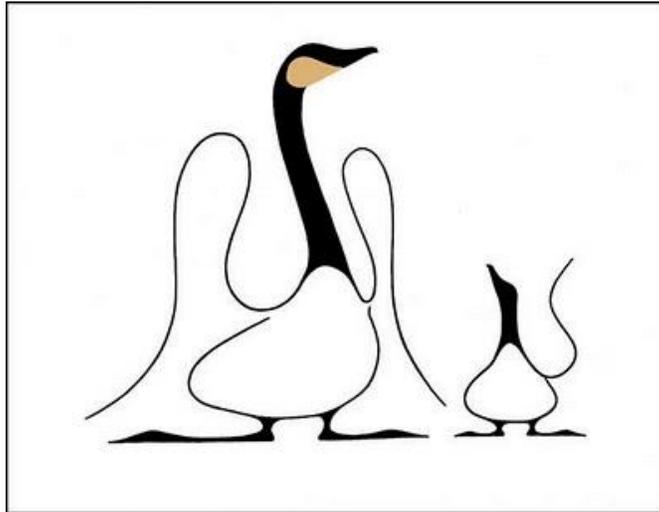


Language Immersion and School Success: What Can I Expect for my Child?

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Our Language and Culture is the window through which we see the world.

- Paul Disain, Denesuline Elder, Stony Rapids, SK¹

The education system in Canada today is not working for many Aboriginal – First Nations, Inuit, and Métis – children. The dropout rate for Aboriginal children is 66%, compared to only 37% for non-Aboriginal people, and Aboriginal children often leave school without the skills they need to succeed in the workplace and with a loss of identity and self-esteem (Kanu 2006). With such a great difference between the outcomes for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, it is clear that this is not a problem with the Aboriginal children *in* the school system, it is a problem with the system itself. At the same time, many of Canada's Aboriginal languages are in danger of disappearing. However, First Nations across Canada, with programs such as the Mniidoo Mnising Anishinabek Kinoomaage Gaming (MMAK), are working to change that. First Nations communities are taking control of their children's educations and using the education system to help ensure that their languages are passed on to the next generation, that their children succeed academically, and that they are able to see themselves in the curriculum and in the classroom and so leave school with a strong sense of pride in their identity. They are also looking to strengthen the community through the school system by including local voices and traditional knowledge and wisdom into the classroom. Research has shown that First Nations controlled education, particularly totally immersion programs like the MMAK, is largely successful in achieving those goals (Demmert 2001; McCarty 2003; Harrison & Papa 2005; McIvor 2005; Kipp 2009; Noori 2009; Osborne et al. 2009; de Korne 2010; Osborne et al. 2011; Guèvremont & Kohen 2012). However, parents in many communities still have understandable concerns about the impact of immersion on academic achievement, language learning, and self-esteem. As you start down the path of Anishinaabemowin immersion with your child, this paper seeks to address your concerns by looking at existing research from other bilingual learners and Aboriginal immersion programs.

¹ Elders' quotes are taken from the website of the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre. See <http://www.sicc.sk.ca/languages.html>. The Quote from Darrell R. Kipp is taken from his manuscript entitled, *Encouragement, Guidance, Insights, and Lessons Learned for Native Language Activists*. "Learning," by Benjamin Chee Chee, is from <http://leblogdedoris.blogspot.ca/2010/03/benjamin-chee-chee-et-cecil-youngfox.html>.

Educational Outcomes and Academic Performance

Education is vitally important because it gives us the knowledge and skills to build a better future for our children and grandchildren.

- Pauline Pelly, Elder, Keeseekoose First Nation

In entering into culture-based Aboriginal language immersion programming like the MMAK, the most common concern of parents and communities is that the children will struggle in their learning because of difficulties with the language. However, particularly when the children begin the program at young age when they are not yet learning very much academic material in school, this does not appear to be the case. In fact, “the preponderance of research evidence... shows a positive association between academic performance and the presence of Native language and cultural programs” (Demmert 2001: 12). There are a variety of reasons for this.

