answer. Organizations such as ours are in line with the federal government's skills development approach for both the roadmap and other funding programs. The organizations have adapted to this type of funding. This approach is very interesting from a number of angles. That's not the problem. The problem has more to do with the delays in the implementation.

For instance, there was a tender in May 2013 to set up a Canada-wide skills development network. That is a very interesting project in terms of innovation, information, relationships and research. An organization like RESDAC managed to mobilize about 30 organizations to submit a project to the department in question. However, there is no news about the matter.

Organizations understand the reality and are making efforts in that direction. They are well aware that they must develop job skills and they have made the necessary adjustments. However, we all have to go in the same direction and we need answers today. I would rather have a negative answer and know that we are not getting the funding because our project is not interesting or that it does not meet the objectives than no answer at all. It is unfortunate, because some programs are really interesting. Yet no progress has been made.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: Okay.

Mr. Galbraith, you talked about the importance of the quality of economic structures for minorities. As we know, until recently, all the provinces had restrictive legislation that undermined the learning of French. It has not been too long since francophone boards have been set up in the various provinces.

Do those restrictive laws, whose goal was to assimilate francophone people, still foster negative attitudes and still have a negative impact on the quality of the economic structures of francophones?

Dr. John Galbraith: I will answer your question in two parts.

Of course, I am not an expert on francophone communities outside Quebec, but I can give you my general perception. My children, who are teenagers, are perfectly bilingual. I have the general impression that attitudes in Canada toward francophone communities have very clearly changed. It seems to me that this is much less of a problem than it was in the past. Even though there may still be some residual effects of this kind of thing, it seems to me that it is now to a lesser extent.

For example, Mr. Morrow spoke about the language skills of minorities. I have noticed that young anglophones in Quebec are now very competent, very capable of interacting in French, working in French and studying in French, and most of them already have. I have also noticed, based on the experience of a few Franco-Manitoban friends, that it is simply normal for people to integrate into the communities.

My general point of view is that the difficulties, barriers or prejudices of this type are much less prevalent in Canada than they were in the past. I'm not saying they aren't there. However, in terms of access to education or funding or capital markets, it seems to me that there are many fewer constraints now.

I would like to add something to the remarks of Mr. Robillard, Mr. Morrow and Mr. Lévesque. We spoke this morning about details, funding and budgets for certain programs that could help iron out some problems that affect official language minority communities somewhere in Canada. The Government of Canada and the professional sector have a lot of people with solid expertise in program evaluation. I think it would be a good idea to have independent evaluations conducted regularly by people who have no interest in those programs. They could therefore determine whether the funds attributed to a program are being used as effectively as possible, whether our programs still meet the intended purposes and whether they could be improved.

This is sort of related to what you just said. No doubt there are cases where some things that were constraints or real problems in the past have improved over time. If that is the case, perhaps it is less important to maintain programs aimed at eliminating those obstacles.

I think it would be a good idea to put in place an ongoing independent evaluation process for current programs.

• (0930)

The Chair: Thank you.

You have the floor, Ms. Bateman.

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

I would like to thank all the witnesses for being here today.

To start, I would like to come back to Mr. Galbraith's comments.

[English]

Dr. Galbraith, when we get the *Good Housekeeping* seal of approval from the chair of the economics department at McGill in terms of being on the right track for economic growth and creating the right framework for economic growth...and I suspect that in talking about Canada's excellent record your reference was relative to the G-7 in particular.

I really want to pursue a couple of the things you've said. In particular, I think you know how to do a great presentation, because you left us all wanting a little more. You closed your remarks with the fact that evaluations of programs that have existed for a long period of time might very well be an opportunity for us to pursue to make sure

[Translation]

...that we maximize our investments.

[English]

I'd really like you to expand on that point, because so often in these committees, from our perspective we are very focused on allocating scarce resources in the most responsible manner possible for the taxpayers of Canada. Obviously, we want to achieve the best results possible with those investments. Sometimes people think you just have to build on previous investments. In regard to your comments about the evaluation of programs that have existed for a long time, if you would be kind enough to expand on those, it would be wonderful.

