

A Response to Minister Lamrock's Justifications for His FSL Plan

In recent days, Minister Lamrock has been circulating the following text to justify his plans for French education in NB. A team of us from the Citizens for Educational Choice have taken on the task of annotating the Minister's argument, pointing out errors in fact and argumentation. Although the details are to be found in the following pages, some general points arise repeatedly.

1. The Minister misuses French language learning scholarship. For example, his many misrepresentations of the ideas of Dr. Fred Genesee of McGill has resulted in a letter from Dr. Genesee explaining the problems. If the Minister wants the benefit of experts in FSL, he should assign them with the task of devising an FSL plan for the province or, at very least, heed their warnings regarding the Croll and Lee recommendations.
2. The Minister seems to persist in misunderstanding the nature of French immersion. In this text he presents it as a challenge that suits higher-achieving students; whereas we understand from the works of Dr. Dicks, Dr. Genesee and others, and from the experience of other provinces such as Nova Scotia, that EFI can be accessible to nearly all children.
3. The Minister erroneously argues that the many studies before Croll and Lee support his innovations: they simply do not, and we encourage all to read these reports and determine the truth for themselves. In fact, since the Scraba report of 2002, NB has been encouraged to improve participation and retention in EFI by increasing the resources required to support students within the EFI program.
4. The Minister argues weakly against this less disruptive and more standard solution: he claims that it cannot be done because it has not been done or because a fully detailed plan for this approach does not exist.
5. The Minister frequently suggests that any report or expert opinion which supports an entry point for French immersion later than the current grade one entry point also lends support to his plan for immersion to begin only in grade 6 because such opinions support a 'later' date. We believe that if he were to consult with the authors of these reports, he would find that they consider the grade 6 entry point which he proposes to be quite worse than the grade 2 or grade 3 entry points that some experts advise.
6. Finally, in the title of the piece and throughout, the Minister wishes to suggest that the past two months have been a time of 'study', which should now conclude in a decision. We hope our comments will show that the Minister and Croll and Lee are very far from having studied the topic well, and that the decisions made in haste and ignorance thus far should be delayed so that a true and careful course can be plotted for this important aspect of our province's public education system.

Below you will find the Minister's original text in italics and our critique in plain text following each point he makes.

WHEN SHOULD STUDY GIVE WAY TO DECISIONS?

By Kelly Lamrock

This essay is written for all those who, in good faith, are wondering why the Government of New Brunswick would change an early immersion programme we have grown to know with a new universal French programme that seems to alarm so many.

Sometimes, in the midst of a heated debate with claims and counter claims it is helpful to remind ourselves exactly what is being proposed and why.

I have a daughter who will start Grade One next year. We want her to be bilingual. Here's what awaits her – and all of her peers – when she starts in the new universal programme next year.

- *From Kindergarten to Grade Four, all schools will offer several weeks of co-curricular programming to introduce kids to the Acadian and aboriginal cultures that are part of our province's identity. They will be introduced to the benefits of bilingualism and schools will use modules in art, music and social studies to introduce the French language.*

In March 2008, after a brief two-week period of consultation, the Minister adopted the recommendations of the now-discredited Croll and Lee report, against the advice of all language learning experts. It is a fundamental point of contention between those experts and the plan's authors (both of whom work outside the field of language acquisition) that this plan removes elementary-level French instruction entailing the choice between an early French immersion (EFI) program and Core French programs in the critical first five years of education and replaces it with one that offers no language instruction whatsoever during those five years. This plan, they state, 'has no basis in science', and it is an unprecedented experiment.

Therefore the authors of this commentary find the last sentence of the Minister's statement above puzzling. If by 'introduce the French language' Minister Lamrock means that he has drastically revised his plan, and art, music and social studies will be taught in some sort of immersion context, he needs to describe these changes in detail; if, however, he merely means that students will be taught **about** the existence of French language and culture, this does not address the concerns.

There is a second point to be made here: the Minister has attempted to shore up support for his removal of all elementary-level FSL instruction in our bilingual province by claiming that the time spent on French instruction will be used for other educational goals, implying that they are currently unmet. Thus the Minister above presents as an innovation a program that introduces Acadian and aboriginal cultures. Yet many of us can recall learning about aboriginal history in early elementary nearly 30 years ago, and these topics are already part of the elementary school curriculum in both the EFI and Core setting.

As for the Acadian culture, the Minister might ask the Acadian community what they think: would they prefer English-speaking children to learn elementary-level information about Acadian culture in English or, through French instruction, build a true foundation for further communication between anglophones and francophones in our province?

- *In Grade Five, all students will take Intensive French, an active-learning approach to speaking French that has shown rapid results while being piloted in over 25% of Anglophone schools. This program gives them much of their day speaking French while leaving time for subject-based instruction in English.*

Minister Lamrock repeatedly has been taken to task by FSL researchers for assuming that the results of the current Intensive French program, which takes place after four years of Core French instruction and was, until this year, voluntary, will also be the results of his proposed grade five Intensive program, a mandatory program which will be the absolute beginning of the students' French instruction in our province. One of these researchers, Dr. Genesee of McGill, commented during his May 14th lecture in Fredericton that the Lamrock plan cannot be properly described as an Intensive French program because it is so unlike all others. Moreover, Minister Lamrock is aware that, in a public letter, the architects of the reasonably successful Intensive French program in New Brunswick have rejected the Minister's plan as an inappropriate use of their project.

- *Once in Grade Six, students will choose. At the very least, they must take post-Intensive French, which provides more conversational French modules until the end of Grade Twelve (unlike now, where students can stop taking French after Grade Ten and may lose some progress by graduation). Those wanting an extra challenge can take Late Immersion, where the majority of their subjects are taught in French.*

Above, and in several other publications, the government has called this program 'universal'. This description shows the limited extent to which this is true: the program is universal for its first five years only, and universal only by offering a meager 5 months of 50% FSL instruction to everyone. This is equivalent to making our health care system more universal by closing down hospitals in regions that are better served so as to be equal to those that are less well served.

Following this phase, the Lamrock program is made up of two streams, one of which the Minister of Education himself describes as "an extra challenge". This illustrates the fundamental difference of opinion between the Minister and FSL experts: well-designed immersion programs should not be seen as enrichment programs, and, we contend, could be accessible to virtually everyone if properly supported, as a decade of FSL reports have recommended.

- *Further, our new Bilingual Schools Policy will provide students with more chances to speak French in real life situations. Right now, most students in Grades 6-12 arrive with no conversational ability in French. Because this new policy will allow all students to arrive in middle school with conversational French ability, schools will schedule social, cultural and extracurricular time for conversations in French.*

The result of this new universal program will be to make New Brunswick the first province in Canada to require eight years of applied French for all students. It will transform New Brunswick from a province where only a quarter of students become bilingual to one where 70% of graduates speak French at the Intermediate level. For those who worry about reduced opportunity to learn French, I would point out that this goal means that the student at the 70th percentile is at the Intermediate level – much higher than now. Students in the higher-achieving range will have superior fluency.

It has proven difficult for scholars, researchers and concerned parents to assess the nature of the Lamrock plan in part because the plan makes up new terms for its components. This is, presumably, due to the fact that no scholar working in FSL or language acquisition has had a hand in devising the plan. For example, to emphasize its novelty, the plan refers to 'post-intensive French', where the common terminology is 'Core' or 'Enhanced Core' French. Similarly, above the Minister adopts the term 'applied French', which appears to mean Core French courses with a communicative approach, hardly an innovation since core French has been following this methodology for many years.

However, many citizens of NB would prefer that the province's French instruction remain defined by terminology in line with national standards. This will allow Canadians from other provinces to move to NB assured that their children in immersion or Core instruction will have the same quality of education.

In any case, it is our understanding that even in the Core program today NB requires ten years of French for all students, from grade one to grade 10. Perhaps a reduction by two years should not be presented as an improvement, no matter what 'applied French' entails.

Finally, we note that '70th percentile' is an incorrect usage of testing terminology. That would in fact mean that a particular student would be achieving better than 69% of the population. We assume this is not what the Minister means. For an analysis of the Minister's contention that under his plan 70% of students will reach the much-diminished 'Intermediate' level of oral French competency, please see below.

The Rationale for the Decision

Anyone who has followed the debate will have heard me state a few simple premises for this decision. They are as follows.

1. Bilingualism has changed from an optional skill pursued by a few to an expectation we share for all children.

For a critique of the Minister's imprecise use of the terms 'bilingualism' and 'bilingual' throughout this document, see below.

2. If we want 70% of children to become bilingual, our programme must include all students in its scope, not a minority of them.

For an analysis of this 70% goal see below. It is incorrect for Lamrock to say that his program includes all students: it has an optional immersion program in grades 6 to 12. However he parses these goals, a large number of the more proficient speakers in the system will come from this portion of the program.

3. Choosing an optional grade one entry point for FSL closes that option for children who struggle early and leads to streaming, which ultimately hurts children's learning in literacy, math and French.

Lamrock's critics agree that the current program, lacking as it does in sufficient resource help in EFI, does have this effect; citing Nova Scotia's system as an example, they dispute his contention that any possible immersion program would be thus flawed. In fact all other provinces have a Kindergarten entry to immersion allowing students more time to adjust to French language instruction and allowing parents and teachers more time to assess students' progress.

4. Despite years of study and past promises of implementation, there is no detailed plan available to simply add "more resources" to the current model.

Since a string of reports recommended that carefully adding teachers' assistants and resource teachers to the EFI program would improve the problems he purports to be solving through his plan, his critics contend that working out the details of such recommendations is the responsibility of the Department of Education under the direction of the Minister.

5. There are other proven methods of delivering bilingual education which don't exclude as many students, or cause the streaming of students, in the way early immersion does.

After several weeks of full debate, I would like to explain why we still believe these premises are sound and backed by evidence and experience. I want to be clear that continuing to believe that we have not heard or reflected upon the concerns of others – just as I accept that those who still disagree with the decision can still honestly say that they have listened to government's reasoning respectfully but without changing their minds.

The Minister has indeed treated the time after his decision as a debate, and treated parents as opponents in a debate, defending his position and discrediting his opponents positions. He has characterized his position as 'fair and Christian', and has attempted to discredit the provincial Ombudsman as a former Minister of Education who is envious of the current one's energy and enthusiasm. He and the Premier have argued against the EFI program by describing it as 'elitist'.

The Minister has not engaged in an open and honest discussion on the issue. Discussion, as compared to debate, would allow that there are more than two possibilities. True discussion would include exploration of other alternatives. The Minister has not explained why Intensive French specifically was chosen. He has not explained why he canceled all French instruction in grades 1-4. He has not explained why grade 5 was chosen as the first year of French instruction,

rather than the middle immersion entry points favored by some scholars or entry at kindergarten, as advised by many scholars of language learning and used elsewhere around Canada.

Moreover, proper discussion regarding this issue could have only taken place between the publication of the Croll and Lee report and the Minister's decision. But the Minister only provided two weeks for this to take place -- one of which was March Break --, and assured parents that he was consulting 'language experts' during this time. We know of only one that was so consulted, Dr. Joe Dicks, and he advised against the plan.

1. Bilingualism has changed from an optional skill pursued by a few to an expectation we share for all children.

Many New Brunswickers, like Premier Graham and I, grew up in an era where early immersion was a symbol for our belief in bilingualism. Many of these citizens are surprised when they learn that internationally, many countries use more universal models to teach second and third languages. Ending Early Immersion is not the end of bilingual education. It changes two characteristics about early immersion – the optional, segregated nature of the model and the grade one entry point. But many places teach languages without excluding students or starting in grade one. Indeed, even Professor Fred Genesee, an early immersion advocate, acknowledges in a number of scholarly articles that many multilingual countries use a later, universal second language model like we are proposing.

Please see below for an extended discussion of Minister Lamrock's misuse of Dr. Genesee's research. Dr. Genesee refers to the project Lamrock proposes as 'unheard of' because it provides no second-language instruction in any form for the first five years of schooling. In his comments during a lecture at UNB on May 14th, Dr. Genesee said of the Lamrock plan, "I don't get it." Moreover, Dr Genesee clearly states that the kind of program one chooses often reflects the sociolinguistic and sociopolitical reality of the community. In bilingual areas - especially an officially bilingual province - programs that provide early exposure and the highest levels of eventual attainment in the target language are the most logical, he contends.