First, studies have shown that bringing Aboriginal perspectives into the classroom in what is referred to as Culture-Based Education (CBE) makes school more relevant for Aboriginal young people. They are able to see themselves and their communities reflected every day, they feel respected and welcomed, and they come to realize that there is great value in their culture’s traditions, knowledge, and wisdom (Kanu 2006; Ball 2012). In a CBE classroom, like the classroom planned for the MMAK, teachers make use of traditional approaches to learning such as guided questioning, peer teaching, talking circles, reflection, hands-on learning, observation of the natural world, and storytelling among other approaches. Because that is how Aboriginal families and communities have traditionally taught their children from birth, there is less of a disconnect between how children learn at home and how they learn at school, so they come to the classroom prepared to build on their previous knowledge (Preston et al. 2012). Also, in a CBE classroom, teachers are encouraged to use methods of evaluation that are more appropriate for Aboriginal learners. For example, “many First Nations people do not value overt demonstrations of what one knows without any practical purpose for such a performance... As well, a rationally raised First Nations child would typically learn not to demonstrate knowledge of something she or he expects an older person to already know” (Ball 2012: 289). By understanding that and incorporating it into their assessment, teachers can really gauge how much children have learned and give parents and students meaningful feedback on their progress.

The MMAK is a great example of CBE, but it also adds the complication of instruction in a language that is not the child’s first language. Parents have expressed concern in many communities that immersion will interfere with their child’s English and literacy development. However, as Wright and Taylor (1995) write, “the common assumption that the use of the heritage language will negatively affect the acquisition of English skills is clearly false. In fact, there is evidence that heritage language instruction may result in better performance in English in the long run.” (241)

We are all born with our brains pre-programmed for language learning, and learning more than one language is natural and common for many children around the world. When children learn language, they are not learning only the patterns of one specific language, but rather how language works in general (Morcom 2009), and that knowledge transfers from one language to another. Anishinaabemowin instruction offers children the advantage of learning a language that works completely differently from English. For example, the sentence “It’s making me dizzy” is a single word, *ngiiwshkweshkaagon*, in Anishinaabemowin (Valentine 2001). Children who speak more than one language, especially languages that are very different, become more aware of how language works. They show better awareness of speech sounds, syllables, sentence structure, and the conventions of language usage such as how language differs in different situations, how stories are structured, and how to define words (Durgunoğlu & Öney 1999, 2002).

The benefits of bilingualism extend to literacy skills. For children whose first language is English but who are in an Aboriginal language immersion program, literacy skills that they have already learned in English will transfer to the Aboriginal language, and similarly skills they learn in the Aboriginal language will transfer to English. It is important to note that their literacy development might be slowed at first, but normally children catch up by grade 3 and often surpass their peers who have not been in immersion classes at later grades (Raham 2010; Wright & Taylor 1995; Osborne et al. 2009). Children in the MMAK have an additional benefit in this area. The

spelling system for Anishinaabemowin is much more phonetic than English – letters generally only correspond to one speech sound, whereas in English one letter can correspond to multiple sounds. Research has shown that children learning languages that are written phonetically like Anishinaabemowin learn to read faster and are better at figuring out how letters relate to speech sounds. That is a skill that will transfer to English, where children will also require memorization to become fully literate (Durgunoğlu 2002).

That said, for children to soar academically, regardless of whether they are in immersion programming, they need help from their parents and families. If you speak Anishinaabemowin, even just a little bit, it will be helpful to speak it at home with your child as much as possible. That is most effective when the family decides to learn together and the parents start taking classes to improve their language proficiency (Greymorning 1995). It is also vital to work with your child in English at home, using varied vocabulary, telling stories, and speaking at an age appropriate level. That will give your child the understanding they need to make sense of written language (Noori 2009). It is also important to help your child with reading at home. Provide books and read with your child to help his or her self-confidence as he or she grows (Wright and Taylor 1995).

Members of some families, particularly those impacted by residential schools, may not be able to do that, or may feel intimidated by books, teachers, and

schools because of how negative their experiences have been (Ball 2007). If that is the case, it is important to reach out to friends and family in the community as much as you feel ready to do so to help your child get the language and literacy support they need to thrive. That may present a chance for some healing by your family and community as school becomes a different, positive experience for the next generation.

