



First Nations Languages and Improving Student Outcomes

Submitted to the Assembly of First Nations

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to review current language research to examine whether language immersion or being taught in Indigenous languages facilitates the development of language and cognitive abilities including mental flexibility, abstract thinking, and problem solving. This project will provide an inventory of evidence to support Indigenous language immersion and instruction as a significant factor for improved outcomes for learners in all subject areas.

This paper will identify key literature and data which demonstrates evidence of improved outcomes for First Nations learners taught in Indigenous languages. It will focus on elementary and secondary education, while utilizing examples from early childhood education programs where appropriate. There will also be a discussion on international research on bilingual and immersion education with a specific focus on the implications for emerging government policy on language and education.

Background

Research shows that there are clear intellectual benefits associated with learning a second language. Students who receive quality second language instruction tend to show greater mental flexibility, enhanced abstract thinking skills, the ability to think independently of words, and superiority in concept formation. Bilingual children also show enhanced problem-solving skills and better-developed creative processes compared to their monolingual counterparts.

Encyclopedia of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education, by Colin Baker and Sylvia Prys Jones, 1998 and Cognitive consequences of bilinguality, by Josiane F. Hamers and Michel H.A. Blanc, 2000

Despite official support for bilingualism (English and French), Canada is characterized as a country where Indigenous languages have suffered in part due to government policies over the past century (Miller, Milloy, RCAP). As noted in the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples (2011) Report on Aboriginal Education:

Canadians are coming to understand the traumatic impacts of the residential school system, an assimilationist system that failed to educate Aboriginal children and deliberately disconnected them from their languages, cultures, and traditions, ripped them from their homes, and, in far too many cases, brutalized Aboriginal children. Government after government continued this vicious cycle...killing the spirit, the heart and soul, of Aboriginal people.

Government policies and practices have contributed to the continual decline and expected loss of over 50 indigenous languages in Canada. Within Canada, only 3 Indigenous languages are expected to survive – Cree, Ojibway and Inuktitut. The loss of language through educational policies is an international phenomenon as noted by Magga et al. (2005): “Most of the disappearing languages will be indigenous languages, and most indigenous languages in the world would disappear according to

these estimates. Education is one of the most important direct causal factors in this disappearance...”

Skutnabb-Kangas and McCarty (2008) have reported that “The world’s spoken languages are disappearing fast: pessimistic but realistic estimates fear that 90–95% of them may be extinct or very seriously endangered by the year 2100.” De Korne (2010) has noted that, “The movement to revitalize Indigenous languages attempts to facilitate the transmission and survival of Indigenous languages despite pressures to assimilate, and is one of the key efforts in the preservation of global linguistic diversity.”

While the disappearance of Indigenous languages is increasingly common across other countries, the United Nations has recently been promoting the rights of Indigenous peoples, including an emphasis on the rights to education, language and culture. In November 2007, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was supported by many countries with the notable exception of Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand. In November 2010, Canada agreed to support the resolution. One of the most significant sections (article 14) pertaining to Indigenous languages is:

Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.

The importance of minority languages was recognized as early as 1966, as outlined in Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which declared that,

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language.

The United Nations (2011) continues to stress the importance of developing legislative and policy measures that will strengthen Indigenous cultures and languages in education:

6. Encourages States to consider, in cooperation with indigenous peoples and on the basis of past advice of the Expert Mechanism, initiating and strengthening, as appropriate, legislative and policy measures that prioritize education in the design and implementation of national development strategies affecting indigenous peoples, including measures that will strengthen the culture and languages of indigenous peoples;

UNESCO (2012) has pointed out that there are negative consequences to suppressing language and culture:

Loss of language and culture is frequently accompanied by large human and social costs, including poverty, poor health, drug and alcohol abuse, family violence and suicide.

UNESCO has also noted that,

School systems that do not use learners' own languages or respect their cultures make it extremely difficult for children to stay in school and learn. For individuals, communities and even whole ethnic minority groups, this contributes to perpetuating cycles of marginalization and discrimination. For countries, excluding large portions of the population from their right to good quality education can delay economic growth and perpetuate conflict and political instability.