Of course, it is possible to have honest debates about these issues: we do not want to suggest that Dr. Genesee is the only experienced voice our province's educational leaders should listen to. However, we believe the Minister discredits his own plan when he misrepresents a scholar's printed statements. If he believes Dr. Genesee's work is important to this discussion -- and we agree it is -- then Dr. Genesee could have and should have been made part of the planning of the FSL program.

Indeed, New Brunswick didn't necessarily choose Early Immersion for educational reasons. We chose an optional, segregated model of second language instruction because it was more politically palatable. Early Immersion started in an era when there was great resistance to bilingual education, and it was necessary to make it optional to mollify those who opposed the very concept.

Here and elsewhere, the Minister has adopted the term 'segregated' to describe the province's immersion system. Since segregation is a loaded word in English, we must be clear in our understanding of what it denotes in this instance and what it can connote to the detriment of discussion of FSL in Canada. Coming from a Latin root word that means 'flock', segregation merely denotes 'separation'. Usually, in terms such as 'racial segregation' and 'sex segregation', the separation described in the word 'segregation' takes place by the command of an authority, just as a shepherd forces sheep and goats to enter different pens. In an open and free society, such forced separation is considered poor public policy, and so the racial segregation in the US before the 1960s or in South Africa during apartheid were widely criticized by Canadians.

A less frequently used connotation of the term 'segregation' is that the separation takes place through the decisions of the persons involved. It would be an odd, but perhaps not incorrect, use of the word to say that musicians in an orchestra are 'segregated' into woodwinds, percussion, etc. because they chose different instruments. This is an odd use because the connotation of forced separation that this term carries is in danger of suggesting that a 'segregated' orchestra is one in which the participants had no choice: by the machinations of some authority, its participants were forced against their will to take on their instruments.

Clearly, French immersion, both the early form which the Minister plans to abolish and the late form with which he intends to replace it, separates students. However, this separation is entirely the choice of the families who enroll their children (to the extent that any such thing is done by free will in our society). When the Minister uses the term 'segregation' for this separation he risks evoking the connotation of racial segregation and sex segregation, implying that immersion forcibly divides students, and thereby making immersion itself seem to be a social evil through verbal trickery.

Finally, the Minister suggests above that a French instruction program with an optional EFI component is more politically palatable to those who oppose bilingual education and implies that, as a result, his program is one that suits an age of greater acceptance of French instruction. The shape of the debate following the announcement of his plan belies this assertion. In fact, anglophone rights advocates have lined up in favour of the Lamrock plan, while proponents of a truly bilingual NB have decried it. Apparently both sides see it as the Minister does not: as an erosion of the FSL programs undertaken decades ago.

That means that Early Immersion was the right choice then. We salute those who pioneered it and fought those battles, and who took us from an era of almost no bilingual Anglophones to the 25% we see today. However, because of their success, those battles no longer rage so intensely, and 25% is no longer good enough.

Looked at on a region-by-region basis, EFI programs are more popular than the Minister contends (if, as it seems, he is referring to EFI enrollment with his 25% statistic). Actual enrollments in EFI in grade 1-5 in are 40% in the City of Bathurst, 49% in Campbellton, 41% in Fredericton, 62% in Grand Falls, 37% in the Kennebecasis Valley, 48% in Moncton, 49% in Riverview, 50% in Sackville, and 60% in Shediac Cape. If nothing else, these statistics indicate why the Minister faces such persistent opposition.

Bilingualism is simply a fact of life for New Brunswickers my age. It is not a debate – we are ready to accept it as a universal skill. Not only can we accept this, but it is essential. Our children will grow up in a global marketplace and work in international environments and sell to foreign markets. They will grow up in a world where China has the largest English-speaking population in the world. Not only does universal bilingualism give us an advantage in attracting jobs, but the act of learning a second language gives us the ability to learn new languages and cultures and to deepen our grasp of our own. This is an essential skill – for everyone.

In adopting the recommendations of the Croll and Lee report, Minister Lamrock here and elsewhere makes the claim that the new program will make 70% of New Brunswick students bilingual. We agree that any plan that could achieve this result would have great positive results on the economy and life of our province and would be an improvement over the existing system. Bilingualism is not only a staple in the telecommunications sector in which our province has invested heavily, it is a road to higher education in the francophone colleges and universities of our province and a means of fostering good-will between the cultural groups of New Brunswick. Interestingly, the Lamrock plan purports to achieve this goal through a Late French Immersion program that will provide students with about half the number of contact hours in French compared to the current Early French Immersion program and an Enhanced Core program that provides a fraction of that. Since this plan was devised without the help of any of the province's experts in language learning, and is rejected by the Minister's outside consultants, we might well wonder: how is this possible?

It is possible only because the Minister and the Department of Education have redefined 'bilingualism' in NB education.

Those who have attained competency in a non-native language know that the simple term, 'bilingual', does not do justice to the range of abilities one might have in a second language. Some people say they are bilingual when they have just enough competency to order a coffee and get a room for the night; experts tend to avoid the term as too vague entirely. Until the Minister's changes of March 14, the province's terminology was appropriately nuanced: Directive 309A of the Department of education stipulated that the goal of the Early French Immersion program was the 'Advanced' standard of oral competency in the grade 12 optional exam, and provided a paragraph's description of this high standard. This same document stipulated that the goal of the Late French immersion program was 'Intermediate plus'. All this changed with item #19 of the Minister's list of 'Improvements to French Second Language Programs' at <http://www.gnb.ca/0000/eng-bck-e.asp> . It reads, "The Department of Education and government would publicly state that the target of «70% of all students reaching the intermediate level» is considered an interim objective «on the road» to Policy 309 proficiency levels." And so, it is the 'Intermediate' level, two steps down from the previous high-water mark, by which the Department of Education now wishes to judge itself, and which the Minister has begun to refer to as 'bilingual'.

This Intermediate competency is defined in directive 309A <<http://www.gnb.ca/0000/pol/e/309A.pdf> > in part thus: "The individual can get the gist of most everyday conversations but has

some difficulty understanding native speakers in situations that require specialized or sophisticated knowledge. The individual's utterances are minimally cohesive. Linguistic structure is usually not very elaborate and not thoroughly controlled; errors are frequent. Vocabulary use is appropriate for high-frequency utterances, but unusual or imprecise elsewhere." Is the Minister right to call this bilingual, as he does throughout this document? Not if he wishes to imply that this level of competency will significantly increase the educational or employment prospects of NB students. To research this issue, one of our authors contacted employers who were seeking bilingual office workers around Canada. All agreed that this standard did not reach what they meant by 'bilingual'. One employer put it bluntly: "we need people who are *really* bilingual"; another said that this was a standard closer to what they mean when they advertise a job as 'bilingual preferred but not required'. In contrast, the 'Advanced' standard, the goal of the EFI program, was sufficient for all employers' needs. With this being true of office work, 'Intermediate' is also clearly insufficient for work at a post-secondary institution, either in NB or elsewhere in Canada.

So when the Minister compares results in the previous system to those he hopes to achieve in the new one, he is not judging them by the same standards. Moreover, it is a great concern to us that by his imprecise terminology -- in particular the term 'universal bilingualism' above -- the Minister will frustrate a generation of NB students and their parents, who will expect, by virtue of their participation in this new system, to have access to the increased opportunities afforded by these reduced skills which he inaccurately describes as 'bilingual'. This runs the risk of having the opposite effect of true bilingualism: of frustrating anglophones and fostering greater antipathy towards francophones who will continue to have access to these jobs because of their higher proficiency in their second language.

Ultimately, though, bilingualism is not just about economics: it is a means of enriching the lives children and the adults they encounter. Being able to speak a language is a gift that children can use to their own advantage from a very young age. These changes deprive children of 4 years of being able to speak, read, and write in French; and they deprive children from being able to converse with their neighbours in French.

2. If we want 70% of children to become bilingual, our program must include all students in its scope, not a minority of them.

This seems to be beyond controversy. If a subject is part of the essential bundle of skills we owe our children, we teach it to all students to the best of their ability to learn and our ability to teach. Yet we have known for years that there are accessibility problems with early immersion. Fully 60% of schools, many rural, have no access to the programme due to numbers and available teachers. And the vast majority of students are in Core French, which has a 98% failure rate in giving students even basic conversational skills in French.

There are two statistics here that require analysis. First, the Minister states that "60% of schools have no access to the programme." He's correct about this 60%, but only 42.7% of elementary students attend those schools and half of those children are in the same zone as an EFI school

that they can attend if they want EFI. So while saying 60% of schools don't have EFI makes it sound very inaccessible, in fact 78% of New Brunswick's students have very easy access to EFI.

Furthermore, the Department of Education offers EFI and LFI courses only where there is sufficient demand. For rural schools which do not have EFI due to a lack of demand, streaming is obviously not a problem, but unless the demand for LFI is going to be substantially greater than that of the EFI program, eliminating EFI will do nothing to create demand sufficient to increase enrollment in French Immersion. We are left, then, with the Minister suggesting that the new Core program will substantially change the French competency of students in NB. Our assessment of the proposed Core program is provided later, but suffice it to say here that, despite the re-branding of this program as 'post-Intensive', the number of hours of French instruction will be the same in grades 6 through 8 as they are in the current Core program and overall will increase mandatory class time by only 18%.

Finally, the Minister states that there is a 98% failure rate in Core French. We do not dispute the failings of this program. Perhaps the addition of mandatory French in grades 11 and 12 of Core French will improve this somewhat. But it is not necessary to eliminate EFI in order to improve Core French programming in schools that do not have EFI, or indeed in any schools at all. In fact, it is only the Minister who wishes to pit LFI against EFI: this province has offered both programs simultaneously in various regions for some time.

Department of Education numbers show that 31% of students start Grade One in Early Immersion. For all the furor around calculating attrition numbers, they don't change this point. If you use the calculations made by Croll-Lee, about 18% of students are still in early immersion by Grade Five. If you use those of their critics (who themselves have differing numbers), then between 21 and 24% of students are in early immersion by the end of Grade Five. Neither number will get us to 70%. And none of the critics have proposed a specific plan to make early immersion available to all schools or accessible to all students, the way the new universal model will be. (It is worth noting, in passing, that the Croll-Lee concerns about high attrition rates are consistent with findings of other expert reports such as Price Waterhouse Cooper (2001) and Rehorick (2005).

If the Minister cites the studies from PriceWaterhouseCooper to Rehorick (the latter of which his office buried and was made available to New Brunswick citizens only through access-to-information), he should not suggest that there are no plans to improve accessibility of early immersion in NB. These reports all provided specific recommendations. A common recommendation throughout them was that resource teachers and TAs be provided to the EFI component of elementary education in this province. We have noted above that the Minister demonstrates in this document a mind-set that immersion programs represent a challenge suitable for higher-achieving students. In this, we believe he shares an erroneous prejudice with many New Brunswickers. The research of the very Dr. Genesee whom the Minister frequently cites in this paper has shown that even students with language learning disabilities are capable of reaching full potential, within the parameters of their disabilities, in both languages.

Finally, it once again appears the Minister assumes that the province cannot improve Core French without eliminating Early Immersion. Every school which has piloted optional Intensive French seems to have been able to do that well, and every other province in Canada appears to be trying to do both, as well.

It has been argued that a universal plan is flawed. Some suggest that it will hold back students who want a higher level of achievement. However, there is no other subject that provides optional, segregated classes in Grade One. There is not math immersion, history immersion or science immersion. We don't separate young children into different classes to teach them these sessions. Yet we have students who excel in math, history and immersion. To include a diverse group of learners is no bar to excellence.

We believe these comments betray a fundamental lack of understanding about the process of immersing a student in a language for the purpose of language acquisition. Proponents of math education and history education have not ever, to our knowledge, argued for anything like a 'math immersion' or 'history immersion'. The idea is preposterous because math and history are not learned by young people as languages are. The over forty years of experience with French immersion have shown that language, at a young age, can be learned well without specific attention to the field of study, but rather in the course of learning other topics, such as history and mathematics. As Dr. Joe Dicks puts it, "this is the beauty of EFI - we can put students in French immersion classes and students can do both - learn the language and learn the subject matter without prejudice. And students of varied backgrounds can do this."

Thus the Minister is wrong to suggest that his opponents believe that the diversity of students in the classroom would be a bar to excellence. They believe that all evidence suggests that by removing the Early Immersion program Minister Lamrock will bar excellence in French instruction, and that if he were to open this program to a more diverse group of learners -- by adopting the language help in EFI provided in Nova Scotia and other provinces -- he would increase the number of students who have a chance of achieving such excellence.

