

Good evening and thank you very much for inviting me, on behalf of Dyane Adam, Commissioner of Official Languages to share this evening in the celebration of your accomplishments.

I am speaking this evening, not only on behalf of the Commissioner, but also from my experience as an Anglophone, who learned French as an adult.

Comme l'a dit madame Adam, « La dualité linguistique doit être l'affaire de tous. Elle ne peut s'épanouir au Canada que si la majorité accepte son bien-fondé et y participe pleinement. Alors que le bilinguisme, dans les années 70, misait sur une transformation des institutions, on peut aujourd'hui l'envisager comme un atout personnel et collectif dans le contexte de la mondialisation. Donner aux jeunes la possibilité de devenir bilingues, c'est leur ouvrir des perspectives d'enrichissement culturel inédites et leur faciliter l'accès à la nouvelle économie du savoir et de l'information. »

The Government of Canada has an ambitious goal, to double the number of high school graduates with a working knowledge of both French and English within ten years. As I look around this room I see a generation of young Canadians contributing to this objective... and reaping the benefits. Doors will open for you, every time you travel, make new friends, share cultural experiences, listen to new music. You have advantages when you are looking for a job, or going on to study in another province, or country. You have more options and more choices. You are fortunate to have as part of your heritage a social environment where freedom of expression in both official languages is a Canadian way of life. As young adults, be proud of the opportunity to continue the richness of the dialogue between our two official language communities.

Speaking of my own experience, I did not have the opportunity to learn French through immersion. I did, however, have the privilege when I was in my 20's of spending a summer in Saint Pierre and Miquelon at the University of Toronto's French Language Program. Saint Pierre is a magical place, but the real magic for me was to live another language and culture for six weeks. The experience brought richness to my life that remains to this day. Learning a second language as an adult can be a challenging experience, and it requires constant daily nurturing. Yet the rewards are worth it.

En terminant, et au nom de la commissaire aux langues officielles, je suis vraiment heureuse de célébrer votre importante réalisation, qui est de maîtriser le français comme langue seconde. Vous avez les connaissances, les compétences et la volonté d'aller plus loin et de tracer l'avenir d'un Canada bilingue.

I wish you all the best.

Carol White

pour la commissaire aux langues officielles