• (0935)

Dr. John Galbraith: Yes, certainly. Thank you.

First of all, let me say that I'm not here representing McGill, of course. I was asked to show up and participate. I'm obviously very happy to do that.

Secondly, let me say that program evaluation is a very substantial area of research in economics at the moment, and a lot of progress has been made in methods for providing much more credible evaluations. In a sense, what one would like to do in evaluating a program is to ask the following question. It's a counterfactual question: how are things, and how would things have been without this program?

Now, it's notorious that counterfactuals are very difficult to evaluate, but many people, particularly over the 15 or 20 years, have been working on ways of providing more credible answers to questions of this type. I think there is some expertise within the federal civil service in this area, and there are many people within the academic sphere who are specialized in this area. It's also employed a great deal in the area of health economics, for example, where people are interested in the impacts of programs and how scarce dollars can be well allocated in making expenditures in hospitals or what have you.

The day when one can simply guess whether a program is a good idea or not has passed, I think, and regular formal evaluations by people outside the interested groups should routinely be incorporated. It would be very easy.... I think you already have expertise within the federal civil service, both in the people who could do such

things and in the people who know the relevant parties within, for example, the academic community.

But I think this should become the norm at this point: that on some schedule—I'm getting used to saying that word in the American way since my speech recognition software doesn't get my Canadian accent anymore—the government might want to routinely evaluate all programs of this type that come up. I could easily put you in touch with some good people that could do that, but again, there is expertise within the civil service. We should not, I think, at this point in time, simply be guessing about whether money is well spent or not.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Yes. Hear, hear.

I wanted to follow up on something else.

[Translation]

I believe it was Mr. Robillard who spoke about the importance of investing in the necessary programs. His comments were similar to yours. He said that the lack of funding jeopardizes the progress made in recent years, and prevents economic and government stakeholders from working with quality community partners.

Who are the quality community partners? Who, in your community, is not a quality partner? This is very interesting to me.

[English]

Mr. Michel Robillard: I'd like to answer by saying that when you look at RESDAC, as we just said a few minutes ago, you see that we have roughly 30 partners across Canada working with our team.

Interestingly enough, related to your question regarding program evaluation, last summer when we went back to the government for our project, what we did was a kind of program evaluation. We sat together and asked how we can do things better.

We came up with a new pan-Canadian partnership. RESDAC sat with all the partners, such as the CLQ, which is an anglophone community group in Quebec working with us on community literacy. We sat with the CDÉACF in Quebec as well, which is

[Translation]

...the Centre de documentation sur l'éducation des adultes et la condition féminine.

[English]

We sat with coalitions from Ontario and Saskatchewan and from across the country, and we said that we needed to look at innovation, at how we can have a better relationship with different partners, such as the industries, different community partners, and provincial, municipal, and federal government entities and departments and so on and so forth. What should we do in terms of research? How can we make sure that we are fully aligned with what the federal government wants to do in terms of developing competencies, for instance, the competencies that will support the creation of jobs and put Canadians back to work, and so on and so forth? As well, how can we inform Canadians of what we're doing?

What we've done is exactly that. When we say that we work with partners of quality, we don't mean that other partners are not of quality. We mean quality in terms of our field of expertise, which is literacy and basic skills. Some organizations have developed a very good expertise, for instance, in competency development, in training people in the work environment, in making sure that they have the right level of literacy and basic skills to embrace the 21st century in terms of new technology, new job development, and so forth. That's what we mean by this.

Again, when we say "quality partnership", it means working with the real experts in the field and making sure that for what we do, we do it the right way, and that we're using our funding in an efficient and effective way to make sure that where we spend a dollar, that dollar is well spent and serves as a lever for other investment and so on and so forth.

As I said, if you go with the integrated model, that's exactly what we're trying to do. We've done a lot of research on that. Now we're working with enterprises, with firms and so forth, and it has a real impact for them as well.

• (0940)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chisu, you have the floor.

[English]

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

Thank you very much for your presentations.