Some have also suggested that there should not be a universal model because some children with special needs may struggle with French. While students will struggle with French (as some struggle with math, science and art), it is dangerous to assume students with special needs cannot learn French (or that they can't learn math, science or art). And if a student genuinely cannot master a specific subject even with proper supports, we adapt that student's learning plan but don't cancel the universal nature of the course. (Some students will never master math, science and art, but these are still universal courses).

Minister Lamrock seems to be the only one who assumes that students with special needs will struggle with French, by assuming that they cannot handle Early Immersion. However, his statement here makes an assumption that proper supports exist. He is also talking about students who are unable to master a subject - completely different than students for whom the program is inaccessible. We find this portion, then, continued evidence that the Minister did not understand the special dynamic of immersion instruction when he underfunded special education resources in this program and subsequently cancelled EFI.

'70% At the Intermediate Level'?

We turn now to the oft-stated contention that the new program will ensure that 70% of students reach Intermediate proficiency. Perhaps some would agree with the Minister that it would be worth while diminishing students' chance of achieving Advanced proficiency to one in ten if the Intermediate standard were acquired by a far greater portion of the population. Because this is an entirely new project, untested in any other jurisdiction, we can judge the likelihood of this claim only on the basis of past experience and estimations of enrollments in the new LFI program. Experts in FSL such as Dr. Dicks and Dr. Genesee agree that the enrollment in the Lamrock LFI program will be lower than that of the EFI program it replaces and that the LFI program will be more 'streamed'. They offer the opinion that a grade 6 youth can be less easy to guide into new projects than the same child six years earlier. Moreover, the Lamrock plan gives little comfort to the parents of children with learning difficulties since it compels the student to remain in the program for all six years. It is reasonable to assume that only parents of high-achievers would want to lock their children into the Lamrock immersion program for the years 6-12, when so much rides on their grades in these later years.

Currently, at the beginning of middle school approximately 40% of children are enrolled in EFI and LFI combined. Let us optimistically estimate that 35% of NB students will continue through Lamrock's LFI program. This is a generous estimate given that parents may well be hesitant to enroll their children in a program that they are not permitted to leave, and the fact that student opinion in middle school may well make it harder to encourage entry into the program. However, in the spirit of optimism we will work with this. Even if *all* of these reach the Intermediate standard or better (currently 90% of LFI students do), this still leaves another 35% of all students, or 54% of all students in the enhanced Core program, to reach Intermediate proficiency if the 70% goal is to be achieved. (For a visual representation of these data, consult the graph of Croll and Lee information that follows this document.) Of students in the Core program today, only about 21% reach Intermediate or better. On what basis does the Minister believe the new 'enhanced' Core program will be such a drastic improvement over today's approach? Has he any data to support this important assumption? Given that no such information exists (because pilots of Intensive French are not complete), we are puzzled by how he can make these claims.

There are two means by which to measure the likely success of the new Core program against its predecessor, hours of instruction and curriculum. Details of curricular changes are unfortunately vague and so do not point to any major innovations. In any case, since the plans were developed without the support of FSL experts, we have no reason to believe that curricular changes would conform to 'best practices' that might cause a great change in results. Accordingly, we base the following argument on hours of instruction.

As is well known, the Lamrock plan most controversially removes all FSL instruction from the elementary years of education (kindergarten to gr. 4 in New Brunswick). We cannot know if the concentrated period of instruction in gr. 5 will fail to compensate for this or, as the Minister contends with no data to support him, surpass the results of five years of Core instruction. Let us optimistically assume, for argument's sake, that at the end of gr. 5 the results will be about the

same; this seems to be the Minister's assumption since he has not, to our knowledge, changed the FSL curriculum in gr. 6 to be any more challenging.

It is, then, in the years 6 - 12 that the Minister promises great things in order to improve the ratio of students achieving Intermediate competency. However, the changes in contact hours are minimal. (Data on contact hours were garnered through emails with the Department of Education and are summarized at http://spreadsheets.google.com/pub?key=pgOYTWj4reUjQQ_0TO4cyFQ) In grades 6 to 8, the number of FSL hours in the new Core program will be the same as those in the current system. In grades 9 and 10, it seems that 13% of the students' time will be in FSL as opposed to 8% now. The only major change to the years past gr. 5 is that in grades 11 and 12 all Core students will have to take one French course a year. The net change in hours of instruction is an increase of 18%, and this largely comes from the mandatory addition of gr. 11 and 12. We contend that it is unreasonable for the Minister to promise the province a drastic improvement in Core French competency based on an experimental program and a relatively small incremental increase in teaching hours.

In fact, there is a good case to suggest that the ratio of students who achieve Intermediate or higher ratings will not be an improvement on the statistics provided in the Croll and Lee data summarized in the graph at the end of this document. In order to use the existing statistics to predict the results of the new program, we need to appreciate the circumstances under which they were gathered. The oral competency exam on which these data are based is an *optional* test administered only in grade 12. In some schools, anecdotal evidence suggests, it is by no means routine: students sometimes have to insist that they be examined. Unfortunately no data were collected on this point, but we would contend that, under these circumstances, very few young people who stopped taking French in grade 10 or 11 would undergo the oral exam at the end of grade 12. Therefore, we suggest that the results in the graph represent not the results of students undergoing the minimal number of hours of instruction under the existing system (which ends mandatory French instruction at grade 10), but rather the results of students who have continued their Core French studies until the end of grade 12. Since the major increase in teaching hours under the new system is due to the addition of the mandatory grades 11 and 12, we believe the data in the graph represents students' achievements with about the same number of hours of FSL instruction as under Minister Lamrock's plan, and that the results will be about the same: about a fifth of Core French students will reach the Intermediate level, not over a half.

In short, we contend that the Minister's promise of "70% bilingual" is a doubly false one: it redefines 'bilingual' so as to be of little use to the student, and he cannot reasonably hope to find 70% of students reaching even this diminished goal. Finally, the Lamrock plan has one devastating effect on true bilingualism in NB: it virtually guarantees that the smallest fraction of anglophones will reach the 'Advanced' level of French competency which employers in an office setting considered sufficient. Most recent results showed only 9% of LFI students reach this level; in contrast 42% of EFI students do.

One might wonder why the Minister so boldly expresses his hope that the new plan will be so productive. We hope that he does not intend to include the results of 'grandfathered' EFI students to determine if his plan is a success in reaching the 70% Intermediate target.

3. Choosing an optional grade one entry point for FSL closes that option for children who struggle early and leads to streaming, which ultimately hurts children's learning in literacy, math and French.

This point has never been contested. Several previous reports, such as Price Waterhouse Cooper, Scraba, and MacKay cited conclusions similar to Croll-Lee, that the vast majority of students with special needs (as well as those who struggle but don't have special needs) winds up in Core French. In schools I visit, I see many Core French classes where over half of children are struggling. None of them get the attention they deserve in a class like that, and there aren't enough resources in the world to make that a positive learning environment.

Out of all the reports that Minister Lamrock quotes above, only the Croll and Lee report recommends the elimination of EFI. The others actually recommend making EFI more inclusive. With respect to the issue of streaming, there are three different aspects that should be considered: 1) the extent of streaming, 2) the effects of streaming, and 3) the cause of streaming.

The Extent of Streaming

Not to diminish the importance of this issue, it must first be placed within its proper context. That "a vast majority of students with special needs winds up in Core French" should be qualified by pointing out that a majority of students are enrolled in the Core French program to begin with. Therefore, based on relative enrollments (28% EFI vs 72% Core, 2007-2008 statistics), it is expected that a majority of special needs and struggling students would be enrolled in the Core program anyway. However, there is no disputing that there is an additional concentration of these students within the Core program, but to what extent? Presently, the proportion of students in the Core program on a specialized education plan is 4.3 students per class. If both the Core and EFI programs are combined, the number only declines to 3.4 students per class, or a difference of one student per class. (These numbers are calculated across the entire system, and differ from Hamilton and Litvak's discussed below only because the latter are calculated for grade 2 only.) It is not clear how classroom environments will change dramatically under the new model of French Second Language (FSL) instruction.

The Effects of Streaming

This "early" streaming is reported to cause a deterioration of classroom environments in the Core program with concomitant effects on literacy, math and science assessment scores. However, please take note of the following facts:

1. There is no meaningful difference in the 2006-2007 literacy assessment scores in grades 2 and 4 between EFI and Core students. These results were actually presented in the Croll and Lee report.
2. Students in the francophone sector do not fair as well as those in the Anglophone sector with respect to assessment scores. There is no streaming in francophone schools.
3. The effect on assessment scores associated with late streaming when LFI students are separated from Core students in grade 6 are far more substantial than any differences

measured between EFI and Core. A review of grade 5 (EFI vs Core) and grade 8 (EFI vs LFI vs Core) math results reveals a consistent trend. Data presented for 2006-2007 in the Croll and Lee report indicate that the mean math score of grade 5 EFI students is marginally better than that of Core students. However, LFI students significantly outscore both EFI and Core students in grade 8. Math assessment data available for 2003, 2004, and 2005 reveal a similar trend. In those years, the percentage of students reaching the provincial standard in grade 5 math is marginally higher in EFI vs Core, with 7-10% more EFI students reaching the provincial standard. In grade 8, however, the program with the highest percentage of students reaching the provincial standard in all three years is LFI, with 23-29% more students reaching the provincial standard as compared to students in the Core program.

The data indicate that there is little to support an appreciable effect on assessment scores with the reported streaming associated with EFI. The large disparity in assessment scores only appears with the late streaming associated with the LFI program. The primary reason is that, in general, the more academically inclined students enroll in the LFI program which even the Minister has acknowledged as more challenging. For all the rhetoric about streaming and assessment scores, the Minister has endorsed the very program which the data indicate significantly isolates lower achieving and struggling students. While the cause of late streaming is due to preferential enrollment of high academic achievers into the LFI program, the cause of early streaming is quite different, and is discussed below.

The Cause of Early Streaming

While no one disputes that special needs and struggling students are preferentially enrolled into the Core program, there is a considerable difference of opinion regarding the root cause. While some choose to characterize EFI as a program for the "elite", nothing could be further from the truth. It is important to note that special needs children, struggling children, and children from lower socioeconomic classes are all welcome in EFI and all are eligible to enroll. Why then are these students preferentially enrolled in the Core program? The heart of the problem lies with the differential resource allocation, as the vast majority of funding for exceptional learners is funneled into the Core program. In the 2006-2007 school year, after examining hundreds of applications, the Joint Committee on Classroom Composition awarded grants totaling \$1,060,800 to English core program classes and just \$4,080 to French immersion classes. Obviously, the core program is where these children are placed to get the support they need - it is unavailable in EFI. This has nothing to do with the EFI program itself and everything to do with resource management.

For years, the Department of Education has directed exceptional students and resources specific to them into the core program, and now the government is blaming EFI for a streaming problem that they themselves created. Studies have been calling for increasing inclusiveness in EFI for years. Based on these figures, it appears that the government has not even tried to do this. Without trying something, it's hard to credibly conclude that it won't work.

Unfortunately, the Minister says he cannot correct this disparity due to a lack of bilingual learning specialists to support the immersion program. "They simply don't exist," he claims. But

why would bilingual B.Ed. graduates preparing for positions in New Brunswick specialize in the teaching of exceptional students when, for years, the government has failed to hire them?

Again, mismanagement has turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

We simply need to focus on encouraging bilingual education graduates to become exceptional student specialists. Given that roughly half of all UNB B.Ed. grads are bilingual, we could very quickly be populating EFI with the resources that exceptional students need. This would eliminate one root cause of the imbalanced distribution of exceptional students within the system, and would give children of all abilities an equal opportunity to benefit from early second language training.

For those who are concerned that this focus on ending streaming to improve literacy has come at the expense of bilingualism, we might point out the general consensus that children with low literacy skills rarely become bilingual.

Doug Wilms, an international expert in literacy (which most FSL experts are not), has made it clear that jurisdictions which segregate young students on the basis of ability have poor literacy results. In today's skill-based economy, having 300,000 adults with low literacy rates is not an option. I have noted some critics, from the Ombudsman to some academics, suggest that our schools don't really have low literacy rates and raise some question about testing or small statistical deviations. We should never fall into the trap of denying a problem because we don't want a full debate about solutions. After all, we know we have more adults with low literacy rates than other provinces. One would logically conclude they came from somewhere – most likely our own school system.

We object to the characterization of Dr. Willms as an expert in literacy and of FSL experts as not being experts in literacy. FSL experts are second language and applied linguistics experts and could not be so without having expertise in literacy because reading and writing are critical components of language development and proficiency. Knowing about the psycholinguistic processes of reading and writing as well as the pedagogical applications of these are essential to the expertise of second language specialists. Dr. Willms, however, is an expert in social policy and statistics, not literacy: the majority of his peer reviewed articles are on the unrelated topic of childhood obesity.