The negative impact of education policies in Canada which minimize language and culture was highlighted in the Standing Senate Committee's (2011) observation:

The historical evidence indicates that much of First Nations formal education has been dominated by either churches or governments, and guided by an education philosophy rooted in ideology rather than pedagogy. The result is that many First Nations people identify education negatively, as a deliberate effort to minimize their languages and cultures. Understood from this perspective, the history of First Nations education, rather than empowering and valuing First Nations children and youth, has, in fact, impoverished successive generations.

The Standing Senate Committee's observation is reflected in other countries which have focused on assimilation to the detriment of language and culture. Increasingly, international research has shown that dominant educational systems have harmed Indigenous and minority children through assimilation. Skutnabb-Kangas and McCarthy (2008) have noted:

Assimilationist submersion education, where indigenous and minority children are forced to accept teaching through the medium of dominant languages ...can cause serious mental harm and often leads to the students using the dominant language with their own children later on— i.e. over a generation or two the children are linguistically, and often in other ways too, forcibly transferred to a dominant group. This happens to millions of speakers of threatened languages all over the world.

But learning new languages, including the dominant languages, should not happen subtractively, but rather additively, in addition to their own languages. Subtractive formal education, which teaches children (something of) a dominant language at the cost of their first language, is genocidal.

UNESCO (2008) has noted that there is a strong linkage between mother tongue, literacy, and learning outcomes:

The appropriate use of languages in literacy provision and education has a beneficial effect on access to learning, inclusion in schools, and learning outcomes. The use of mother tongues in education impacts positively on children's attendance and performance in school. While today we recognize that multilingualism is the norm rather than the exception in most settings, many

education systems have yet to address the needs of learners from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. As a result, many children do not attend school or drop out, suffer from low achievement.

UNESCO has promoted three principles to promote universal basic quality education:

- 1) Mother-tongue instruction as a means of improving educational quality by building upon the knowledge and experience of the learners and teachers;
- 2) Bilingual and/or multilingual education at all levels of education as a means of promoting both social and gender equality and as a key element of linguistically diverse societies;
- 3) Language as an essential component of inter-cultural education in order to encourage understanding between different population groups and ensure respect for fundamental rights.

Magga et al. (2005) has noted that the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2003) recommended "that States parties ensure access for indigenous children to appropriate and high quality education". The Committee further recommended "that States parties, with the active participation of indigenous communities and children [...]

- b) implement indigenous children's right to be taught to read and write in their own indigenous language or in the language most commonly used by the group to which they belong, as well as the national language(s) of the country in which they live;
- c) undertake measures to effectively address the comparatively higher drop out rates among indigenous youth and ensure that indigenous children are adequately prepared for higher education, vocational training and their further economic, social and cultural aspirations;
- d) take effective measures to increase the number of teachers from indigenous communities or who speak indigenous languages, provide them with appropriate training, and ensure that they are not discriminated against in relation to other teachers;
- e) allocate sufficient financial, material and human resources to implement these programmes and policies effectively.

Language and Outcomes

Mother tongue instruction is clearly tied to educational outcomes as outlined in many research studies internationally. This was illustrated in a recent study by UNESCO (2012) which has pointed out that there are many positive outcomes when primary school children receive instruction in their mother tongue:

- Children receive a good foundation: When taught first in their own languages, children learn better, are more self-confident and are well equipped to transfer their literacy and numeracy skills to additional languages.
- Children perform better: Evidence from linguistically diverse countries worldwide shows that children taught first in their most familiar language are more likely to thrive and excel in school.
- Fewer children repeat grades: Studies have found that children who start formal education in a second or foreign language are more likely to repeat school years.
- Fewer children drop out of school: Children who start formal education in a second or foreign language are much more likely to experience frustration and failure, resulting in higher dropout rates for these children. Worldwide, some 50 percent of out-of-school children use a language at home that is not the language used in school.
- Children have more family support: When children learn in their mother tongue, parents and families can be involved and support their education. When children are learning in a second or foreign language, families are often excluded from the process.
- Cycles of exclusion are broken: By including families and drawing on local cultural heritage, mother tongue-based education contributes to communities' social and cultural well-being and fosters inclusiveness within the wider society.