It is possible that some of the children entering into the MMAK may have some special learning needs as they move forward in their education. Sometimes, for children in immersion programs, it can be hard to tell whether they are struggling due to language challenges or learning difficulties. To test that, educators can look at skills that transfer across languages, like matching letters to sounds, following storylines, and identifying letters. If a child has trouble with those skills in one language, they probably transfer to the other and may be due to learning difficulties (Durgunoğlu 2002). Once a learning difficulty is identified, professionals can work with the child's parents to develop an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and help the family decide whether immersion is in the child's best interest. However, in many cases children with learning difficulties are educated in an immersion program following an IEP, so it is not a given that the child will have to be removed from the MMAK. That depends on the individual child, his or her strengths or challenges, and the goals of the family.

Language Learning and Language Revitalization

Our Creator put us here on earth. He gave us different languages to use. He put us here to love and respect each other.

- John Mosquito, Elder, Nekaneet First Nation

In addition to its benefits for learning, Aboriginal language immersion programming likely offers the best solution to the challenge of language maintenance. Given what research is showing based on immersion programs, “most linguists and educators would agree that total-immersion programs are the best option for revitalizing a language. They are built on the commonsense premise that the best way to learn a language is to create an environment in which that language, and only that language, is used constantly” (Grenoble & Whaley 2006: 51).

Immersion programming can be divided into two types: in *strong* or *total immersion* programs like the

MMAK, children use the Aboriginal language all day, every day with the goal of learning the language as fluently as possible. *Weak immersion* programs incorporate much more English with the goal of transitioning children to an English classroom as quickly as possible. A step down from weak immersion is *second language teaching*, where the teacher gives instruction about the language or teaches vocabulary for a few minutes each day. For the purposes of language maintenance, strong bilingual programs are by far the best (Usborne et al. 2009). Children may leave immersion programming without being fully bilingual, but they will be much more fluent than children in weak bilingual programs

or who have taken second language lessons. They will also have a greater understanding of the importance of the language and how it relates to their community and their heritage (Greymorning 1995).

There are a number of reasons for that. First, weak immersion programs tell Aboriginal children that their language is not well suited to academic study, and it does not give them the language skill to learn, think, and create in the language in and out of school. Strong immersion also gives children a natural environment for language learning that weak immersion or language instruction do not. Rather than teaching *about* the language, strong bilingual programs like the MMAK teach *in* the language and let children pick up the language as they did their first language (DeKorne 2010). To do that, teacher training is very important because the teacher needs to know how to expose the children to a wide range of vocabulary and grammar instead of just teaching words and phrases.

The first few years of school in strong immersion, where children are focused on life skills and socializing, are taught only in the Aboriginal language to give them a good footing in the language. To make sure the children grow academically, as academic subjects are introduced they will learn language-laden subjects like English language arts in English, and other subjects in the Aboriginal language. By grade 3 normally the day is about half in English and half in the Aboriginal language (Usborne et al. 2009). Combining the two gives children the academic and literacy skills they need to succeed in an English language classroom as they move forward, but also teaches them to appreciate the beauty of their heritage language and shows them that it contains knowledge and the vocabulary they need to discuss anything and to develop and create new ideas (De Korne 2010). The MMAK is following that model, which makes the program even more promising.

Because children's brains are designed for language learning, early childhood is the best time to start immersion programming. Some of the best immersion programs begin as the MMAK does, at the kindergarten level, or in some cases even earlier with toddlers in *language nests*, or immersion day care. At that age, although children may mix or confuse

the languages at first, they quickly learn to separate the two. They also naturally learn how language use differs in their two languages, and pick up important cultural information like how to tell stories, what to tell others and what to keep private, and when to speak and listen (Ball 2012). That gives them a better connection to their community and their elders. Children are only able to pick up a language naturally like this until around age 12, so the earlier programming starts, the better. Their approach to language learning changes as they grow to that age. Younger children are more uninhibited and willing to make mistakes, and older children have better memories, so as the children progress the teacher will use different strategies to make best use of their strengths (DeJong 1998).