On his company's website (KSI Research International Inc.), Willms describes his research interests as:

- Childhood Development
- Monitoring Systems
- National and International Assessment
- Program Evaluation
- Research Design
- School Effectiveness
- Social Policy

- Statistical Modeling

Clearly his broad range of research interests would not qualify him as a literacy expert. In fact, the word “literacy” is completely missing from the list.

It is also important to make a distinction between streaming and segregation as both Minister Lamrock and Douglas Willms use them interchangeably. Willms defines segregation as the **“separation of people of different social classes, ethnic or racial groups, or sexes into different schools, neighbourhoods, or social institutions**. The separation does not necessarily occur through intentional public policies or limited access; it can be the result of several economic, social and political forces”. Joseph Dicks notes that “French Immersion is an integrated part of the New Brunswick system. EFI students attend the same schools as English program students, classes are usually set up adjacent to the equivalent English grade level class, students participate in the same school-based cultural and recreational activities, recess and lunch periods are common to students in both programs, and some teachers teach in both programs. French Immersion is a choice that is open to all parents in NB. It is difficult to see how the term segregation applies in this context”. It is also difficult to see how any relationship between true segregation, as defined by Willms, and educational outcomes in other countries can be used to draw conclusions regarding outcomes in New Brunswick where this type of segregation does not exist in an immersion context. He is comparing apples to oranges.

Some have suggested that because EFI is a free choice, parents concerned about the learning environments of their children have only their choice to blame. While my family chose early immersion for our oldest child, I find that to be a judgmental and harsh view of a choice parents must make by Grade one (and one cannot re-enter once out, so the “choice” is limited. When children struggle, parents want the reassurance of a foundation language and they want to be able to help with schoolwork. This isn’t irrational, it’s human – and denying their kids equal learning environments because they made a different choice is no way to run a school system.

We agree with the Minister that such a view would be harsh; though we are not sure to whom he is ascribing this view. The Minister might be right that some unilingual anglophone parents remove their children for the reasons he lists, but we suggest that providing the resource teachers in EFI would help exceptional kids enter and remain in the program. This certainly is the case in Nova Scotia.

Finally, some have suggested that the Late Immersion option will simply delay streaming. It is worth noting that this is a mere prediction – it may be that having more time to remediate literacy problems and more kids introduced to Intensive French will make Late Immersion more accessible in a universal system. (In passing, one might be wary of academics who claim none of the benefits of a new system can be known, but state negative consequences with absolute certainty). Even if streaming is delayed but not avoided, no one can deny that sparing the youngest children from streaming while they learn to read and write is a positive achievement.

We are not aware of academics who state negative consequences with absolute certainty, but we believe there is a difference between making predictions based on past experience and based on

the inherent nature of a particular program. Dr. Joe Dicks puts it like this: "LFI is a more cognitively demanding program than EFI due to the complexity of the subject matter learning involved from the get-go. We know also from previous experience that more academically inclined students choose this option. The predictions about streaming are not drawn willy-nilly or based on whims. There is a basis for them. On the other hand, predictions about 70% of IF students reaching Intermediate have no basis - neither in past experience nor in the nature of the program (since we don't really know what that 8-12 follow up program will be like)."

Furthermore we feel that the statement "no one can deny that sparing the youngest children from streaming while they learn to read and write is a positive achievement" needs to be addressed. It will only be a positive achievement (a) if those children learn to read and write and (b) if they learn to read and write to a significantly higher level in unstreamed classes than in streamed classes. Current evidence suggests there is no significant difference. Also, without proper diagnosis and intervention eliminating streaming will not solve the problem - it could exacerbate it by creating even more diverse classrooms.

4. Despite years of study and past promises of implementation, there is no detailed plan available to simply add "more resources" to the current model.

In the 1990's, the professionals in District Two suggested a delayed entry point for immersion to avoid streaming and include more children. Education Minister Bernard Richard refused, saying the current segregated model could work if there were more resources. The Price Waterhouse report suggested a delayed entry point for immersion to avoid streaming and include more children. Education Minister Elvy Robichaud refused, saying the current segregated model could work if there were more resources. Both Scraba and MacKay cited streaming and underfunding of inclusion as major contributors to our poor literacy skills, and recommended a thorough review with all options on the table. Education Minister Madeleine Dube refused, saying the current segregated model could work if there were more resources.

While we do not have any knowledge of the delayed entry point for immersion recommended in the 1990s, the PriceWaterhouseCooper report did suggest, as the first of two recommended plans, that a dual entry point of grades three and six be implemented. (The second recommended plan was that the province standardize on a Kindergarten entry point, like its Maritime neighbours.) The Minister misrepresents this report by suggesting that its recommendations are fundamentally in line with his plan because both offer a 'delayed entry point'. There is, in fact, a good academic debate over the optimal time to begin immersion: Mount Allison's Dr. Ouellette, for instance, believes that a gr. 2 or 3 entry point might be better. But the Minister should not misread this debate to mean that 'later is better': the same Dr. Ouellette states that there is no basis in science for the Minister's plan to begin all immersion in gr. 6. We know of no FSL expert who recommends an entry point as late as gr. 6.

Indeed, four of the last five expert reports on FSL suggested either a specific change or a massive rethink of the current model. Very bright, capable and sincere ministers overruled these reports, saying they could fix the problem with more resources. Before we condemn them too strongly, let's at least entertain the possibility that the reason they didn't improve our

bilingualism rates or literacy scores might be because those urging them to go find more resources might have sent them looking for a solution that never existed. After all, for all the experts who have spent years researching early immersion who argue to maintain the current segregated system, not one has shared a detailed, costed model for exactly what resource model will reach 70% of students and avoid streaming. And ad hominem attacks on a report's authors are a poor substitute for actual policy ideas.

When stating that former Ministers said "they could fix the problem with more resources", the Minister comes dangerously close to suggesting to the reader that former Ministers did, in fact, follow the fundamental recommendation of all reports (except Croll and Lee) -- to increase the resources for remedial education in the EFI stream -- and that somehow this solution failed. The reader should be aware that this is not the case. We know of no point at which the efforts currently made by the NS government were brought to bear in NB.

Thus, there is no plan today because he has not created it. There are not additional resources in the last two years because he has not done a recruiting campaign, and he has not encouraged the needed professional development. Is he assuming it is too hard because others did not achieve it? If no one has shared a detailed, costed model, it is because he has not instructed them to do so. It is his staff who should be producing this model. We believe this less disruptive, proven and recommended repair should at least be undertaken before being rejected out of hand as impossible because it has never been tried in NB.

We must also address the implication that the criticisms of the Croll and Lee report were *ad hominem* (or 'personal') attacks; they were, in fact, criticisms of the report's statistical methodology. Hamilton and Litvak's critique of the Croll and Lee report was not a review of Croll and Lee themselves, but of their report, in which were found substantial mathematical and statistical flaws. These undermined Croll and Lee's conclusions, specifically their recommendation to terminate Early French Immersion. Hamilton and Litvak's analysis is confirmed by a sequence of letters from statisticians and social policy analysts across the province. In response to Hamilton and Litvak's work, the Minister has attacked them repeatedly in the press -- where he claims they treat it as a competition to see who's Ph.D. is bigger -- and in this essay below, where he likens them to pseudo-scientists.

Among the criticisms of the Croll and Lee report is the observation that neither of these authors has special knowledge of language learning or specifically French as a second language learning. We do not consider it an *ad hominem* attack to question the the credentials of the authors of a report, especially when their advice is swiftly adopted by the Minister and that advice is at odds with a decade of previous reports. Clearly, neither Croll nor Lee have any training in FSL education and were not appropriate choices to study FSL delivery in NB. This calls into question the judgment of the authors, as they were clearly not qualified to do this report, and that of the Minister in choosing them in the first place.

5. There are other proven methods of delivering bilingual education which don't exclude as many students, or cause the streaming of students, in the way early immersion does.

Early Immersion advocates have been asking the wrong question. They always cite the fact that the few children who take and remain in early immersion tend to learn French, thus we should keep it. But the right question to ask is, "Given the number of kids excluded from early immersion and the streaming that results, isn't there another way that still teaches children French but doesn't exclude and stream so many?" The evidence, internationally and domestically, suggests there is.

The Minister misrepresents the position of early immersion advocates. Since 1999 report after report has recommended that the NB government improve retention of weak students in EFI by increasing funding for TAs and resource teachers in the immersion program. Thus, advocates have been asking, "Since EFI works so well, how can we get more kids into the program?" We note, for instance, that Nova Scotia provides full-time Reading Recovery(tm) and Resource teachers in the EFI program that support a whole range of elementary years.

The old phrase "earlier is better" generally refers to language acquisition before age four, as early childhood expert Margaret McCain noted during her visit to New Brunswick. Those who cite this as proof that there's a difference between starting at age six and age ten are on shakier ground.

Ms. McCain is a much-loved public figure in New Brunswick who has been asked by the government to address the issue of early childhood education. However, to our knowledge, she has no formal qualifications in language acquisition. To refute the Minister's contention, we quote Dr. Gene Ouellette, Professor of Psychology at the Language and Literacy Learning Lab at Mount Allison University: "there does exist a body of scientific research that clearly indicates that the earlier the exposure to a second language, the better the linguistic outcomes. While there may not be a critical period for the acquisition of a second language (after which learning becomes impossible), there is certainly a sensitive period in development marked by increased plasticity in the brain when language learning is most successful; this period occurs before the onset of puberty, which may be perilously close to the grade 5 entry point for intensive French instruction in the new N.B. plan. Consequently, delayed onset of second language instruction is statistically associated with lower outcomes in language proficiency. While the Minister of Education has directly stated that introducing intensive French in grade 5 "is the best way", this is simply not true. Early immersion (and middle immersion starting in grade 3) is the best known way to teach a second language."

After all, as passionate as Professor Genesee has been in the pages of the Telegraph-Journal urging us to keep early immersion, his peer-reviewed research is more ambiguous. In "What Do We Know About Bilingual Education For Majority Language Students?" he presents the debate as far more nuanced than has been portrayed.

In this article, Professor Genesee notes significant academic disagreement about the effectiveness of early and late immersion programmes, even citing a previous article of his own which "found that two-year late immersion students outperformed early immersion students on a standardized, norm-referenced test of French when length of exposure to the L2 was equated, again attesting to the learning effectiveness of older students". He goes on to note years of

similar studies which “reported similar success for older versus younger learners in school settings”. He looks at factors besides starting grade which predict success, before wrapping up this review with this conclusion – “In short, the notion that there is ‘an optimal starting grade’ for bilingual education is misguided”

In his presentation at UNB on May 14, 2008 Dr. Genesee contradicted the Minister's interpretation of his research found above. He noted that the results cited above were for late immersion following six years of FSL comprising 45 minutes of French instruction per day. Thus, the results found above cannot be assumed to apply to the program proposed by the Minister, one which Dr. Genesee characterized as 'unprecedented'. Furthermore, he pointed out that the Minister quoted only a portion of his sentence: the actual quote is "In short, the notion that there is “an optimal starting grade” for bilingual education is misguided **since what might be 'optimal' in one community may not be in another**". Dr. Genesee adds that in a province such as New Brunswick, where French is all around the young pupil, the optimal age is as young as possible; elsewhere it might be later. Finally, both in the article cited above and in his presentation, Dr. Genesee pointed to high motivation and high achievement as characteristics of LFI students in explaining their success. He thus shares the worries of all FSL experts that the Lamrock plan will cause a greater streaming problem than the one it replaces.

We encourage the Minister to consult with experts such as Dr. Genesee first-hand, since it can be perilous for politicians to undertake to interpret scientific research such as that cited above.

We know that the majority of Late Immersion students make it to Intermediate Plus or higher – the level needed to compete for bilingual civil service jobs. That’s without the year of Intensive French first. As well, fully 91% of late immersion students score at the Intermediate level upon graduation – given that few graduates enter the workforce immediately after graduating high school, this certainly provides a base from which they can continue to learn and become bilingual—an opportunity we deny Core French students now.

Elsewhere in this paper, as we have noted, the Minister refers to the Intermediate standard as 'bilingual'. Here he takes a more moderate approach, stating that this standard is a 'base' from which to become bilingual. However, we cannot see what opportunities the Minister recommends for further French study. The bridging program at U. de Moncton, for instance, would not accept a student with Intermediate oral competency.