Bilingual and/or Immersion education are means to address language revitalization which needs to be considered by Canada, not only as a means of improving educational outcomes, but also as a means of upholding the Indigenous rights of First Nations students who have an internationally-recognized right to a quality education in their Indigenous language.

Literature Review

Recent search has shown that bilingual or immersion education can have a positive impact on educational outcomes. Barac and Bialystok (2011) have reported that, “In contrast to early warnings about negative consequences, bilingualism turns out to be an experience that benefits many aspects of children's development.” A recent study prepared for the Mi'kmaq Kina'matnewey by Osborne et al. (2011) has found that “The results revealed that students in the immersion program not only had stronger Mi'kmaq language skills compared to students in the second language program, but students within both programs ultimately had the same level of English. Immersion programs can simultaneously revitalize a threatened language and prepare students for success in mainstream society.” Osborne points out studies have clearly shown that Indigenous language instruction has led to positive outcomes.

One of the most promising methods of language revitalization is through the inclusion of the Aboriginal language as a language of instruction in schools. In the case of a threatened language, teaching young students in this language has been shown to be an effective method of producing more language speakers (Baker, 2003, 2006). Research has repeatedly demonstrated that the education children receive in school can play a vital role in developing a language and in teaching young students to speak, understand, and use a language that is under threat from a more dominant mainstream language and culture (Baker, 2003, 2006; Cummins, 1983, 1986; Fishman, 1991, 2001).

One of the most effective language programs for Indigenous peoples is the Maori language immersion program which starts during the early years with the Kōhanga Reo (language nest program). May (2005) reports that a review of the Maori Language immersion program had “found that the programmes were very successful in terms of: the promotion of the students' self-esteem, self confidence and cultural identity; the

provision of culturally sensitive and safe environments; the inclusion of families; and the development of the students' English language abilities." He further notes that, "Successful bilingual/immersion programmes are also those that enjoy a high amount of parental support and involvement." He also states that research has shown that the longer immersion programs (seven or more years) have had positive effects on fluency levels. This statement is supported by Magga et al. who have reported that:

Research conclusions about results of present-day indigenous and minority education show that the length of mother tongue medium education is more important than any other factor (including socio-economic status) in predicting the educational success of bilingual students. The worst results, including high push-out rates, are with students in programmes where the student's mother tongues are not supported at all or where they are only taught as subjects. The report argues, with Amartya Sen, that poverty is not only about economic conditions and growth; expansion of human capabilities is a more basic locus of poverty and more basic objective of development. Dominant-language medium education for indigenous children curtails the development of their capabilities and perpetuates poverty.

We show that the present practices of educating indigenous children through the medium of dominant national/state languages are completely contrary to both solid theories and research results about how best to achieving the goals for good education, and to the rights to education that indigenous children have in international law. In addition, present practices also violate the parents' right to intergenerational transmission of their values, including their languages.

Along the same vein, McDonald (2011) has noted that "...First Nations language and culture education and literacy has personal, social and economic benefits for everyone. Children with literacy skills have been shown to have higher income, better health, greater social and civic engagement, lifelong access to learning and less involvement with the justice system, therefore, everyone has a responsibility to develop and maintain First Nation literacy competencies."

McDonald's observation is reflected in other international research on the effects of children being forced to learn a language other than their own heritage language.

Skutnabb-Kangas and Dunbar (2000) have reported that, "summing up consequences of submersion education, in most cases non-models and weak models for ITM children lead to:

- (1) Negative education consequences, in terms of achievement and outcomes;
- (2) Negative physical consequences which can flow from (2) above, including alcoholism, incest, suicide, violent death rates, and so forth;
- (3) Negative psychological consequences, with particular reference to the devastation caused by residential schools;
- (4) Loss of culture and in-depth knowledge of culture; and
- (5) Negative socio-economic consequences and other social consequences which influence the life chances of children as adults, and which are long-term and can last for generations (e.g. higher levels of unemployment, lower incomes, economic and social marginalization, alienation, mental illness).