Because children in immersion learn two languages at the same time, the languages build on each other rather than replacing one another (Usborne et al. 2011). Children who are strong in one language are likely to be strong in the other, so family and community support is very important to help children in language learning. Again, a 'whole family' approach to Aboriginal language learning has been shown to be very effective because children can learn the language at home in addition to English. (Greymorning 1995; McIvor 2005). Learning together can bind the community and help spread cultural awareness and an appreciation of the language. While monolingual adults are not likely to become fully bilingual, they will still learn effectively if they put in the effort, and the language can become more central to community identity. After all, "a language – and by extension a culture – can only exist where there is a community to speak and transmit it" (Bougie et al. 2003: 351).

In most communities, a lack of resources and teachers means that immersion must end before the children graduate from Grade 12. Community support is perhaps most important once they leave immersion programming to help them maintain what they have learned and pass it on to others, and community members who volunteer for extra-curricular language maintenance programs for these children, even if they are second language speakers, will make a great difference in helping them keep the language alive.

Language Learning and Self-Esteem

Knowing your language gives you an inner strength and pride in your heritage.

- Freda Ahenakew, Elder, Muskeg Lake First Nation

Immersion can also have a positive effect on student self-esteem. In fact, that may be at the heart of the language and learning benefits that immersion offers, since children with high self-esteem perform better in school, which leads to even higher self-esteem. (Wright & Taylor 1995; Guèvremont & Kohen 2012).

The residential school system aimed to devalue Aboriginal children's cultures and communities, and in so doing it devalued their self-worth. Even after the last residential school closed, Aboriginal children have been faced with a curriculum that often does not represent their experiences. For example, Aboriginal cultures tend to view the world holistically and focus on inter-connections, where Western education divides the world up into separate subjects. Sometimes there is also a 'hidden curriculum' in which teachers, sometimes on purpose and sometimes not, promoted ideas, values, and perspectives that are harmful to Aboriginal student's self-worth (Agbo 2001). That can even include teaching and assessment methods. If children, when they start school, are suddenly expected to learn and respond in the classroom in a way that is completely different from how they learn at home and in the community, they will not learn as effectively. They may assume that there is something wrong with them that is stopping them from succeeding (Kanu 2007). They may also feel uncomfortable, unworthy, and undervalued at school, particularly if assessment is done in a way that does not make sense according to the children's culture (Bougie et al. 2003; Ball 2012). Because it takes this into account, a CBE immersion classroom will help bridge the gap between the home and school, spark curiosity, help develop a love of learning, and build on the children's sense of pride and identity (Wright & Taylor 1995; Bougie et al. 2003; McIvor 2005; Kanu 2007; Preston et al. 2012; Singh & Reyhner 2013).

Previous research has shown this to be the case. Guèvremont and Kohen (2012) write that "kindergarten instruction in an Aboriginal language was associated with increases in personal self-esteem at the end of the year, whereas kindergarten instruction in English or French had no such benefit for Aboriginal children" (3), even if those children

had access to second language classes in their Aboriginal language. They also note, however, that children who have been in immersion classes experience a drop in self-esteem if they are transferred too suddenly from full-day immersion to full-day English classes. That is probably because of the change in classroom culture that they experience. Because of that, it is really beneficial to slowly introduce English into the classroom before children have to transition to full-day English school, like the MMAK is intending to do. It is also beneficial to have children participate in language programming after they have left immersion classes to help them maintain their language, cultural connection, and respect for traditional knowledge (DeJong 1998; Bougie et al. 2003; Osborne et al. 2009).

In addition to helping with their personal self-esteem, Aboriginal language immersion programming promotes high collective self-esteem. *Collective self-esteem* refers to how children feel about their ethnic heritage, family, and community. As McIvor (2005) points out, "language is the main link to identity, both personal and collective. Although it is not always a person's first language, there is an inherent emotional and spiritual connection between the mind, body, and soul of a person and the person's ancestral tongue" (7). Aboriginal language immersion programming gives children an appreciation for the history, songs, stories, rituals and worldview of their culture and community (McIvor 2005). It also helps them avoid the 'hidden curriculum' and the mistaken idea that all worthwhile knowledge comes from outside their community (Wright & Taylor 1995). Rather, it shows them the reality of the sophistication of their culture and the knowledge it holds, and that their heritage language possesses the ability to create, describe, and discover. Because immersion teachers are likely to also be Aboriginal people, they can be role models for children, and confirm for them that high status positions and academic success are within reach (Wright & Taylor 1995). Those lessons stick - when children who have been educated in Aboriginal language immersion programs transfer to English programs, their collective self-esteem stays much higher than their peers even if their personal self-esteem suffers (Bougie et al. 2003).