Further, the assertion by the Minister that "the majority" of students make it to Intermediate Plus or higher is false if we are relying on data presented in the Croll and Lee report. They present data from 1999 through 2006, and in that period, an average of 44% of Late Immersion students reach this level.

New Brunswick has evolved to the point where it is no longer enough to teach a quarter of our students a second language. The world has changed to the point where high literacy cannot be a skill for only half our citizens. After twenty-five years, the programs that got us to this point may now keep us frozen here unless we have the courage to change. If we want all students to learn a second language, teach one effectively to all students. If we want universal literacy, we must give

every child a good environment to learn to read and write. The minimum expectation of a program should be that it meets those two simple criteria. Those of us in government are not perfect, but we believe we have proposed the best model that meets those two minimum standards of access.

The Minister is incorrect in stating that NB has taught only a quarter of students a second language. In fact, in middle school approximately 40% of all students are enrolled in an immersion program. Further, all students do currently receive a FSL education, and it would be quite possible to improve the Core French program along the lines the Minister proposes -- adding about 18% more hours of mandatory instruction -- without disrupting the EFI program.

It should be noted that this section ends without the Minister providing the 'national and international evidence' supporting his position which his first few sentences promised.

The Process Of Decision-Making

A politician identifies an urgent problem and suggests that radical change is needed. In a highly emotional debate, opponents point out that many academics disagree on the data and statistical analysis that establishes the problem. Those opponents of change then suggest that because there is academic debate about the data and statistics, action should be delayed until greater consensus on data can be found.

This may sound like I'm describing the current debate on French immersion programmes. But actually, that is a description of the debate over global warming – a debate where vested interests have tried to use statistical disagreements to obscure a larger, inconvenient truth.

In An Inconvenient Truth, Al Gore cites “928 peer-reviewed academic studies” that confirm that human activity is contributing to climate change. He argues that knowing this, we cannot avoid acting any longer.

However, even a cursory view of those 928 peer-reviewed articles will reveal that there are still huge debates over the pace of global warming and the proportion of global warming which is caused by human activity. Many take strong issue with some of the choices made in collecting or analyzing data. If Gore is suggesting that these articles unanimously share the same data or analysis, then he would be wrong.

Despite all that disagreement about the statistics of global warming, very few of us think it is credible when Texas oil executives tell us that we should all wait for more study before we change our environmental practices. Because when Gore reads those studies, disagreements and all, two big truths emerge. The world is getting hotter because of human activity. And if we do nothing to change it, a bad trend will continue. We often demand that our governments act on things we know, even if some statistics are open to debate among experts.

This comparison does not illustrate the situation well. Nobody is advising that the Minister do nothing. Instead, we are suggesting that the Minister pay attention to the peer-reviewed articles

and heed their advice, much as Al Gore is doing. In contrast, the Minister chooses to rely on a report that has not been peer-reviewed and is demonstrably flawed. At this point it is not unreasonable to question who is acting like a "Texas oil executive" in this process. Concluding that FSL researchers are biased because they get grants to study immersion-related topics (and he did imply this on the radio program Sunday Edition with Michael Enright) and therefore should not be taken seriously is completely inappropriate. If one were to take that argument further, all academics who conduct funded research of any form are by default biased when working in their own field. Does this mean that conservation biologists should not comment on research surrounding the development of nature reserves, or medical researchers should not comment on clinical trials of drugs? The point is, these are the experts we listen to in these cases. By ignoring all FSL experts, the Minister is rejecting the input we need the most.

“Experts” disagree over how we calculate the pace of global warming – but no serious person suggests we should not change our environmental policy. You can find peer-reviewed articles that differ wildly on the statistical correlation between smoking and lung cancer – but none of us suggest we let our kids smoke while they figure it out. And literacy researchers still have academic debates over how to classify and measure the exact number of New Brunswickers with low literacy levels – but that doesn’t mean we can’t determine that we have a literacy problem and propose solutions.

This essay is offered to all those who worry, sincerely and in good faith, that the government has moved too quickly and with inadequate information in designing our new universal French second language programme. I hope to be straightforward about why we made the decision, share with you all we learned through a decade of study, and provide a window on how we think about policy choices.

I also hope to show you how some academic critics of the decision have fallen back upon the same rhetorical devices that the oil industry used to deny global warming and Big Tobacco used to deny the health impact of smoking – showing statistical debates that are irrelevant to premises, using testimony from experts outside their field of expertise, and passing off value statements as dispassionate research. You will also notice that many of these “experts”, in their haste to attack the case for change, haven’t bothered to provide any actual solutions for our low rates of literacy and bilingualism.

Lamrock argues that his critics “have fallen back upon the same rhetorical devices that the oil industry used to deny global warming and Big Tobacco used to deny the health impact of smoking,” and places himself in the role of Nobel prize winner Al Gore. This comparison is unfair. The Citizens for Education Choice do not deny that there are failings in our education system, but we feel the numbers show that by removing of all French education until grade 5, Minister Lamrock will make those failings worse. To cast his critics as industry-backed pseudo-scientists is quite wrong. Indeed, the Croll and Lee recommendations he is following were written by people who have no expertise in language learning, but were paid handsomely, if the document's \$180,000 price-tag is any proof. University experts on this topic, both from this province (Dicks and Ouellette) and others (Genesee and Netten), have uniformly expressed their bewilderment over this plan, and they gave their professional opinions at no cost. If anything, the

comparison points in the other direction: our Minister has a vested interest in a position that has no justification in research, and so he has apparently paid people who work in other fields. They, in turn, have produced suspect results through statistical manipulations which have been roundly criticized. The opinions of Croll and Lee alone support the Minister's plans, not '928 peer-reviewed academic studies' as implied in the comparison.

The Minister repeatedly states as evidence for the validity of his plan that his critics do not provide a plan to solve the problems he observes. In fact, as we have repeated elsewhere, a far less disruptive solution has been recommended to NB for some time.

The Minister furthermore misrepresents his critics by claiming that we do not believe there are problems in the FSL system. At no time has anyone concerned about this decision stated that the status quo is acceptable. Everyone acknowledges that inclusiveness needs to be improved so that more children can benefit from the opportunities provided by the immersion program. What we question is his solution. He seems to reason that in education any solution is acceptable if it is proffered with goodwill. If the Minister does not recognize that his critics instead expect him to consult with experts in language learning when overturning the FSL program, just as the the Minister of Finance consults with experts in financial matters, it is nowhere near time for our province to end the debate.

Why Did The Government Change FSL Programmes?

In the last ten years, there has been no improvement in the number of graduates who are bilingual, or who have acceptable literacy skills. Both these numbers are unacceptably low, and need to change.

There were two premises that led government to choose a universal FSL programme.

1. The number of students accessing early immersion was a small minority of students, far fewer than 70%, and

2. The many students left out of early immersion were streamed into classrooms where the vast majority of struggling students were placed, which contributed to low literacy scores (and low numbers of bilingual graduates).

The response to this was not to ask if early immersion worked well for the few who took it (for it clearly did). The response was to ask if there we could create a programme that would also get good bilingualism results for many more students without streaming – could we design an effective universal programme? We concluded that there was evidence that good FSL education could be universal and effective. After all, there are good universal programmes in math, science, history and literature. We believe the same can be true of French.

Once you look at those two premises and one conclusion, it is fair to ask if those premises and conclusion are well established by the data and expert opinion. I will address that very legitimate question.

It's equally important not to be distracted by debates that don't affect those premises. Some experts say they have varying numbers that show early immersion works for those in the programme – but we already accept that point (it works, but reaches too few). Some argue that they would calculate attrition rates differently – but none of the calculations show anything but a small minority of students left in early immersion by the end of grade 5. However, the actual premises of the decision are supported by years of data – and refuted by none of the critics. No one has argued that a majority of students or schools access early immersion. No one denies streaming happens – and hurts kids. And no one can argue our bilingualism or literacy rates are good enough with the status quo.

How Long Have Governments Studied This Problem?

The problems of low accessibility of early immersion, streaming, and the lack of bilingual skills of Core French students, did not show up with the Croll-Lee Report. That report is made more credible precisely because it identifies similar problems to many other reports and published data. It is true that these problems were ignored for a long time, but that strengthens the case for quick action from a government that promised, after all, to actually address the poor academic performance of our students.

The government did not rely solely upon Croll-Lee, but placed it in the context of a body of work that should inform any thoughtful decision on the issue. I'd like to list some of these works that anchored government decisions.

- *The Price Waterhouse Cooper Report was delivered to government in September 2000. It noted that “nearly all groups that ‘streaming’ is evident”, and that “...frequently, we were offered the perspective that immersion programmes had a negative effect upon the non-immersion programme”. It recommended removing the Grade 1 entry point for early immersion and replacing it with a Grade 3 middle immersion programme. The minister at the time, Ely Robichaud, rejected that recommendation and said that the right approach was to put more resources into Core French and improve teaching (which he said would promptly happen).*

We encourage interested persons to read the reports, provided in hyperlinks through this document, and assess if they recommend anything like Lamrock's plan. In fact, the report referred to by the Minister was a survey of perceptions surrounding FSL programming <http://www.gnb.ca/0000/publications/comm/fsl_raportfinale.pdf> In it, the authors stated that it was clear that there was a perception of streaming, but data at the time were inconclusive with respect to its magnitude. Also, we do not understand how the Minister interprets the report's recommendation to move the entry point to grade 3 as a recommendation to terminate the program.

- *In 2002, the provincial government asked Elaine Scraba to study why education results were not meeting expectations in New Brunswick. Her report stated that “the data indicate that this is an education system that is not educating the young people of the*

province” and went on to state that “the contribution to the failure of the system to educate its young people include...mismanagement of the French Immersion program.” She recommended a significant review of how we offer FSL education, but did not state support for any particular model.

Regarding Scraba <<http://frederictonhigh.nbed.nb.ca/scraba/scraba.pdf>>, we note that there are a number of other statements in her report more germane to the argument here than the one the Minister chose to quote. These include (quoting her): "The inclination to adopt a one-size-fits all model must be strongly resisted." She also stated:"The problem is not early or late immersion, nor is it immersion per se. The problem is the real and perceived inequities within schools and within the school system for parents, children and teachers. These inequities must be acknowledged and addressed. This will take time." Her report also stated that New Brunswick students education was suffering due to the drastic changes to the curriculum, which had not been properly planned for. Minister Lamrock seems to be taking us down that path again.

- *In 2004, the Sally Rehorick was asked to reflect upon the low numbers of bilingual graduates in New Brunswick. Her report did find “(t)here is a high attrition from French Immersion classes, particularly in the primary and elementary grades, among children with exceptionalities”. She recommended government keep the current structure and place more resources and new teaching practices in Core French – the same changes Minister Robichaud said he had made four years earlier.*

Like Scraba before her, she called for additional resources in EFI to help retain these students <<http://www.cpfnb.com/reports/rehorick.pdf>>. It now seems clear that this is why the report was only made publicly available after it was retrieved through an access-to-information application.

- *In 2006, Wayne MacKay was retained to recommend how to improve the results of the education system in an inclusive environment. In his widely-praised report, Professor MacKay reported on his consultations with hundreds of experts, educators and citizens with these words, “(i)t was unanimously agreed that the impact of the French Immersion program in the Anglophone sector is to concentrate higher numbers of students with exceptional needs and general learning difficulties in the English program....French Immersion as currently delivered, is widely regarded as a barrier to effective inclusion in the Anglophone sector.” He recommended launching a study on the delivery of French Immersion and the most effective ways to promote French. The government promised to implement this recommendation in the 2006 election.*

Dr. MacKay also made a number of specific recommendations that the Minister has not mentioned <<http://www.gnb.ca/0000/publications/mackay/mackay-e.asp>>. Of specific interest is recommendation 41 (b) *The Minister of Education should designate appropriate officials within the Department of Education to engage in a **dialogue with relevant parents, teachers and associations to explore ways of making the existing French Immersion program more inclusive** and alleviating the concentration of students with learning challenges in the Core English program.* Note the government's Charter for Change clearly stated all of MacKay's

recommendations would be implemented and his recommendation was to correct inclusion issues with EFI, not eliminate the program. Other recommendations include providing greater access for FI students to French-speaking resource teachers and speech language pathologists, and developing reading and literacy support programs similar to ones already established for the English Core program. We cannot accept that the Croll and Lee report represents a report of the quality that Dr. MacKay, a former university president, was advising the province to undertake.

In short, none of the above reports recommended eliminating EFI, and most of them fully supported it in one form or another.