From another perspective, Pease-Pretty on Top (2003) asserts that, "Language immersion may be the most reliable approach/method and strategy for the acquisition of education. Education positively correlates with socio-economic status; the higher the education, the higher the standard of living, health, safety and just about every other index sociologists measure."

A recent presentation by Namaka Rawlins on the Hawaiian language program to the American Senate (2011) has highlighted the success of culture-based programs: "our data show that from culture-based charter schools, 90 percent of students graduate and go on to their successful careers in college. That is compared to our State average of

80 percent and for Native Hawaiians, around 60 percent.” Regarding the language immersion program, it was further noted by Rawlins, who made a presentation on behalf of the Aha Punana Leo Language Nest and Ka Haka `Ula O Ke`elikolani, Hawaiian language college at Hilo that “Our successes include 100 percent graduation rate and 80 percent college enrolment, due to the rigorous academics of our program.” She also stressed that the students have also succeeded in English-only colleges and universities in other states:

When our students graduate, they are 100 percent bilingual, biliterate, both in Hawaiian and in English. They are, at senior year, they are concurrently enrolled in local university courses or the community college. So they are taking courses in English in the 12th grade.

She also noted that there were many other immersion programs in other states that need to receive continued government support:

Immersion is not only the most effective method of restoring Native languages, it is also a most effective program academically for Native American children. Well-established Native American language immersion programs currently exist in Arizona, Montana, Wyoming, Oklahoma, New York, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Montana, Oregon, Alaska and Hawaii.

A review by McDonald (2011) has found that there are also increasing numbers of immersion programs and other initiatives to support First Nations language immersion in Canada including: New Brunswick, Manitoba, Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan and British Columbia. However, many are in the early stages of development and only a few have had formal evaluations to determine whether the outcomes are comparable to those examined in the United States.

Cummins (2008) notes that five broad conclusions emerge from the international research data on bilingual education:

- Bilingual programs for minority and majority language students have been successfully implemented in countries around the world.

An enormous amount of international research documents the fact that, in well-implemented programs, students educated for part of the day through a minority language do not suffer diverse consequences in the development of academic skills in the majority language.

- The development of literacy in two languages entails linguistic and perhaps cognitive advantages for bilingual students.

Several hundred research studies carried out since the early 1960s report significant advantages for bilingual students on a variety of metalinguistic and cognitive tasks. Bilingual students get more practice in learning language (by definition) and this seems to sharpen their awareness of subtleties of linguistic meaning and form.

- Significant positive relationships exist between the development of academic skills in L1 and L2.

This is true even for languages that are dissimilar (e.g. Spanish and Basque; English and Chinese; Dutch and Turkish). These crosslingual relationships provide evidence for a common underlying proficiency that permits transfer of academic and conceptual knowledge across languages. This transfer of skills and knowledge explains why spending instructional time through a minority language entails no adverse consequences for the development of the majority language.

- The most successful bilingual programs are those that aim to develop bilingualism and biliteracy.

Most bilingual programs implemented in the United States have provided some first language (L1) instruction as a short-term bridge to mainstream English-only programs. However, these short-term programs are less successful, in general, than programs that continue to promote both L1 and English literacy throughout elementary school. Particularly successful are dual-language programs, which include both minority and majority language students in the same classes with each group acting as linguistic models for the other.

- Bilingual education for minority students is, in many situations, more effective in developing L2 literacy skills than monolingual education in the dominant language but it is not, by itself, a panacea for underachievement.

Underachievement derives from multiple factors and, while provision of L1 instruction can address some of these factors (e.g., the devaluation of children's

language and culture in the wider society), far more than just medium of instruction is involved in reversing school failure.