I was impressed by your presentation, Mr. Robillard. You've illustrated very grim pictures about literacy in Canada generally and in the francophone community. In one of your last appearances before this committee, it was said that 55% of the adult francophones aged 16 to 65 have a reading level that does not allow them to be fully productive in society and to meet existing labour market needs. Also, you explained this in your presentation regarding the OECD comparisons and so on.

This is a very grim picture. The federal government does not have the responsibility for education. It belongs to the provinces to give the basic literacy skills to people. Obviously, the issue of literacy has a great impact on labour productivity and also in regard to keeping Canada as one of the G-7 countries.

I would like to have more information about what the literacy rate is for anglophones and francophones living in the minority language communities in Canada. I don't know if you can elaborate on that. Also, has this literacy improved over the years? Is there a significant difference between the literacy rates for anglophones and francophones in Canada?

Mr. Michel Robillard: The evaluation in 2003 and that in 2013 used different methods. What we're seeing is that we still have a big challenges. With respect to literacy, we are under the OECD average. I think we are also under the OECD average for numeracy. With respect to problem-solving in technology-rich environments, we are at the average of the OECD, if not a little above.

The challenge we have is that, in our francophone community, literacy and basic skills are important. You are right that the provinces are working a lot and investing a lot of money. They are delivering literacy and basic skills training to Canadians. What a pan-Canadian coalition such as RESDAC does to our different provincial and territorial coalitions, however, is bring together all of these people. We share best practices, and the programs' differences are shared as well. So we can adjust and adapt, we get access to innovation and research, and because we are delivering in the provinces, when we have a pan-Canadian group such as RESDAC we can piggyback on the research they are doing, their innovations, the information they have. We can share with other provinces and learn from other provinces.

The impact is that we have much better programs and are more efficient and effective in delivering the best programs for our people. That's what RESDAC does as a pan-Canadian community in which we have roughly 30 partnerships with different communities across Canada, including the CLQ in Quebec, Pluri-elles in Manitoba, and l'Association franco-yukonnaise. We get together and share our practices. We're getting much better in terms of delivering a good literacy and basic skills program to our students.

• (0945)

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: What tools are you using to measure the success of your programs?

Mr. Michel Robillard: I'll speak for my own province, Ontario.

[Translation]

We have the COFA, the Coalition ontarienne de formation des adultes.

[English]

Last year—and these are data that are shared with the public—we had 2,500 francophones going through our 20-some learning centres across Canada, and we developed an e-learning program to reach out to remote locations. We have put a performance management system in place. We know how many learners we have. There's a big system of performance measurement and program evaluation behind the delivery of literacy and basic skills—or LBS—in Ontario, for instance, and it's the same for other provinces.

So we have in place right now a program management system, as well as a risk management system, and we are measured on all sides. We are told whether our program is performing or not, and we have to make adjustments and so on. These things are in place as we speak.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, do I have more time?

The Chair: No. We're going to go to Mr. Nicholls now.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Dr. Galbraith, thank you for being with us. As an economist you have a great name, following in the footsteps of another great Galbraith.

I want to address the situation of the anglophone minority in Quebec. Past witnesses have come to committee and said that there's under-representation of anglophones in certain sectors of Quebec's economy. We have also heard that many anglophones turn to self-employment.

At a certain point we have to rely on local knowledge, which might belie a centralized economic model for the country. You may be familiar with Hayek's argument, whereby knowledge of particular circumstances of time and place are important—the expertise of place and special knowledge. Quebec really is a distinct place in Canada, just as much as the west is.

[Translation]

I lived out west. I can testify to the fact that unilingual francophones cannot get a job if they do not speak English.

[English]

For anglophones in Quebec, they have special needs as well.

You mentioned the importance of investments. My question would be, are investments made in organizations to help anglophones understand the special knowledge of the place worthy investments, according to you?

Dr. John Galbraith: First of all, I absolutely agree with you on the importance of local knowledge and more generally of knowing what you're talking about. Again, I don't want to represent myself as any sort of representative of or expert on the English community in Quebec. I simply live here, and I'm an anglophone.