- *In 2008, professor emeritus of education Jim Croll and DEC Chair Patricia Lee were appointed to review and consult on actual solutions to the problems identified in MacKay and other reports. They echoed the Rehorick Report's finding of low participation rates in early immersion and the findings of all four reports that streaming was rampant.*
- *These reports were further backed up by department data and testing for years. Enrollment numbers showed that early immersion was unavailable in the majority of schools, and that the majority of students were not accessing that programme. Provincial testing showed that the number of students graduating with bilingual capacity was stuck at around 25% due to low accessibility of immersion and high failure rates (as high as 98%) in Core French.*

In fact, close to 80% of students either attend a school that offers EFI, or live within 16 km of one and therefore could easily attend the school. When viewed in this light, it is clear that the argument that this program is inaccessible to the majority is patently false. Again, choice to participate cannot be equated with access.

- *Provincial, national and international assessments have long confirmed that New Brunswick is trailing other Canadian provinces in literacy. This result is consistent with our high rates of illiteracy in adults. And there is a host of peer-reviewed work and PISA evaluations which show that education systems with high levels of segregation based on ability (streaming) have poor literacy results.*

For those keeping score, of five expert reports commissioned by the government, two recommended delaying the Grade One immersion entry point, two others recommended serious and significant changes without endorsing a particular model, and only one recommended keeping the current structure. Each of these reports differed in perspective and data calculations from each other. They had different policy prescriptions, but all five agreed with these premises – that the vast majority of students were not accessing early immersion, that those students were streamed into classrooms with too high a concentration of struggling students, and the province's results in students' literacy and bilingualism are too low and not improving.

It is simply incorrect to attempt to use these other reports as support for this decision. Only Croll and Lee said to do this and they cannot be described as 'experts'. The others pointed out a

problem and offered recommendations, but they did not propose elimination of EFI. Nor did any report but Croll and Lee recommend elimination of all FSL education up to grade 5. Further, the Minister is again attempting to paint opposition to this plan as opposition to change. That is not accurate; the opposition is to an ill-conceived and, according to FSL experts, flawed plan that has little hope of achieving its desired goals.

Not Every Difference Changes One's Conclusion

It is worth noting that Croll-Lee is consistent with all these previous findings. As well, for all of the statistical challenges to the numbers in Croll-Lee, not one of them changes the numbers that anchor the decision. For example, much has been made about differences between Croll-Lee and the Mount Allison biology professors Hamilton and Litvak on attrition numbers in Early Immersion. Statisticians often disagree about terms and calculations. But the smart decision-maker has to ask if the difference changes the premise, or do both numbers reinforce it?

Given that one of the premises of Croll and Lee was that Early Immersion suffers a much higher attrition rate than Late Immersion, and that when calculated correctly, we see that this is completely false, we can answer the Minister's question quite directly - this reason for the change is gone, so either he has to convince us that this wasn't really important anyway (which makes one wonder why they made such an issue of it), or he has to acknowledge that just maybe some careful reflection on this decision is in order.

Put another way, having read the passionate and articulate defence of Hamilton and Litvak make of early immersion, does anyone really believe that if one rounded up twenty academics disagreed with their calculations that they would change their conclusion? (This would not be hard – in fact, the two other academics who have challenged the Croll-Lee numbers themselves have different calculations of attrition and success rates, although they wisely downplay their own statistical disagreements.) If they were off on their attrition numbers by 20%, would Hamilton and Litvak begin praising the new government plan?

They shouldn't, because their disagreement cannot rest on such a thin reed. Because if you use Croll-Lee numbers, about 18% of students remain in Early Immersion by the end of Grade Five. If we use the Hamilton-Litvak numbers, about 23% remain. Neither number changes the premise of the decision – that five reports and ten years of enrollment numbers show the majority of students do not access early immersion.

Again, the relevant comparison associated with attrition rates was between EFI and LFI, and there is absolutely no disagreement on the conclusion that these are not different, contrary to the conclusions of the report. Further, the disagreement he alleges between the groups criticizing the report simply does not exist. There are minor differences in calculations depending on which Croll and Lee tables the data are taken from. However, the fact that several independent groups all arrived at the same conclusion should at least give the Minister pause to think about the document on which he is relying so heavily. Further, the suggestion that Hamilton and Litvak would maintain their conclusions regardless of what others said insults their integrity as academics. Clearly, if they were found to be wrong, they would not be engaged in this argument.

In fact, they purposely had their document reviewed by several people with different areas of expertise before they released it, as they wanted to ensure that it was free of errors. These people are listed in the document. Unfortunately, it is not clear that the Minister did the same with the Croll and Lee report before he accepted it.

*If we are intellectually honest, the real gulf between Croll-Lee and Hamilton-Litvak is not statistical calculations. These can be categorized as the narcissism of small differences. Whether or not you agree with keeping the status quo or trying a new universal French Second Language depends upon one's **values** regarding proven success for the few versus the need to try to get results for the many. And it depends upon one's level of **confidence** that the "more resources in the status quo" approach can suddenly achieve new results.*

Any reader of Croll and Lee will conclude that the Minister is in error when he claims that the Croll and Lee paper was based on values, not statistics. Without the numbers to back up Croll and Lee's hypothesis about EFI failing the system, there is no case for it being removed. With respect to "narcissism" that the Minister refers to, his argument hinges on what he would define as a small difference. It is clear that Croll and Lee have overestimated EFI attrition in elementary grades by approximately 50%. Further, when calculated correctly, attrition rates in LFI and EFI in high school are similar, whereas Croll and Lee report attrition in EFI as 51 to 59%, and LFI as 17 to 26%. Most would not refer to these as "small differences". This does not mean that we do not share his concern about students dropping out of the program, but it does mean that there is no evidence to support the claim that they drop out of LFI at a lower rate.

Further, when discussing "small differences" and their lack of importance, we should review conclusions within the Croll and Lee report that are based on just such differences. Much is made of tiny and meaningless differences in achievement levels by EFI versus Core students in the early grades. Croll and Lee attempt to use 1-5% differences as support for their argument. Further, they gloss over important details that, if understood by readers, would leave them entirely skeptical about the whole premise for this decision. For example, the authors report that children in EFI are doing 5% better on math achievement tests in grade 5 than are Core students. They neglect to point out, though, that the difference between programs explains only 1.2% of the overall variation among students. In other words, this is an extremely weak model, with a difference deemed statistically significant largely because of the huge sample size employed. This, in our view, is a blatant misuse of statistics to support a particular view.

If this statistical analysis is removed from the report, we are left with what the minister calls 'values', but which others would consider blind trust in an untested educational experiment. This is particularly concerning in view of the fact that FSL researchers from across the country have stated that this is a bad plan that is unlikely to deliver the results the Minister is looking for. Under these circumstances, the idea of throwing out what the Minister has acknowledged does work in favour of his experimental approach is all the more troubling. Experts have offered advice on how to invest resources to improve EFI and produce a universal plan; the Minister has chosen not to listen to them.

That's a fair debate, and one I will address now. But let's not fall into the trap of trying to exaggerate small statistical differences because we're afraid of a debate about values and policy ideas.

The Empty Promise of "More Resources"

The Minister of Education had received a report calling for massive change. The professionals had consulted widely with parents, teachers and principals. They reported hearing concerns about inaccessibility of Early Immersion and the impacts of streaming. As a result, experts had suggested changing the Grade One entry point for Early Immersion to make it more inclusive and delay streaming.

If it sounds familiar, it should. But it isn't the year 2008. The year was 2001, when Elvy Robichaud received the Price Waterhouse report recommending a change to a Grade 3 entry point. It could also be the late 1990's, when Bernard Richard was presented a recommendation from frontline educators in the Moncton Region, after thorough consultation and research, to implement a Middle Immersion entry point.

Both ministers rejected those reports. Both Ministers Richard and Robichaud gave speeches at the time saying that "more resources" was the better response. They would keep the status quo, but more resources would increase the number of bilingual graduates, and alleviate streaming.

Both Bernard Richard and Elvy Robichaud were bright, extremely competent ministers. No successor of theirs should ever be deluded into thinking he's smarter than those two gentlemen. I'm not. If any minister could make the "status quo plus resources" solution work, it would have had a full opportunity under the leadership of those ministers.

Yet, they didn't make it work. Our literacy scores still trailed Canada after they were done. And despite their passionate belief in bilingualism, the number of bilingual graduates stayed stagnant as well.

Those ten years of continued failures should make anyone open to discussing why that is. Front-line educators suggest several explanations. Parents whose kids struggle want the security and involvement that comes with establishing a foundation in one's first language. The resources – in the form of resource teachers, speech pathologists and others who can work effectively in an immersion environment – are not available in the numbers we need at any price. Another possibility is that, however well-intentioned, any minister who went looking for the "more resources" needed to make segregation work would quickly find that the amount of money needed simply doesn't exist without cutting other essential supports.

The Minister cites 'possibilities' of why more resources would not work. He seems to be admitting that he does not know why 'more resources' wouldn't work. He doesn't know how much it would cost - it might even be less than the retraining that will be needed for a complete restructuring of the program. However, we can correct some misinterpretations regarding FSL

and resource teachers contained here. First, the idea that one must 'establish a foundation in one's first language' is contrary to accepted research. It is unfathomable that a Minister would use a proven falsehood as a support for his decision. The Minister claims that resource teachers are not available in our province; yet language and educational experts at our provincial universities say otherwise. UNB for example has an institute model ready to implement immediately that would provide summer training providing the equivalent training as R&M teachers in the Ontario system are required. Teachers would be fully certified to this level in two summer sessions (possibly less if online training was utilized). And when the Minister claims his department can't afford resource teachers, we need to remind him that this government has already promised to implement all of the MacKay report recommendations and therefore will have to hire approx. 100 new R&M teachers based on current student:R&M teacher ratios. Yes, we have to spend some money, but the government has already committed to it.

Doug Wilms, an internationally-known expert in literacy, says that the segregation caused by streaming kids in Grade One before we fully know their abilities runs so deeply that it isn't just about resources to help kids with special needs, because it cuts across so many socioeconomic indicators. That might be it as well.

We have discussed the use of the term 'segregation' above. In fact, Lamrock does not point out that Willms concludes that all separated education, and therefore all French Immersion instruction, is socially pernicious. The Minister's LFI plan should be also therefore considered a form of segregation, which Willms considers equivalent to that in the black south of the US. Equally, the Minister's recently-announced optional vocational programs are 'segregated' programs, as are the enrichment programs to which he has alluded.

We are also puzzled by the Minister's assertion that "streaming in Grade One before we fully know their abilities" is the root of the problem. Logically, ability-based streaming would be more of an issue *after* we know their abilities, in fact, how does one stream based on ability at all if these abilities are not known? We would therefore argue that streaming, if it is indeed ability based, will become much more intense under the new system when it occurs entirely in the later grades. Data presented in Croll and Lee support this claim; achievement scores in Core math testing go down after LFI students are separated out, and in fact, LFI students score even higher than EFI students on these same tests. This supports the view of Dr. Joe Dicks, Dr. Fred Genesee and others that streaming is more of an issue in late-starting immersion programs than early ones.

Opponents of the current plan often count the number of experts on either side of the decision. One is entitled to ask which expert has actually developed a plan, with clear numbers about how many new people are needed and how much money it will take, to eliminate the effects of streaming. For all the experts in immersion who have spent years studying immersion, not one of them have published a plan with specifics. Believe me – if one existed, we would have been very interested, because politically that would have been the easier way to go. It's just that, educationally, the evidence shows the results wouldn't improve.

We contend that experts provide policy and curriculum direction, not budgets, which are the responsibility of the Minister and the Minister's staff. Further, what evidence does the Minister have to show that the results won't improve if recommendations of FSL experts are heeded? Has anyone even really tried? Why is the Minister so unwilling to make that effort, in effect, to try to fix the boat before giving up and sinking it?

A long line of ministers – Bernard Richard, Madeleine Dube, Elvy Robichaud, Dennis Furlong – told us there was a painless way to solve this with “more resources” that would make segregation all right. To be honest, I said that too for years. I believe all sincerely believed this. I believe they all looked for those resources. I believe they were all competent in looking for alternatives and trying new ideas. The fact that things didn't improve is either a comment on the plan, or their ability as ministers. I think they were capable ministers.

We cannot find the evidence that the Minister attempted this in any regard. He and others may have given lip-service to a solution; that does not mean that the solution was not viable. Were budget lines in place, but people not available to be hired? We heard nothing of this in the Ministers first year in office. Meanwhile, as NB refused to do anything about this, NS did. It has resource help and TAs in EFI. Students stay in it. TAs are not highly-trained people. They could be hired much more quickly than the minister makes out.