Pease Pretty on Top (2003) has cited that there are compelling reasons to support language immersion programs for American Indian students in the United States:

- First, there are those who recognize the serious rate of language loss and have made a lifetime commitment to tribal language restoration, for the vitality of the tribal nation and its future.
- Second, Native American children and youth have exhibited stagnant educational achievement (among the poorest achievement of all American ethnic groups). Native language immersion has demonstrated remarkable promise in participants' educational achievement.
- A third source of motivation to Native language immersion is the greater cultural and language preservation or revitalization effort that strengthens and rebuilds the Native community.
- Fourth, culture and language teaching and participation positively correlate with Native student retention rates.
- Fifth, Native leaders foresee a world in urgent need of Native perspectives or worldview in areas including child-rearing, natural resources management and family and community development.
- Finally, there are a few activists who are motivated to this work by its political potential to allay the centuries old history of injury and subjugation of Native people.

Fredeen (1988) has noted that the essential requirements for an effective language immersion program for Cree students include:

1. An early total immersion format, as opposed to a partial or late immersion format...
2. The teaching of English literacy after Cree literacy has been introduced, that is, at the grade 2 to 4 level, and the continued use of Cree to teach some subjects after the introduction of English literacy, at least until the end of elementary school.
3. The provision of adequate Cree language resource materials, for all grades and subjects taught in Cree.
4. The choice of subjects to be taught in Cree being dependent on the availability of sufficient Cree language resource materials, and dependent on the availability of teachers capable of using Cree to teach the subject matter.
5. The availability of a pool of fluently bilingual and biliterate qualified teachers, with specialized training in bilingual education methods.
6. A thoughtfully planned and carefully implemented program.

The success of those communities which have language immersion programs was witnessed by the Senate Standing Committee (2011) who reported that:

We witnessed the concerted efforts of communities to reclaim their languages and observed the importance of immersion programs in elementary schools. We were greeted enthusiastically by the children in their own languages while young, budding performers sang their traditional songs to us. In each of the schools we visited we found dedicated educators and individuals working with limited resources to develop programs that best serve the needs of their students and who are committed to creating safe and warm learning environments.

The Senate Committee's conclusions on the importance of language were verified by many witnesses who stressed the need to incorporate language instruction and immersion. As noted by the Senate Committee:

They talked to us about the challenges of recruiting, training, and retaining qualified teachers, the importance of language instruction and immersion programs, the link between parent and community participation in the educational outcomes of students, and the need for adequate resources to build and maintain healthy school facilities and to deliver a range of educational programs, including language instruction and gifted and special needs programs.

The Standing Senate Committee reported that they clearly understood the linkage between language and student outcomes:

Importantly, the Committee believes that the preservation of First Nations languages must be among the core elements supported by a revised funding formula. During our site visits we have seen how language and immersion programs contribute to academic success. Language is also a significant aspect of culture. The evidence suggests, however, that First Nations languages are under increasing threat of survival. There is therefore a tremendous urgency to support their preservation and survival.

Policy Implications

Cummins (2008) stresses that research has clearly shown that there are benefits of bilingual education for students. “The research on bilingual education shows clearly that L1-medium instruction for minority students can successfully promote L1 literacy skills at no cost to students’ academic development in the majority language. These findings become interpretable within the context of the interdependence hypothesis. Consequently, bilingual education for minority students represents a legitimate and, in many cases, a realistic option for policymakers to consider.”

This assertion is supported by Poulin-Dubois et al. (2011) who studied pre-schoolers enrolled in immersion programs. They have noted that, “across a range of studies investigating a variety of abilities, it is clear that bilingualism is an experience that has significant consequences for cognitive performance”.

Magga has emphasized that “Research on educational performance ... indicates that children from minority linguistic backgrounds taught through the medium of a dominant language in submersion programmes perform considerably less well than native dominant language speaking children in the same class; that they suffer from higher levels of push-out rates, and so forth. There would therefore appear to a be a strong argument that such children do not benefit from the right to education to the same extent as children whose mother tongue is the language of the school, and that this distinction is based on language.”