Community Cooperation

We are the ones who have to teach our children.

- Agnes Alphonse, Elder, Black Lake First Nation

For an Aboriginal language immersion program to survive and thrive, community support is absolutely necessary. Although not everyone in the community may agree with immersion education, having a strong support base offers access to funding, important cultural knowledge, and speakers who can help work with children and create resources. Community input into children's learning has a long history in Aboriginal approaches to education, which "is based on centuries of experience raising children to function productively in close-knit communities. Family members, Elders, and other community members pass on this knowledge to each new generation" (Singh & Reyhner 2013: 37). Local culture and language is at the heart of a program like the MMAK, and there are no greater experts on that subject than community members, particularly elders and knowledge keepers, so it makes sense to continue that tradition. With their help, teachers and program developers will be able to do an even better job designing a school environment that fosters a sense of identity and community and delivers content in a culturally appropriate way. Research has shown clearly that community input helps immersion programs by increasing buy-in, enrollment, and retention, as well as overall student satisfaction and achievement (Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation 2004; Holmes 2006; in Preston et al. 2012; DeKorne 2010).

Having community members in the classroom is key. The presence of parents, elders and knowledge keepers, and others keeps content relevant. Culture is always changing and developing, and it is important to remember that there are two types of traditional knowledge: ancient traditional knowledge and modern traditional knowledge. Ancient knowledge has been passed down for generations, and modern knowledge is based on a present-day interpretation of situations and events (Hermes 2000; Ball 2012). Both have value in the classroom, and having input from people with both types of knowledge makes

sure programming is current and that culture in the classroom is not reduced to symbols like materials and artifacts, or to stereotypes (Hermes 2000). In addition to connecting children to living culture, classroom visitors can also act as additional positive role models.

In addition, having community members who are Anishinaabemowin speakers in the classroom, even if they are second language speakers, gives learners the chance to practice with people other than their peers and teachers and makes it more likely that they will be able to use the language outside of school in any context they wish (Greymorning 1995; Watahomigie & McCarty 1994). Speakers from the community can support teachers by helping to develop resources, and that may encourage some speakers to become teachers as they learn about immersion programming. Community members who are not fluent but who are involved as parents or who wish to become involved in the program may also be encouraged to learn the language or become involved in education or administration (Wright & Taylor 1995; McCarty 2003; DeKorne 2010).

Communities also benefit from having input into immersion programming and education. Creating a program like the MMAK can be very empowering. The school system was used for years to rob Aboriginal communities of their traditional education, languages, and cultures, and by creating programs like this, communities are taking those things back. Programs like the MMAK help whole communities recognize once again the value and dignity of their languages, cultures, spiritualities, teachings, and traditional and modern knowledge. When elders and other community members who are experts in these things help design the program, it reminds the children and the whole community that their voices have great value and should be heard (Watahomigie & McCarty 1994; Agbo 2001).

Immersion Programs in Other Communities

Teach the children to speak the language. There are no other rules.

- Darrell R. Kipp, Co-Founder of the Peigan Institute of the Blackfeet Nation

The idea of language immersion was developed in Canada for teaching French. Today, French Immersion is one of the most successful second language teaching programs in the world. The context of French Immersion is totally different from Aboriginal language immersion; French is certainly not an endangered language and the children in the classrooms tend to be unconnected to French or Québécois culture but rather are learning the language to increase their future job prospects and socioeconomic status or for added academic challenge (McCarty 2003). However, Aboriginal communities around the world have learned from this model and are using it in their schools.²