In fact, when given the opportunity to address this imbalance through budgets, the Minister allocated about \$1,000,000 to help struggling students in the Core French program and \$4080 to similar students in the EFI program.

When Is It Time To Change Course

Some of suggested, with sincere concern, that even if there are real problems with the status quo, we should not change yet because the new model has not been tried out on students who have taken it from start to finish. I would confess that it is true – there is not a way to have a programme which students have taken from start to finish without having someone be the first to take it from start to finish. But as a parent with a child who will also be participating in the new programme, I take comfort from the fact that nearly every improvement in education was new at some point.

Indeed, when opponents of the new policy raise this objection, they are holding the new programme to a higher standard than other programmes. Like, for instance, early immersion. It is often noted that New Brunswick pioneered early immersion in Canada. This is true – and if one had looked for students who had had twelve years of early immersion before launching early immersion, the programme never would have happened. There was support for the methods of early immersion, and international experience that children could learn French by being in immersion. But we were the first to try it, just like we are the first to have a universal French programme as we do now.

New Brunswick began province-wide early immersion in Canada, but it did so with the recommendation of language learning experts, who could draw on a decade of experience with

immersion in Montreal and Toronto schools. It already was a well-studied process, not a complete novelty as the Lamrock plan is today. Moreover, early immersion was an optional program; however under Lamrock's plan all children will have to be part of the experiment, and none will have access to more proven and standard means of FSL instruction.

What we do have, however, are five years of results from Intensive French pilots that now encompass a quarter of Anglophone schools. And we have even more experience with Late Immersion, which takes children with no conversational capacity in French and puts a majority of them at Intermediate Plus – the level needed to compete for bilingual civil service jobs, and 91% at the Intermediate level which allows students to continue on and study French at a high enough level to enter the workforce with advanced proficiency. If the two programmes keep doing what they have done, then it will provide students with more French instruction than the average student has now, and a universal opportunity for Anglophones to become fluent in French.

To be clear, we have zero results from the Intensive French program described in Lamrock's plan. The five years of pilots are completely different from the program that is being implemented because the students in those pilots had undergone four years of Core French. Furthermore, it is an exaggeration to say that the children have no conversational capacity in French. These years of exposure gives them comprehension skills, a base from which to start; it gives them vocabulary, which they can use when put in the spot of having to speak. Finally, we reiterate that it is simply false to say that the majority of children in Late Immersion reach Intermediate Plus. Croll and Lee data clearly states that, from 1999 through 2006, the percentage reaching this standard ranged from 37 to 48%, averaging at 44%.

For those who worry that these programmes have always had students with four years of Core French, I would offer two reassurances – first, there will still be some K-4 exposure to French and second, if Core French failed 98% of the time to give students even basic sentences in French, then those programmes have been tested under fairly similar conditions.

We do not understand what the Minister means by 'some K-4 exposure to French'. Tables of hours of instruction given to one of us in emails from the Department of Education indicate zero hours of French instruction during these years. If the Minister is rethinking this part of his plan, perhaps he should reconsider all aspects.

There are also many international examples of bilingual or multilingual jurisdictions who allow all students to learn the second language together at a later entry point. We have only known the segregated early entry point in New Brunswick, but it does not follow that this is the only way to do it. Many people have understandably and articulately written me equating support for early immersion with the opportunity to become bilingual. I find that knowing that countries like Finland teach second and third languages with later, universal models is tremendous reassurance – as is knowing that more students will learn French for a longer time under the new plan.

The Minister will be at pains to find an example of an earliest possible immersion entry point as late as grade 6, as we have pointed out above. Consultation with language learning experts will convince him that grade 3 and grade 6 are not equivalent merely because they are both later than grade 1.

In short, there is much more evidence, with more specific proposals for the new universal model than there is evidence or specific proposals for how the status quo might be made to suddenly work and deliver wildly different results in the foreseeable future.

We have yet to see any specific evidence that the new model will deliver as the Minister suggests it will. Studies on this new system would be very welcome, because they would indeed settle the debate. The problem is, the new system has never been tried, anywhere, and therefore the studies so urgently needed clearly cannot exist. Combining no supporting data with strong concern from education experts should, at minimum, cause the Minister to seek a broad consensus before moving forward. To use an analogy, if you come to a fork in the road and everything hinges on which of several routes you choose to take, especially if there is no complete map available, surely the prudent approach would be to consult all of those with access to a partial map. Most people would attempt to reach a consensus, and if none is possible, go in the direction that the existing body of evidence suggests is the best choice. We maintain that in this case, the Minister has indeed chosen the unsupported path.

Looking For “The Experts”

When I was young and interested in politics, I heard a politician I liked talk about how “the people” supported an idea of his. When I echoed this at the family dinner table, my dad shot me down pretty quick.. “Son,” he told me, “I’ve never met a group called ‘the people’. I’ve met people. But they don’t all think alike. If someone tells you ‘the people’ all agree with him, he’s trying pretty hard to ignore anyone who disagrees with him.”

I’ve always tried hard to remember that, and I hope I’ve never fallen into the false pride that politicians get when they claim that “the people” all want the same thing and we know what it is. I’ve thought about it often during this whole debate when some people claim “the experts” are on their side.

Like my dad told me twenty-five years ago, if any of us think “the experts” are a monolithic group that agree with us, we’re defining an expert as anyone who agrees with us.

I can’t deny that a lot of experts in immersion programmes think we should keep early immersion. A lot of parents think so, too – and they all have an expertise to offer that comes from observing their child and knowing their strengths and the challenges they want them to have. I’ve heard from teachers who speak to the gains they’ve seen kids make in Early Immersion, and they have observed and measured those gains. I don’t deny the value of a single one of those opinions.

Opponents of the decision also can’t deny that there are people on the other side. Academics who study literacy and learning, like Doug Wilms and Marie Cashion, say the changes will improve results by avoiding streaming. Wayne MacKay, who literally wrote the book (or report)

on inclusion, has publicly said the new policy will help inclusion. Chairs of district councils, who have an expertise on managing the system and representing parents, support the changes. And many parents and teachers have spoken out in favour of the increased equality and improved decision-making that comes with a later entry point.

Dr. Willms has said that the Minister should have gone further and terminated all immersion. He is concerned about streaming in the upper years, as a result of Late Immersion. Based on his research record and publications, his professional interest in this debate is based on the effects that streaming has on success, and on developing testing strategies to assess how students are doing. He has never claimed to be an FSL expert. Therefore, unless the Minister wants to admit that these changes have nothing to do with language learning and everything to do with streaming, relying only on the opinion of Dr. Willms without considering FSL researchers is clearly only considering half of the equation. In this sense, it seems clear to us that the Minister has not fulfilled his duty to look objectively at all sides of this issue. Furthermore, it seems the Minister is willing to ignore the effects of streaming in other programs he is devising: the vocational program will certainly stream students, but he considers it a highlight of his educational policy.

In fact, that range of opinions was cited in many previous reports, too, like Scraba, Price Waterhouse and MacKay. None of us can pretend that our views on this matter are unanimous. None of us should discount the legitimacy of feelings and experiences and views of those who disagree with us. I've made a point of inviting many of those who disagree with me to meet and discuss their views, and had email exchanges with many more. I've never shouted them down, questioned their motives, or assumed that the fact that they can hear my views but hold fast to their own is a sign of a character flaw like stubbornness or arrogance. Sometimes good people disagree. Even intelligent, sincere ones – and plenty of folks like that think this decision is wrong.

So, there's no magical group of "experts" who have all the answers and share all the decisions with us. Does that mean we just throw up our hands and keep the status quo? Delay for a year in hopes citizens simply achieve unanimity?

Sometimes, we have to dig deeper – understand when experts are speaking on a matter within their expertise, ask if their solutions match their factual findings, and be alert to when they are making value choices rather than presenting settled fact.

We agree with the Minister here - but we question whether he is heeding his own suggestions. Are Croll and Lee acting within their expertise? A review of their publication record suggests not. Is Dr. Willms an FSL expert? It is clear that he is not. Did the previous reports, written by experts in their fields, recommend terminating EFI? They did not. Did the Minister heed the advice of FSL experts? He did not.

Imagine you're a high school principal. The football team's coaching staff tells you that if they could leave at 1 pm each day to practice longer and study film, the football team would win more games. The teachers, however, warn you that letting them do that will hurt the marks of the team

members. The football coaches suggest you hire tutors to help them catch up to mitigate this, but the methods and resource teacher tells you that this will divert resources from kids who are struggling but not on the team. Some parents support the plan, because kids should be encouraged to be the best at whatever they do, including football. Other parents object to the double standard on attendance for kids who are good at football.

By the way, making this decision doesn't mean you think you know best, or that you don't have to care what people on both sides think. It's just our job to decide – after all, you're the principal.

This hypothetical shouldn't be read as a metaphor for any particular policy question. But it shows how even in a simple policy choice, we have to sort through conflicting opinion and expertise.

If the principal says the football team shouldn't miss class, does she doubt the expertise of her football coach? Of course not – the coach is the football expert. But he's not the literacy expert – and they can explain some effects of the decision the coach isn't an expert on. Just because the coach says missing class is the best way to meet his goal of winning doesn't mean there aren't other ways to win that don't also hurt the student's marks. And some of this isn't a question of expertise at all – it requires a rational debate about what we value and what is a fair distribution of resources. So the principal has to listen to all the experts, but follow none of them blindly. And she has to listen and understand the views of all parents – even knowing she will ultimately disagree with some of them.

We are frankly baffled by this analogy. EFI does not take resources from the other students. A quick review of funding for the two programs makes that abundantly clear. As we have seen, virtually all of the budget for special needs goes to the Core program. Methods and resources teachers are not being diverted from this program to help EFI students. In fact, it could be argued that struggling EFI students do not receive the support they deserve, which is why some drop out of the program early. They go to the program that will provide them with help. Hence, it's a bit hard to see why EFI students (seemingly the Minister's football team) could be claimed to be stealing resources from the rest.

Academics are only experts in their area of expertise. Wayne MacKay says publicly that the new FSL plan is good for inclusive education. But he rightly pointed out that he was not an expert on FSL, so he didn't offer an opinion on that. It is worth noting that many of the FSL experts who testify to the effectiveness of early immersion in delivering second language skills are not experts on the impact of streaming upon literacy, or experts on the learning of EFI students in other subject areas (as Doug Wilms, who is an expert on literacy, has noted).

This is why one has to take Hamilton and Litvak's essay with a large grain of salt. As biologists, they do have the qualifications to statistically estimate that these changes will reduce the number of students with special needs from 6 to 4 per class. (I say estimate because they do not attempt or claim to show that this is a consistent effect by school). As biologists, they have no special expertise, however, to make their follow up statement that this makes an unappreciable difference in the learning environment. Anyone who speaks to teachers in the system will know

that this is a significant change in and of itself. Further, any principal will tell you that class composition isn't just about reducing the numbers but also equally distributing the students with the most significant developmental or behavioural challenges equally, which cannot be done in a streamed environment. I don't criticize Hamilton and Litvak for not knowing this – those of us who teach in university classrooms don't know a whole lot about the challenges of classroom composition in the K-12 system. I do, however, find fault in the sleight of hand involved in going from what they know (average distribution numbers) to what they clearly do not (the effect on classroom learning), while dismissing the practical expertise of educators who disagree with them.

Actually, Hamilton and Litvak state only that the effect on average classroom composition (with respect to number of children on SEPs) is not as substantial as what has been implied <<http://hamlit2008.googlepages.com/>>. They have not commented on how this will affect classroom learning, or dismissed anyone's opinions on this matter. They indeed are not education experts and therefore had no intention of attempting to do such a thing. However, it should be noted that one of the people who reviewed their analysis of the Croll and Lee report is indeed a school principal, and she had no concerns about their comments on streaming. Finally - as a point of correction, Hamilton and Litvak calculated the change in class composition (based on a grade 2 class of 23 students) as 5.4 to 4.25, or 1.15 students per class.

It is equally important, when reviewing academic opinion, to ask questions that take us to a deeper understanding of what the expert has to tell us. Many opponents of the universal FSL plan correctly note that a number of experts in early immersion from across Canada have written to me stating that early immersion works, and should be maintained.