Having said that, the English in Quebec have a number of advantages, I think, that make it less serious to be subject to some of the constraints, for example, with which we're familiar. It's a commonplace here, for example, that anglophones are under-represented in the Quebec civil service. Is that a serious problem? Perhaps not.

The fact is that the anglophone minority in Canada is free to move anywhere within this country, and those who find themselves heavily constrained have in many cases already gone. The younger generation of people is not constrained, in my experience—which is informal—by lack of language skills. I think it's possible to exaggerate the difficulties that the community faces. It's not obvious to me that a large number of special programs are necessary to alleviate some of these difficulties.

If someone were to mention a particular sphere in which the anglophone community is disadvantaged, I think it would make sense to look at programs that could deal with that. But it's not access to capital markets; it's not access to education. I think one could exaggerate the difficulties of being in a minority here as an anglophone.

The difficulties that I see here are of a more global nature and of course, I think, are much smaller now than they were just a few months ago. That has to do, as I indicated at the beginning—and this is not something specific to the English community either, but to all Quebecers, francophone and anglophone—with the requirement that there be some stability and certainty in order to undertake investments. As that is solidified, I think the economic position of all communities in Quebec will be improved by increasing investments.

I don't know whether that answers your question or not.

● (0950)

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Yes, I didn't want to imply that the anglophone community is undergoing hardship, but simply that under-representation in the civil service is still a barrier to entry to employment, and there are questions that have to be answered surrounding that. The economic behaviour of actors in the anglophone community would be different from what it would be in the country at large because of the language situation. It doesn't mean that they're experiencing undue hardship,

But we also heard witnesses at committee say that many young anglophones turn to self-employment and to arts and culture. Without an economic vision from the federal government that includes the creative economy, which according to the Conference Board makes up 7.8% of real GDP in 2008, these actors within Quebec—anglophone people employed in the arts and culture sector—will struggle, if there is not adequate funding. Obviously if you're an artist and you go to the bank to ask for a loan to create 50 paintings, the loan manager is going to smirk at you and say, “Good luck: show me a business plan.”

People in the creative economy do need help other than traditional capital markets. Would you not agree?

Dr. John Galbraith: I may have misinterpreted your earlier remark, but this is something that has been true throughout history as we know it. Again, it's a stereotype that artists struggle at first, and of course you don't just go to a bank and get a loan to produce paintings. However, this is not something specific to the anglophone community in Quebec.

Montreal has a large creative economy. It's something that people take pride in, with good reason. It's part of the Montreal brand, as we now say. The opportunities to participate in that sector of the economy are perhaps greater here than in many other places. But because there isn't a standard path to success in that business, the way there would be, for example, if you were to get an M.B.A. and go to work for a large corporation, it's always been more of a struggle.

Much of the work is contract. This is absolutely true. It's a legitimate question as to whether some programs to encourage investment in that sector could benefit both the Montreal economy and the Canadian economy more generally; however, I don't see that these are necessarily language specific. I think the same is true for francophones in Quebec. If we want to encourage an important sector of the economy that generates benefits for Montreal, I think we should look at whether we can productively do that. Many of the points you just touched on are true of other groups in Montreal.

Of course, Montreal is not just francophones and anglophones. There are many, many language groups there, and many of them are involved in the artistic community. All should have access to whatever support there is in order to let that industry thrive.

● (0955)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Mr. Daniel.

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for being here.

I'm going to follow up on what one of my colleagues, who has just left, has asked you, and that's about the level of literacy. I see the world in the way that water will level itself, and in that sense, there must be a need or enough jobs and economic value for people who don't have any literacy skills. Is that true?

[Translation]

Mr. Normand Lévesque: It is difficult in the reality of the current economy. Someone without basic training or skills will have difficulty finding and keeping a job. Skills development has an impact not just economically, but also in other areas, including personal development and health.

I find that Canada is an interesting example. It is the country that invested the most in the last survey. There is a sample of 27,000 people, which is very large. If we compare the literacy tables from the 2003 survey to those in the 2013 survey, we can see that there was an overall drop of six points in Canada, regardless of the community. There was a seven point drop in numeracy.