Unfortunately, not all immersion programs are successful academically or for language teaching. Although successful academically and culturally, the Arapaho immersion program has not produced fluent speakers. It started with only an hour of language instruction per day, and has since moved to a half day then full day immersion program where children speak Arapaho 90% of the time. Although the children have not attained complete fluency, they grew in cultural pride. Their lack of fluency is likely due to teacher training, as the teachers do not know how to aid the children in language development and creative language use rather than simply teaching words and phrases. To remedy this, the community was moving toward a family-based language learning approach, where adults and children both entered an immersion program when the child was a toddler. They were looking to the Maori program as an inspiration for this (Greymorning 1995; Demmert 2001;)

In Canada, the Cree School Board in Eastern Québec introduced Cree as the language of instruction in 1991 up until Grade 3, when children transition to English or French. The Canadian Achievement Test results from 2003/4 and 2006/7 show that less than half of the students in these schools reached expected reading, language, and math levels at Grades 6 and 9. As Guèvremont and Kohen (2012) write, “based on these test results as well as interviews with teachers and students, . . . this program ‘has done a poor job in

teaching Cree as a language, and has completely failed to provide a language of instruction for curricular learning. An entire generation of students has passed through the current regime and they are failing in record numbers’ (Cree School board 2008, 97 (4)).” The reasons for the failure of this program are probably related to difficulties already present in the region; there is a shortage of good, qualified teachers, student attendance is low, teachers often miss work and there are no qualified substitutes, there is a lack of adequate classroom resources, and students are not well prepared to transition into the English or French classroom (Guèvremont & Kohen 2012). It is important to learn from programs like this to avoid the pitfalls that they have fallen into.

However, the majority of the programs that have been studied are really successful and add great value to their communities. One of the oldest and most successful Aboriginal language immersion programs was developed in New Zealand for Maori. It started in the early 1980s with language nests where parents were also encouraged to learn the language. It has since expanded to elementary school and then high school. At these schools the New Zealand national curriculum is taught almost entirely in Maori along with Maori history, traditions, perspectives, politics and current events. Students engage in a holistic mix of academic learning and culture-based activities with no clear distinction between the two. The emphasis is consistently on Maori traditional knowledge and traditional practices are present in everyday life in the schools. Elders are brought into the school, and students take frequent field trips that give them culture exposure and keep them interested. Nowadays, Maori children in immersion are more likely than other Maori or non-Maori children to meet national literacy requirements and to achieve New Zealand’s National Certificate of Educational Achievement. Students also gain considerable bilingualism if they continue throughout their educations in Maori immersion, but research shows they lose fluency if they switch to English programming (Greymorning 1995; DeJong 1998; Harrison & Papa 2005; McIvor 2005; Guèvremont & Kohen 2012).

Following the Maori lead, Hawai’i developed language nests that stressed simplicity, constant language use, and whole family involvement. Since

² This section describes only a few of the best studied Aboriginal language immersion programs. Many more such programs are underway across Canada and the world.

then, Hawai'i has built a system of immersion schools that span from preschool and kindergarten to Grade 12 and then to university-level programming. The speaker base has grown from a few hundred speakers on one island to high general fluency at schools throughout the state. Students from Hawaiian immersion programs consistently score equal to or better than native Hawaiian children in English programming in all subjects, even language arts. They have also won prestigious scholarships, enrolled in college courses during high school, and successfully passed the state's university entrance exam essays. Cultural pride is notably higher (DeJong 1998; McCarty 2003; McIvor 2005; Ball 2007; Singh & Reyhner 2013).

Aboriginal language Immersion programs have also been developed across Turtle Island. In the American Southwest, several communities have developed immersion schools. The Navajo immersion program at Red Rock is one of the oldest. It had bilingual programming under community control since 1966. It has since moved to immersion up to Grade 4, with English slowly introduced starting at Grade 2. The modern program offers a curriculum with integrated traditional teachings including outdoor experiences and an emphasis on using Navajo in a variety of situations. Parental involvement is stressed. Navajo Immersion children consistently perform better than non-Immersion children on standardized math tests; in fact, 68% met or exceeded state standards in math, compared to only 15% of Navajo children in English programs. They were slightly behind their peers on English literacy achievement, but caught up and even passed them with time. (DeJong 1998; Demmert 2001; McCarty 2003; Lockard & de Groat 2010; Guèvremont & Kohen 2012; Singh & Reyhner 2013)