Magga further notes that, “If indigenous and minority children are taught additively, with their own language as the main teaching language during minimally the first 6-8 years, while they also receive good teaching in a dominant language as a second language (preferably given by bilingual teachers), they have a very good chance of becoming high level bilinguals (or multilingual, if other languages are added later). Additive teaching adds to children’s linguistic repertoire: they learn both their own language(s) and other languages well.”

Little and McCarthy (2006) have also stated that there are superior outcomes for students enrolled in immersion programs: “In line with a larger data base on second language acquisition, we have argued that additive or enrichment programs such as those profiled here both strengthen threatened Indigenous languages and promote Native students’ school success. What is particularly significant about these cases is that they show heritage-language immersion to be superior to English-only instruction even for students who enter school with limited proficiency in the heritage language.”

Another one of their interesting observations is that Canada French language immersion programs have actually been used as models for effective language immersion programs in the United States:

Adapted from highly-effective French-English immersion programs in Canada and Māori language immersion in Aotearoa/New Zealand, two well-documented Native American language immersion programs have been implemented in Hawai’i and the Navajo Nation. These programs have been effective in promoting children’s bilingualism and academic achievement, and they serve as models for language education planning and policy for other Indigenous peoples.

Reyhner (2010) also reported that there were better educational outcomes for Navajo students enrolled in immersion programs:

Besides the improvement in student behavior reported, the immersion students showed higher English-language test scores than the non-immersion students in the same school district (Johnson & Wilson, 2005; Johnson & Legatz, 2006). Johnson and Wilson's (2005) table summarizing what was learned from implementing the Window Rock immersion includes benefits such as improved student and teacher retention as well as family participation in working towards outcomes, and validation of student identity.

A presentation by Senator Al Franken at an American Senate hearing (2011) noted that pre-schoolers in Minnesota who were enrolled in language immersion programming were also achieving measureable success: "In Minnesota public schools, pre-K students in the High Five program spend the morning learning English and in the afternoon they have a Dakota or Ojibway immersion classroom. Over the last four years, this program has produced a 16 point gain in kindergarten readiness."

In reviewing research on the effects of language immersion and bilingual education, May (2007) has noted that,

As with Ramírez et al., Thomas and Collier also found that students in English submersion classes performed far less well than their peers in strong bilingual programs, as well as dropping out of school in greater numbers. Students in transitional bilingual programs demonstrated better academic performance over time, but not to the extent of strong bilingual programs. In both these major large-scale studies, then, length of L1 education turned out to be more influential than any other factor in predicting the educational success of bilingual students, including socioeconomic status.

This research demonstrates that bilingual and immersion programs must be of sufficient length (6 to 7 years) to promote better educational outcomes. Bilingual and immersion

programs will require appropriate resourcing to achieve increases in academic performance.

Based on her research with American Indian language immersion programs in the US, Pease-Pretty on Top (2003) has also concluded that language immersion has led to numerous positive outcomes:

Native language immersion schools have remarkable benefits: students show impressive educational achievement, participants demonstrate considerable language knowledge gains in relatively short periods of time, programs contribute significantly to family strength, and college students---adult learners are retained as a positive correlate with language and culture learning.

Bear Nicholas (2008) has long advocated for an increase in funding to support language education planning:

Language-wide planning is possibly the most urgent need for the future of Indigenous languages since it is the only way to address the fact that only drastic and immediate action can reverse the precipitous decline in Indigenous languages. Increasing the currently shameful level of funding for Indigenous languages is certainly one of the most important needs.