It is important to understand that skills development is not static. The economy of 2003 is not the economy of 2013. The skills needs are not the same. I will give you an example. In this survey, we evaluated the skills relating to the technological environment, which is not something we did in 2003. Try to get by today without a minimum of technological skills and you will have difficulty.

What you raise is a fact. People who enter the labour market with few skills will end up in basic jobs. They will experience financial and job instability. They will have difficulty keeping their job. In addition, given the technological changes within companies, it will become difficult for them to move forward economically.

What is worse, and the surveys show this, is that people with few skills, with low literacy are those who get the least training. People like you and me will take part in a lot of training. In contrast, the statistics show that at most 2% of people who need training take part in it.

What you raise is fundamental. How can we respond? We could create policies on job training, policies that would be more specific and more concrete for this particular group.

In fact, what you are bringing up is a major challenge. The economic changes alone bring us to what we call 21st century skills. If we cannot acquire them, we will encounter serious economic difficulties.

[English]

Mr. Joe Daniel: Thank you.

Mr. Morrow, you talked about the economy and the francophone space in how the economy works. Do you see a specific francophone economic space in Canada, and if so, how would you define it?

Mr. Justin Morrow: In certain parts of Canada there is a certain francophone economic space, such as in St. Boniface and the Province of Quebec, and New Brunswick has its own. They're difficult to come by and to define as well. That's why in my presentation it was to speak to, to redefine one of the recommendations, which was to ensure the participation of the majority

communities so that we could be talking about official languages for the entire Canadian economy.

When we're talking about how official languages impact the entire Canadian economy, we're not talking about a francophone majority or minority economy, or an anglophone minority or majority economy. We're talking about the whole thing and how actors in the traditional anglophone economy or francophone minority economy will interact with those of the opposite majority or minority.

Mr. Joe Daniel: As a follow-up to that one, how prepared do you think the francophone community is in wanting to be able to engage in the European economy, given that we're now going to have a trade deal with Europe and the opportunity is huge there?

• (1000)

Mr. Justin Morrow: I'm going to take one point, and then I'll get Christie in here.

Mariette Mulaire in Manitoba has done a lot of international recruitment and brings the francophone space of Manitoba to the international level. The businesses that she's brought to the province of Manitoba have had significant economic impacts. That's one example.

I'll let Christie expand on that.

Ms. Christie Dennison: I think francophone communities are absolutely prepared to expand into new spaces and are engaged in doing this already. This is one of their priorities. Sometimes it's referred to as

[Translation]

...expanding the francophone community...

[English]

and not only in a cultural way, but in an economic way.

Openness towards international markets is obviously an advantage to francophone minority communities and is something they can leverage. For specific trade deals, it depends. French is often seen as a second language internationally, regardless of the what first language of either party is. They often share French as a common language. Also, we know that growing markets often have French as a language of business, so this is certainly an opportunity.

One thing that we did want to mention is the difference between a basic language acquisition and then the confidence to interact actively within a language community that isn't your own. Learning basic French doesn't necessarily mean that an anglophone will then engage actively with the francophone economy if there isn't an active offer to engage, but Canadian Youth for French recognizes through most of its partnerships that there is an openness from francophone minority communities to this reality.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Monsieur Dionne Labelle.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Robillard, in your presentation, you mention the publication of the results of the programme for the international assessment of adult competencies, specifically the sections dealing with literacy and numeracy. However, the results are not broken down based on francophone and anglophone communities in Canada.

Will the results of the survey be broken down according to those groups?

Mr. Michel Robillard: We have raw data. Naturally, in a year or two, more specific data will be used.

Regardless, initial reports from the PIAAC presented data broken down by the various communities in the various provinces, such as in Ontario, in Quebec, and so on.

What is interesting, as Mr. Lévesque mentioned, is that Canada provided the largest sample of respondents for the international survey. Of the 166,000 people who took part in the assessment, 27,000 were Canadian. What is interesting is that, in the Canadian sample, francophones from three provinces were over-represented, namely, those from New Brunswick, Manitoba and Ontario.

For the moment, the raw data will be broken down minimally, but there will be much more specific data in a year or two.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: For the moment, we don't know what the literacy level of francophones is.