Also in the American Southwest, the Hualapai immersion program, entitled the Hualapai Bilingual Academic Excellence Program (HBAEP) has a cadre of trained Aboriginal teachers who deliver a holistic curriculum that is centred on the local language and environment and aims to build on children's prior knowledge and cultural pride. Many children arrive at school able to speak Hualapai, but it had not previously been a written language, so school staff developed and standardized a writing system and produced print materials so children could develop literacy in the language. Community awareness and input is important, as is the accreditation of community members as teachers. Since the program started, academic performance, attendance, and graduation rates have gone up in the community, and the school has been recognized nationally for its

work in curriculum development, Aboriginal language literacy, and use of technology in the classroom (Watahomigie & McCarty 1994; Demmert 2001; McCarty 2003).

The Keres Pueblo have developed an immersion program that makes use of both traditional approaches to teaching and research on language acquisition to help learners become fluent. Because some students arrive at school fluent in the language and others do not, they pair fluent speakers with learners to help expose them to natural conversation. They never use English in the classroom, and instead rely on gestures and context to help students learn. Again, students consistently perform better academically than their peers in English language school. Unfortunately, many immersion schools in the American southwest are now threatened by government policy that dictates school must be taught in English and by other educational policies like No Child Left Behind, which changes their approach to literacy and numeracy development (McCarty 2003; Lockard & de Groat 2010).

Many communities in Canada have also undertaken immersion programs. One of the best studied programs is the Inuttitut immersion program in Nunavik, Northern Québec. It is unique because it is a weak immersion program; most children arrive at school monolingual in Inuttitut, and the goal is to help them succeed academically and transition them into English or French programming. Even with weak immersion, research still shows that immersion children have higher personal and collective self-esteem than their peers in English or French programming, and that they are able to succeed in English or French literacy development (Wright & Taylor 1995; Louis & Taylor 2001; Bougie et al. 2003).

Also in Québec and Ontario, Mohawk, Cayuga, and other Iroquoian communities have developed immersion programming starting with language nests. The first of these was at Kahnawake, and other communities including Akwesasne, Tyendinaga, and Six Nations have immersion programs to varying extents. Many of these programs started with only a handful of speakers who were not trained teachers, but who were committed to their languages. They had to develop classroom materials from scratch. Now, immersion schools in these communities are able to deliver programming to various grade levels with all school subjects tied closely to local culture and with the language as a central definer of community identity (Agbo 2001; Demmert 2001;

McCarty 2003; Grenoble & Whaley 2006; Ball 2007; Guèvremont & Kohen 2012).

On Cape Breton Island in Nova Scotia, a strong immersion program has been developed for Mi'kmaq. Children are taught their core subjects entirely in the language. Although they are slightly behind in kindergarten, test results have shown that students have English proficiency that is equal to

their peers in English language programming by the end of Grade 1. They are also proficient in Mi'kmaq at an age appropriate level, and they have high self-esteem and cultural connection (Usborne et al. 2011). Programs like these go to show that language revitalization is possible even where it was previously very threatened.

Conclusion

Immersion programming holds great promise for Aboriginal communities that are seeking to take ownership of their schools and create culturally appropriate, relevant, meaningful education experiences for their children. Although it cannot fix social problems that some communities face and can be hampered by problems that may already exist in schools and school boards, in the majority of cases immersion is extremely useful for bringing communities together and strengthening ties between members and generations. That is particularly the case when communities give input into the design and delivery of immersion programming and when parents, elders and knowledge keepers, and other community members participate in the classroom. When that happens, students' personal and collective

self-esteem go up. Students in immersion programming are also much more likely to become proficient in their heritage language, particularly when the language is no longer widely spoken in the community so they are not able to learn it outside of school. Their chances of academic success are also as high as, or even higher than, their peers in English language classrooms. Therefore, "immersion schooling *can* serve the dual role of promoting students' school success and revitalizing endangered Indigenous languages. Indeed, these roles appear to be mutually constitutive. And, given the gravity of the current state of language loss, anything less than full immersion is likely to be too little, too late" (McCarty 2003: 159).

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