As noted by a Native Hawaiian educator at an American Senate hearing (2011), immersion is clearly the answer for reversing language loss and increasing literacy outcomes:

Native American language immersion is not only the most effective method of restoring Native American languages, it is also a most effective program academically for Native American children with excellent English language literacy outcomes. Well established immersion programs currently exist for languages such as Mohawk in New York, Cherokee in Oklahoma and North Carolina, Ojibwe in Wisconsin and Minnesota, Arapaho in Wyoming, three languages in Montana namely Blackfeet, Salish, and Atsina/Gros Ventre, Navajo in Arizona, Chinuk Wawa in Oregon, two languages in Alaska, namely Central Alaskan Yup'ik and Inupiaq, and also Hawaiian. Many other tribes have projects starting immersion or are working to do so, including Lakota speaking tribes in North and South Dakota, the Sauk and Choctaw tribes in Oklahoma, and various tribes in other parts of the country.

Bear Nicholas has called on Canada to consider the lessons learned from international research:

Most importantly, there is a critical need to begin paying attention to research on Indigenous education from international sources for its promising focus on the link between the linguistic rights and First Nations education. As well, we need to find ways to bring these research results to the attention of federal and provincial authorities so that the linguistic rights of First Nations may be accorded positive respect through legislation and action.

With specific reference to policies in Canada and the United States, De Korne (2010) has urged that governments consider the following recommendations to support Indigenous language education (ILE) programming:

Recommendation 1: Awareness of possibilities.

The range of policy approaches towards ILE in Canada and the US is diverse. Although a variety of policy approaches toward ILE were hypothesized by the initial rationale for this study, the results illustrate a range of policies that are far more varied than anticipated. A broad understanding of existing approaches and the pros and cons that they may entail should be taken into account in future policy development. Awareness of this diversity should also serve to fuel future creativity and innovation in this area.

Recommendation 2: Careful consideration for limiting or restricting factors.

There are as many ways to limit the growth of ILE as there are to support it, and a policy that supports ILE in one context may restrict it in another. Restrictive policies illustrated in this study include specification of languages or groups with rights to ILE, leading to the exclusion of other languages or groups, and establishment of a centralized authority with power of approval over local ILE initiatives. It may not be possible to avoid all limiting factors in practice; however careful consideration of potential restrictions should be given.

Recommendation 3: Support for bi- or multi-lingual education in general.

In the interest of not restricting the possibilities for ILE, policies that promote two or more languages of instruction in general provide more support than policies that single out special programs for specific languages or groups. As evidenced in the analysis of policy approaches to immersion curriculum, jurisdictions that support bilingual education in general have higher levels of support than those which provide support only for a specific language or territory. Whether through bilingual maintenance, two-way immersion, or other frameworks, establishing

bilingual education as a norm creates opportunities for many language communities.

Recommendation 4: Development of ILE immersion teacher training.

If ILE programs are to produce proficient learners, attention must be paid to supporting skilled teachers. As illustrated by this study, although most factors relating to ILE are in need of stronger support, this area is starkly lacking in support and is greatly in need of expansion and exploration.

Recommendation 5: Continue the momentum of Indigenous control over Indigenous education.

More and more regions are responding to the efforts of ILE advocates and offering some form of support for Indigenous control of ILE through curriculum consultation, teacher certification, and/or support for local programming. Decades of slow growth in this area have led to the substantial minority of supportive policies that exist today, and the momentum can be carried forward on any of the fronts mentioned above. There is no way of knowing how many supportive policies will be necessary to create a critical mass that will lead to Indigenous control becoming the norm, but any growth in that direction will help continue the forward movement.

Recommendation 6: Incorporate evaluation and accountability mechanisms.

This recommendation is motivated by the lack of information available on the effects and outcomes of various policies. It is not enough to have a supportive policy in place; it must be implemented and maintained effectively. An example of a policy with a built-in evaluation mechanism is the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (1992), which requires regular reporting on the status of the languages that it protects. Similar mechanisms could help to ensure the continued improvement of ILE policies.

