

February 1968

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St. Lambert Bilingual School Study Group (Draft of speech for public meeting at Westmount Park School, Westmount, Quebec)

[Olga Melikoff presiding]/////

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We of the St. Lambert School Study Group are not here to sell you an idea but to describe how we have tried to solve a problem that has worried us for some time as parents and citizens.

Our Study Group is an inner ring composed of six to eight members: the inner ring of three concentric rings of supporters. The second ring has about twenty parents who work on our project in various ways, and the largest ring of 240 members – includes all those in the community of St. Lambert with young children who have signed up in support of our cause

Our cause is to find ways to break the language barrier between ourselves as English - speaking Canadians and our more numerous fellow Quebecers of the French language. Our solution is to teach French to anglophone children in their early school years – firstly, to take advantage of what is considered an auspicious time for learning a second language and, secondly, to contribute to altering the current ineffectual state of French language teaching in Quebec. We also think of bilingualism as a personal asset for our children, apart from any political or economic considerations.

May I present to you our members who have worked together in rather amazing harmony for nearly five years:

Mrs. Valerie Neale, our very sharp and witty member, who will tell you the hows and whys of achieving our objectives;

Mrs. Murielle Parkes, who is daily on the telephone hot line with me, who will report on Dr. Lambert's findings in his first year of testing;

Mr. Cliff Parfett, our current St. Lambert Home and School President. He is always a modifying influence at Study Group meetings, pulling us back into line when we start to get slap-happy at the end of a long evening of heated discussion. He will help us with the playing of tapes of the children's voices in our immersion programs.

In the audience is Mrs. Margery Langshur, consultant in English language arts of the South Shore Regional School Board and the mother of a child in immersion, who joined us last year to give advice on the English language development of the bilingual students.

Unable to come is Mrs. Kay Stewart, former president of the St. Lambert Catholic PTA, who has given many hours of assistance in a completely disinterested way – she is the only member whose children do not stand to benefit from our joint efforts.

[If Mrs. Walker, principal of Margaret Pendlebury School, is in the audience, introduce her.)

I can't begin to tell you what an interesting experience it has been for us these last four years as a Study Group. Of course, we were also members of the other rings of supporters I referred to. While coming together as a working group, we have inadvertently reaped many rewards for ourselves – we have stretched our minds, our writing skills, our organizational skills, our knowledge of language learning; we have met many interesting people in the field of

education and public life; we have dealt with opposition and criticism with tenacity and sheer stubbornness, though, (it must be admitted) sometimes we were very worried.

We have also extended our interests beyond the immersion program to include participation in other educational projects, such as the Home and School Executive (three members), St. Lambert School Board (one member), service on committees for improving French instruction in all the schools of the South Shore Regional Board (all Study Group members.)

The parents of children in the experiment have also benefitted. They have added to their knowledge of the learning of a second language and beamed at their children who, in a few short months, left poor Mr. Diefenbaker miles behind, at least as far as French pronunciation!

At the present time we of the Study Group consider ourselves to be the watchdogs of early immersion and want to ensure that our goals are maintained and the program not watered down. We have encouraged the participation of McGill University in the testing program, suggested curricula, purchased library books, participated in the hunt for teachers. We are now responding to the possibility of spreading the benefits of our program to other schools and communities on the South Shore, in Montreal, and beyond.

(Introducing Valerie Neale, who will tell you how it all came about ...

(introducing Cliff Parfett, who will be running tapes of the children's speech ...

Re Curriculum

Our curriculum has been the result of some copying and some innovation. We have taken ideas from the Toronto French School, a private school that has offered bilingual education for English-speaking children for three years longer than we have. They lean on the curriculum of French lycées, with most of their textbooks from France. We have also borrowed from the curricula of French Catholic schools, the French and the English Protestant schools of the Montreal area. The development of a good curriculum that will meet out particular needs and encourage activist learning will take some time. Learning through discovery can be particularly difficult when first using an unfamiliar language as the medium of instruction.

We will let the tapes speak for themselves. On the first one, you will hear how we conduct our kindergarten class, or at least a five-minute segment of it. The tape was made by our Visual Aids consultant last Friday, to be precise, so it is very up to date. The consultant did not have access to the best equipment, nor did we have much time to prepare, but at least it is unrehearsed and authentic. In kindergarten, the emphasis is on listening to French, the teacher's French, and on trying to copy her. The children speak English amongst themselves and to the teacher, but they are encouraged to repeat in French as soon as they can. The teacher, as you will hear, is a very dynamic and articulate person. Incidentally one of her greatest talents is in developing the children's art work.

Grade I: The curriculum is all in French. Arithmetic is "new math"— a French translation of the Addison-Wesley series, reading is from a French-Canadian text based completely on

phonetics, writing is cursive, in the usual French style. Please note the children's accents and their increased ability to handle the language (with prompting, of course.) ...

Grade II: This is the pilot class, which is in its third year of the program., or Grade II. They are the ones who will have the toughest row to hoe, though there are compensation too in being the first class.

The French reading program is a continuation of last year's. Mathematics is Book 2 of the Addison-Wesley series, again in French. The "minor" subjects are all in French as well. The one innovation this year is one hour per day devoted to English language arts. The English reading program is the same as the one used in Grade I English classes, though the rate of progress is faster. More than half the class is now reading at the Grade II level; the other half is near the end of the first year program. Spelling, phonics, and some composition make up the rest of the English program. Their English reading is enjoyed possibly more than the French because the meaning of the text is immediately clear, which is not always the case in French.

We will give you a short example of their work in French, but more importantly perhaps, an example of what they are doing in English. One of the two children is reading at the Grade II level and one at the Grade I. [Opponents of the immersion program always fear that the children will not catch in English.]

Now we will hear from Mrs. Parkes who will give you the results of Dr. Lambert's testing of the pilot class last year after Grade I [1967]. The results were ready only this weekend! ...

Thank you for having usetc. Do you have any questions?

End of meeting.