I do not deny this, but I would suggest that the debate should not end there. After all, the point is not that early immersion doesn't teach French to those who take it (it does). The point is that the segregated, optional, Grade One entry point model of teaching French has also shown low participation rates and created streaming. Some questions one has to ask these experts might be:

Do you have expertise upon the effects of streaming upon literacy and numeracy? Have you developed an expertise upon the causes of low EFI participation? Would you be prepared to suggest a model that would include more students and cause less streaming?

And most important, "Even though you believe that an optional grade one immersion model is a good way to teach students French, is it the only way?"

The Minister seems to believe there is only available to New Brunswick two options: the existing grade one entry point; and the plan he offers, which does away with any early or middle immersion program. If this were so, then he would be right that criticism of his approach would implicitly be a statement that, as he puts it above, the existing way is 'the only way'. We have striven throughout this commentary to note that there are in fact many approaches to immersion instruction. The Minister should therefore take the chorus of FSL experts criticizing his plan experts as simply saying that what he proposes will not work and that, if he truly wants to

achieve the goals he has stated, a new plan should be sought, among the many valid, tested options, that truly suits an officially bilingual province.

That last question is the one that makes advocates of early immersion uncomfortable, because the answers are more nuanced than the battle cry that “the experts say early immersion works!” And, because it would be very damaging to their argument if other programmes would also work but without the side effects of exclusion and streaming.

The term 'battle cry' used here, has an unpleasant connotation: it hints at Lamrock's opponents being unthinking soldiers stirred by inaccurate propaganda. Since our argument fundamentally is a criticism of a new plan, it is not damaging at all if there are other, tested and reasoned options available. We heartily encourage the Minister to seek them out, as we hope all Ministers will seek out options that suit our province and that are in accordance with the best advice in their field, from Finance to Health. We are responding negatively to the Croll and Lee recommendations because we believe they will not 'work', insofar as they will make fewer citizens capable in French at a greater cost, and they will exacerbate streaming, since evidence shows and expert opinion deduces that streaming is a greater problem in LFI than EFI.

Fred Genesee of McGill University is a good example. He has been an outspoken advocate of keeping early immersion. Yet a literature search of his scholarly articles would turn up an article entitled “What Do We Know About Bilingual Education For Majority Language Students?” which presents the debate as far more nuanced than has been portrayed.

In this article, Professor Genesee notes significant academic disagreement about the effectiveness of early and late immersion programmes, even citing a previous article of his own which “found that two-year late immersion students outperformed early immersion students on a standardized, norm-referenced test of French when length of exposure to the L2 was equated, again attesting to the learning effectiveness of older students”. He goes on to note years of similar studies which “reported similar success for older versus younger learners in school settings”. He looks at factors besides starting grade which predict success, before wrapping up this review with this conclusion – “In short, the notion that there is ‘an optimal starting grade’ for bilingual education is misguided since what might be ‘optimal’ in one community may not be in another”.

We have noted Minister Lamrock's misinterpretation of Dr. Genesee's research earlier in these annotations. On this particular issue, Dr. Genesee was quite clear in his May 14th lecture: the data Lamrock cites cannot be used to hypothesize the success of the Lamrock plan because the two-year late immersion students had had six years of French instruction at the rate of 45 minutes per day. The Lamrock plan would replace this with a single five-month intensive French experience, an approach that Dr. Genesee considers both untried elsewhere and not likely to succeed. He referred to the Lamrock plan as "like using a sledgehammer to fix a boat".

Critics of Minister Lamrock do not, as he states below, claim that "expert opinion 'supports' maintaining early immersion at all cost", rather that expert opinion should be consulted when forming a new FSL program, and that expert opinion is of the opinion that the plan devised by

Minister Lamrock has little chance of improving French competency in our province and a high likelihood of making it worse. Lamrock's critics would welcome a new plan for FSL devised by the likes of Dr. Genesee, but the one we have was constructed without the help of experts in language learning and cannot thereafter be shored up by misquotations of such experts.

Those who claim the expert opinion “supports” maintaining early immersion at all cost are reading only far enough to find the statements that support their position. Reading enough of the literature would find support for each of these statements:

- 1. Early immersion works well for those who can access it and stay in it.*
- 2. Experts in early immersion are not necessarily experts in streaming or literacy.*
- 3. Experts in early immersion have not produced detailed, costed models of how one might keep an optional grade one entry point and avoid streaming.*
- 4. A strong base in a first language speeds up acquisition of a second, and a strong base in a second language eventually strengthens the first.*
- 5. While early immersion works, well-delivered programmes with later entry points can also work.*

To summarize the opposing position, note the following points:

1. We believe that Minister should not reject out-of-hand the recommendations of three reports on FSL simply because nobody has supplied him with a 'costed model'. We can only assume that he was supplied with no such model for his plan, either; yet it has received his approval. We believe a Minister of government is responsible for creating such models, not the citizens. Though the Minister has not yet implied that the project would be too costly -- since investigation of it has never taken place, presumably -- we can assure the Minister that similar funding for resource help in NS and other provinces have not been overwhelmingly burdensome.
2. The Minister should feel compelled by the science not to lump all "later entry points" together, as if the moderate success of gr. 2 and gr. 3 entry points in some places are evidence for the likely success of the gr. 6 entry point.

Conclusion – A Thoughtful Debate

In the end, something Dr. Joan Netten (who I confess would prefer we keep early immersion) said has stayed with me. When we were on a panel together, she noted that the plan I proposed would give more students a chance to reach an Advanced level of proficiency, but would replace a model we knew for sure gave some students an advanced level of proficiency.

Dr. Netten's objection is an important one. If Advanced oral proficiency is, as our research above suggests, the level that truly provides students with bilingual work and learning opportunities, and if the LFI program produces only a fraction of the number of students with Advanced proficiency, we might wonder: how many more students will have to take the LFI program for us to sustain current rates of truly bilingual graduates? Judging by current participation levels and the proficiency ratios in the graph below, just about *every* student will have to enroll in the new LFI program for the Lamrock plan to graduate the same number of students with Advanced proficiency as graduate today. Without sufficient resource help, this will never happen, and so

the Lamrock plan is, in fact, a step backwards for bilingualism in the province; with sufficient resource help, the early French immersion system could live up to its potential.

In the end, this is a debate about what we value. I do believe that in a public school system, one must give every child a fair chance to learn a bundle of skills that open the door to their success. We want to ensure that they read, write and grasp the math and science concepts that allow them to learn a variety of subjects. We want them exposed to art, music, trades, physical education and civics. More than ever, we want all students to have the benefits of learning a second language.

We, in turn, contend that, if properly resourced in a manner that eliminates streaming, both an EFI and English program can and do offer all of these things, in a way that will not be detrimental to a significant segment of the student population (as the Minister's plan clearly is).

A high school diploma does not make our children into chemists, or doctors, or mechanics. It does not promise them equality of result, or promise to give them any skill to a point where they will never have to learn more. What public school does is open up every door to our kids. If they learn what we ask of them, they can follow any path they want and learn more, whether their goal is to ultimately be a doctor, write a novel, build marvelous buildings, or speak two or more languages. In every other pursuit, from science to history, we see no tension between including all children in our efforts to teach and knowing that some will excel. In no other subject do we allow our desire to challenge those who excel justify a separate stream in the early grades, nor do we see it as necessary to exclude some so others may excel.

Offering EFI does not necessarily exclude children. The existing policies and allocation of funding by the Department of Education have resulted in that, but it is hard to see how it is reasonable to blame a program for failings that the Department has forced on it through its own policies. In other words, a child with special needs is told that he or she should not be in EFI and that there will be no resources available to support them if they choose that path, and later the program is blamed for not including that same child. That is simply illogical. The Minister has been advised that human resources could be made available almost immediately to address this issue, but he has elected to disregard this information, instead claiming that it will take many years and that we can't wait that long.

But if children leave with no foundation in one of these subjects, we have likely closed a door for them. If they do not read or write, most doors are closed, including the chance to become bilingual. And if they have gained no facility in a second language, the road to bilingualism is still long indeed.

That is why the government decided to proceed with a universal French Second Language programme instead of an optional and segregated one. In the end, it is more in keeping with the raison d'être of a public school system to insist that a programme that provides expertise to 20% of students while closing the door to 60% of students must change to be more inclusive. And when a system segregates students to the point it denies small children an equal chance to read and write well, then it must change.

We wonder, where is the evidence that some kids are being denied an equal chance? NB assessments show that up to and including grade four students in both programs read and write at the same level. Further, student assessments in the Francophone system, where there is by default no streaming, are typically below those of either the EFI or Core English program. Therefore, it is extremely difficult to see how the Minister can blame scores that are lower than any of us would like on the absence of some children in Core classrooms.

Finally, with respect to literacy, children in the early grades progress at their own pace. They work their way through leveled readers, capping out somewhere between the end of grade 2 and grade 4 depending on how quickly they progress through the levels. In common practice, the children are grouped within the classroom based on ability. Unless the Minister proposes to hold all children back to the same level until the weakest reader has mastered it (which would be without question a disaster), it isn't clear how "destreaming" will help struggling readers. In fact, if the Minister is correctly assuming that stronger students are in EFI, won't this change result in the requirement for even more ability grouping in each class? The concept of 6-year-old "peer mentors" is therefore confusing at best.

In the end, we are left with the same premises that opened this essay.

1. Bilingualism has changed from an optional skill pursued by a few to an expectation we share for all children.

And yet, it is the very proponents of bilingualism who have so stridently opposed the government on this issue, and the supporters of the government who identify themselves with organized groups are usually associated with English language-rights organizations, opponents of bilingualism. It seems that groups on both sides of the debate conclude that this plan will hinder, not promote, bilingualism.

2. If we want 70% of children to become bilingual, our programme must include all students in its scope, not a minority of them.

We hope that we have shown that the use of 'bilingual' to refer to the newly-lowered standard of 'Intermediate' oral competency is deceptive and will harm our province in the future. We hope we have also shown that, even within the scope of this limited standard, 70% is an impossible goal for this program to reach.

3. Choosing an optional grade one entry point for FSL closes that option for children who struggle early and leads to streaming, which ultimately hurts children's learning in literacy, math and French.

We concur that this is so within the unhelpful EFI system that the Minister has inherited and persisted in promoting. If the Minister funds resource help to the extent of \$1,000,000 for the 70% of students in Core program, and \$4080 in the 30% who are enrolled in EFI, how can he

expect anything else? It is the Minister's inability to see that there might be more simple, more incremental, less flashy, but ultimately more successful solutions which worries us.

4. There are other proven methods of delivering bilingual education which don't exclude as many students, or cause the streaming of students, in the way early immersion does.

To suggest that his plan is in any way 'proven' is a stretch: Dr. Genesee said very clearly that this is a unique and untested approach, and one that he had grave concerns about.

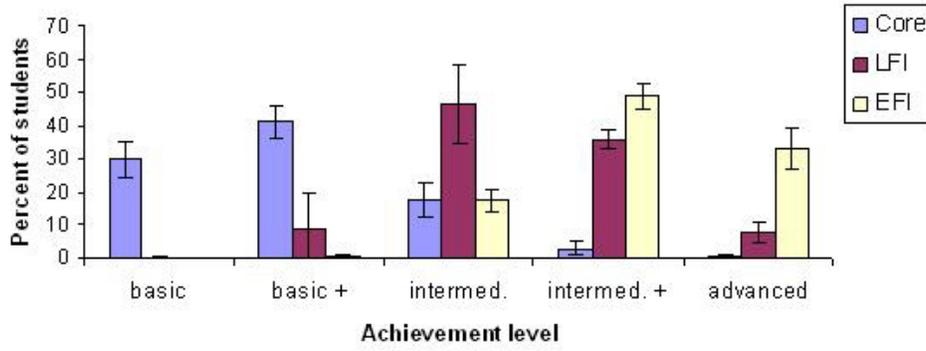
5. Despite years of study and past promises of implementation, there is no detailed plan available to simply add "more resources" to the current model.

We contend that it is the Minister's job to at the very least summon up such a plan, rather than reject it as a possibility because it does not exist.

There have been attacks on the people who have forwarded these premises. There have been skirmishes over the degree to which these things are true. I have no intention of attacking those who disagree with me personally. I believe they are sincere, intelligent people who also want to do the right. I hope I never grow so arrogant as to believe that those who disagree with me must have some hidden agenda or fatal character flaw such as stubbornness or dishonesty.

In the end, if we value bilingualism and literacy, then they must be things we want to teach to every child to the best of their ability. Some will excel, some will struggle, some will get by. But though we cannot guarantee equality of result, equality of opportunity is the only way our school system can keep its promise to our children.

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