Mr. Normand Lévesque: Yes, we do. The data are in the brief you have there.

Generally speaking, we know that the results of francophones in New Brunswick haven't improved since the last survey 10 years ago.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: It's in this report?

Mr. Normand Lévesque: Yes.

The results for Ontario and Manitoba are a little better, but not much.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: How do you explain that?

Mr. Normand Lévesque: A first situation concerns us. We assess that about 80% of people who say they are francophone replied in English. That rate was 66% in 2003. That's the first issue.

For the second issue, it's important to point out that, historically, the relationship between education and reading among francophones has been different. In general, to develop skills, you need to put them into practice. For the moment, the results and analysis of them has not enabled us to determine what exactly is going on.

The fact that many francophones answer in English gives rise to a lot of questions about access to services and about skills development. We are aware that, generally speaking, many francophones outside Quebec and in some areas of New Brunswick work in English. That's the reality.

However, maintaining the language and cultures has to be done in all provinces. Six thematic reports will be published by the federal government, including one on the PIAAC and the official language

minority communities. Some provinces, including Ontario and probably New Brunswick, will go further with the analysis to better understand their own reality and determine how to react.

Skills development is not just a francophone reality in Canada; it's a major issue that has been raised by most economic development stakeholders.

• (1005)

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: I imagine that if the francophone minority communities have more catching up to do, that would be of particular interest.

What do you think of the new labour market agreements program? Do you think it does enough for the minimum basic skills, enabling people to enter the labour market? Is enough money being put into the program? Certainly this has to do with literacy, numeracy and, in general, literacy education. Is enough money being put into this area so that people are acquiring the minimum skills? Are these labour market agreements beneficial?

Mr. Normand Lévesque: On the one hand, it isn't equal across the country because these federal-provincial agreements are managed by the provinces. So we cannot make a uniform observation.

On the other hand, these programs are aimed at skills development and employment. It's a completely different area, and the approach may vary from province to province.

Lastly, with respect to acquiring basic skills, most provinces have different funding programs.

With respect to official language minority communities, since these agreements have just been concluded, we will see later how it will go. However, we know that previous agreements had major impacts and, unfortunately, they were not always positive. I'm thinking about British Columbia, where there were significant problems. In particular, it made a lot of organizations more fragile. We will have to see what these new agreements will bring.

Something interesting, in some cases, but not all, this brought the provincial government and official language minority communities closer together in terms of skills development. I think the communities understood, that they learned from that, that they have better control with this transfer of jurisdiction. So they are closer to the provincial governments because the money is now in the provinces. It remains to be seen how it will be made available.

Still, we think that the federal government can't give up its responsibility for official languages and minority rights. Significant issues remain in this area. Unfortunately, the answers aren't black or white. It is far more complex than that. We will see what happens with these new agreements.

We think that the closer the money is to the ground, usually, the more—

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: There is a better chance it would be useful.

Mr. Normand Lévesque: That's usually the case. We still need to solve the problem of the minority communities' access to the funds in certain areas. That still needs to be sorted out with the provinces. We think the federal government could play a role in that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lévesque.

Mr. Williamson, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to everyone for showing up today.

I have a couple of questions, which I'll direct to Dr. Galbraith from McGill. I want to highlight a couple of points from some of the other witnesses.

The first is on literacy. While I think it is a problem that communities face—it's one in my home province of New Brunswick—I would highlight a point from the Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences, which notes, "This is not a phenomenon purely characteristic of the minority community or that affects only francophones." This is true in New Brunswick. It is true across the country. In fact, I'd even note that the rate in Quebec is the same as it is for Canada as a whole.

Mr. Morrow notes that, for the purpose of the study, we really do need one vision, because it's a strong Canada that helps minority communities across this country. In fact, we've had several previous witnesses who have noticed that in parts of the country where economic growth is strong, the minority communities' participation, wealth creation, and employment levels parallel, if not mirror, those of the majority linguistic community. At the same time, we see the downside. In parts of the country where growth lags, minority communities share those same characteristics as well.