Based on international research, Bühmann & Trudell (2000) have stressed that, “The research evidence today clearly shows that using the learners’ mother tongue is crucial to effective learning. Indeed, some educationists have argued that the only countries likely to achieve EFA [education for all] are those where the language of instruction is the learners’ mother tongue.” They have noted that,

Educational quality needs to be addressed in several ways, including adequate teacher training and the availability of appropriate teaching and learning

materials for the programme. However, the development, production and distribution of such materials can be challenging, especially in developing countries with limited education budgets. Teachers are also central to the effective implementation of education reforms. Teacher training needs to be of sufficient length and quality for teachers to fully acquire the new educational principles and methods. Other education professionals also need training and orientation so that they fully understand and support the objectives and implementation of the reform programmes. In Papua New Guinea, the locally-focused management of the new bilingual school system differs substantially from the previous system; when the education establishment does not understand the role of parents in the new system, schools in some communities function less well than they might.

Pedagogical innovation is another aspect of educational quality that helps to ensure the effectiveness of bilingual education programmes. Effective mother-tongue bilingual education models usually include changes to the entire curriculum and, therefore, to teaching methods and materials as well. In particular, the pedagogy of language teaching itself usually requires special attention.

These studies clearly emphasize the strong linkage between language and educational outcomes. In order for Canada to truly support an effective quality education system that will lead to positive family and community outcomes, then culture and language immersion must be fundamental components of any new policies and legislation on First Nations Education as proposed in the March 2012 Federal Budget. Canada has an obligation to support First Nations with adequate resourcing to improve the quality and effectiveness of education with an emphasis on language and culture. As noted by the National Panel (2012):

We need Canada and First Nations to pledge that they will work together to improve the lives of First Nation students through the development of an effective education system... properly funded, respectful of First Nation language, culture and identity, and able to provide opportunities for life choices and options, including making a positive contribution to the community and participating in the Canadian and global economy.

Conclusion

Language Immersion or bilingual education can lead to improved educational outcomes but ideally there should be a minimum of 6 to 7 years of instruction to lead to improvements (Cummins, Magga, May, Skutnabb-Kangas, UNESCO). Quality education means more resourcing to support not only teacher training in immersion techniques, but also for the development of curriculum materials, technology and infrastructure to support language development. This point is consistent with the report of the National Panel on First Nations Education (2012) which has emphasized the need for supporting a high quality education system with an emphasis on identity, language and culture:

First Nations and Canadians have a collective public responsibility to ensure a high quality system of education for First Nation students in both First Nation and provincial schools. We have a duty to do better and an obligation to protect and support the rights of First Nation children to a good education that builds a strong First Nation identity, language and culture and ensures that these students are learning and achieving at the same level as non- First Nation students.

The Standing Senate Committee has made a similar point in their recent report in urging policy makers to make a fundamental change in policies:

To walk this path honourably we must act not only to transform First Nations education in a way that reconnects First Nations children to their languages, cultures and communities, but we must also transform our fundamental relationship with the First Peoples of this country, from paternalism to partnership.

The National Panel (2012) has also highlighted the need for adequate resourcing and new enabling legislation to support an enhanced education system to nurture the learning of First Nations students:

The co-creation of legislation in the form of a First Nation Education Act that outlines responsibilities for each partner in the system and recognizes and protects the First Nation child's right to their culture, language and identity, a quality education, funding of the system, and First Nation control of First Nation education.

Governmental policies in Canada will also need to be amended to support bilingual and immersion education for First Nations students based on community-identified needs.

One of the most important emerging opportunities for Canada which has long espoused the benefits of bilingualism is to include language immersion and bilingual education within the proposed First Nations Education Act. As noted by De Korne (2010), "While there is more support in Canadian educational policies for bilingual maintenance or immersion programming than there is in US policies, a higher level of support might be expected from a bilingual, multicultural country, as Canada aims to be (cf. Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; Canadian Multiculturalism Act)."

As noted by UNESCO (2012):

Policy makers who understand the vital role of languages help to create better development planning. They are aware that focusing on languages has obvious beneficial results for communications and participation targets. They know that opportunities may be lost when the role of language is forgotten.

Canada has an opportunity to right the historical wrongs experienced by Indigenous peoples by providing support for Indigenous language immersion which will ultimately lead to improved educational outcomes.

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