Dr. Galbraith, in some of your answers, you spoke on some of the global issues. Could you talk a bit about what are some of the characteristics that are necessary for growth so that we can envision policies in some of these slower growth areas of the country that would see them catching up to the economically stronger parts of the country? Is it institutions? Is it questions...? Is it resource development? I'd like to get some of your thoughts on those policies or those areas, so that as we look at this question we're not just looking at it from silos, but rather from policies that will benefit the country as a whole, and so that as one group is lifted up, so too are all groups in the immediate surrounding area.

Thank you.

• (1010)

Dr. John Galbraith: In responding to that question, I want to underline a point that Monsieur Dionne Labelle was making when he spoke of the *compétences de base minimales* when we discuss *l'alphabétisme* and numeracy. I think this is an important point in light of the question that you just posed as well. Again, I want to underline that I'm absolutely in agreement with Monsieur Robillard and Monsieur Lévesque on the importance, of course, of literacy and numeracy.

[Translation]

It goes without saying that...

[English]

these are things that we would like to be pushing close to 100% by whatever mechanism, provincial or federal, that can be used.

But again, as Monsieur Dionne Labelle was indicating, we're speaking of the *compétences de base minimales*. When we think of the knowledge economy, which is another one of the phrases that is on everyone's lips today, the kinds of enterprises that we think of and which we hope to encourage and develop in a country such as ours, which does have a highly educated workforce, are in general not those that are being created by people with a minimal level of competencies.

This kind of educational investment that we think feeds into this growth in the knowledge economy is really the most highly educated and capable people, and this is a different kind of program. Again, that does not take away from the importance of literacy and numeracy as Monsieur Robillard and Monsieur Lévesque have underlined, but it's another part of the distribution of talents that we're thinking about.

The Canadian government has addressed these things with a number of programs, including the Canada Foundation for Innovation. There are a number of ways in which the creation of a high level of knowledge and skill have been addressed. It's that other part of the distribution, rather than the *compétences de base minimales*. I can't quite think of how I want to say that in English, but it's a sort of minimal level of skills. That other part of the distribution is critical for this, so I think we should be making sure that our attention is turned to that as well.

As I was saying earlier, economic growth depends upon investment—we all know this—and investment has many forms. Education is one of these forms. Installation of capital is another one. To the extent that we are talking about education, as many people have been implicitly doing here today, I think we need to be sure that we're talking at least in part about the most highly skilled people in the economy, and not only providing the training, but also attracting people of that type to Canada as a place in which to learn, stay, and create enterprises.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Williamson and Professor Galbraith.

[Translation]

We are going to take a five-minute break.

[English]

We'll allow our witnesses to leave before we move to the second item on our orders of the day.

This meeting is suspended for five minutes. Thank you very much.

• (1010) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1015)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We are continuing the meeting. The session is still public.

We have a motion before us. It is the motion that Mr. Godin moved at a previous meeting. The motion reads as follows:

That the Standing Committee on Official Languages invite the Minister of Canadian Heritage to appear before May 29th, 2014 to discuss the Plans and Priorities for 2014-2015 of the department for a two-hour televised session.

• (1020)

Mr. Yvon Godin: On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You have the floor, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chair, the last time there was a request to hold the meeting in camera, it was debated, and we voted on it.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Yvon Godin: This motion was debated in a public meeting. Normally, the balance of the motion should be handled in public, isn't that right? It's really important.

The Chair: It is possible for another committee member to move a dilatory motion a second time.

Mr. Yvon Godin: That would be unfortunate. We want the minister to appear here.

The Chair: Those are the rules.

Mr. Yvon Godin: If we deal with this motion in camera and the minister does not appear, that would mean that the Conservatives will have voted against the motion. That's clear.

The Chair: It's also clear that committee members have the right to move dilatory motions at any time.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I'm certain that the government party members will want the meeting to remain public.

The Chair: Mr. Gourde, you have the floor.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Chair, we would like the meeting to continue in camera.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, would you like a recorded division?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Absolutely.

The Chair: I give the floor to the clerk.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 5; nays 4 [See the *Minutes of Proceedings*])

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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