

Linguistic Decline and the Educational Gap: A Single Solution is Possible in the Education of Indigenous Peoples

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March 2009**

The genesis of this work:

*“Rationales and Strategies for Establishing Immersion Programs,”*¹ was written over three years ago as a summary of a conference on immersion education sponsored jointly by St. Thomas University and the AFN. At the time the target audience was Indigenous communities and educators who might, hopefully, become interested in establishing an immersion education program, otherwise known as mother-tongue medium education (MTM). At the time the primary target audience was not educational or linguistic policy-makers, but rather, educators and language activists in First Nations communities since it was felt that the impetus for immersion needed to occur first in First Nations communities. Since that time many things have happened that have changed this thinking. Courageous fluent speakers in many First Nations communities have been scrounging for funds to access immersion teacher-training and to establish MTM preschool education programs, while money seems to have flowed readily out of government coffers to establish English-medium preschools and to train cohorts of non-fluent speakers in English-only teacher-training. At the same time Indigenous languages across Canada have spiraled into steeper and faster declines than ever before.

In the past year, as well, there has been a noticeable increase in hand-wringing over the dismal state of Indigenous education.² Literally everyone, from the Fraser Institute, to the Council of Ministers of Education and the Canadian Council on Learning has gotten into the act, in some cases enticed into it by a sudden new availability of funding for the issue from the Federal Government. But nowhere in this hand-wringing has there been any attention paid to the shocking decline in First Nations languages, or for that matter, to what we now know to have been its central role in the dismal state of Indigenous education.³ With respect, even First Nations educators⁴ and political leaders⁵ have failed to make this critical connection, as evidenced most recently at the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, Summit on Aboriginal Education, titled “Strengthening Aboriginal Success, Moving Toward Learn Canada 2020.”

¹ The paper is actually titled “Education through the Medium of the Mother-Tongue: The Single Most Important Means for Saving Indigenous Languages--*Rationales and Strategies for Establishing Immersion Programs*” drawn from A Symposium on Immersion Education for First Nations sponsored by St. Thomas University and The Assembly of First Nations Fredericton, N.B., Canada, October 3-6, 2005

² Miramichi Leader 2008.

³ Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, Summit on Aboriginal Education held February 24 & 25, 2009. See www.cmec.ca/summit/index.en.stm

⁴ Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, Fact Sheet. See www.cmec.ca/releases/press.en.stm?id=87

⁵ First Nations Chiefs of New Brunswick 2008, National Chief Phil Fontaine Speaking Notes for Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, February 23, 2009. See www.afn.ca/article.asp?id=4418

In short, it is these events that have called for a serious reconsideration of strategies. 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. But for this to happen, it will be essential that First Nations organizations begin educating themselves about the new research so that they will be able to stand strong on the matter. In fact, unless First Nations organizations do so, it is unlikely that governments will willingly take the matter seriously, even though there are strong human rights-based arguments for governments to heed the research. It is, thus, the purpose of this paper to describe the results from the international research, to urge reconsideration of our goals, and to begin mapping some strategies so that we may achieve these new goals.

Introduction:

Drawing on research from international sources, this paper addresses two disturbing situations facing Indigenous Peoples in Canada. They are the matter of the drastic and accelerating decline in Indigenous languages, and the matter of the so-called “educational gap.” In spite of all efforts to date, the matter of accelerating linguistic decline has seemed to be irreversible considering that the situation has worsened significantly in the last decade. As for the matter of the educational gap, it has remained stubbornly resistant to improvement as evidenced in the dismal 60% rate of school non-completion that has remained frozen over the same decade.⁶

By addressing the matters as two separate and unrelated issues, we tend to ignore the good news from international research which demonstrates that both problems are actually consequences of one reality—the imposition of a dominant language as the medium of instruction for Indigenous children, which occurs wherever there is no option of education in the medium of the mother-tongue (MTM). By addressing the two issues of language and education as connected in this way, one solution presents itself, that of education in the medium of the mother-tongue. If we could be more open to research on Indigenous education worldwide, we would learn that not only is MTM education capable of arresting and even reversing the processes of linguistic extinction, but also of providing optimum conditions for Indigenous children to benefit significantly from education. Before addressing the particulars of MTM education all the arguments and rationales for pursuing this form of education for our children need to be pursued.

A. The rationales for MTM as drawn from International Research:

1. The Dire State of Indigenous Languages in Canada⁷

⁶ Mendelson 2008:1.

⁷ Much of this section is drawn from Bear Nicholas 2005.

There is growing recognition that the standard approaches to language retention and revitalization, current core language programs in school and community language revitalization and maintenance projects, are not working. Indeed, this conclusion is borne out by the statistics for the five year period between 1996 and 2001 which saw the percentage of Indigenous people who spoke their mother tongue decline from 29% to 24%.⁸ Considering that most of those speakers are over 50 or 60 years of age, this percentage is most certainly declining at a much faster rate at present than it did between 1996 and 2001. Even if it continues to decline at the same rate of 1% per year we are in serious trouble. Indeed, it means that a serious rethinking of language survival strategies is most urgent, especially in light of current political and economic realities where monies for language survival have already been clawed back (in late 2007), and where the availability of funds from federal coffers is rapidly declining.

On the matter of the drastic decline and imminent extinction of Indigenous languages in Canada we quote from a forthcoming paper as follows:

*“Before colonization there were about 63 languages in Canada belonging to 11 different language families, the largest being Algonquian. Of the 63 languages at least 6 are considered to be in a critical state with fewer than 50 speakers, while only 3, Cree with 80,000 speakers, Ojibway with 23,000, and Inuktitut, with 29,000, are considered to be healthy enough to survive the present century (Norris 2002). All the others, mostly with fewer than 1000 speakers, are expected to disappear from the face of the earth unless drastically new strategies are implemented to reverse the trends. Like climate change, the factors in this phenomenon are multiple and complex, and like climate change, the consequences are multiplying exponentially (Krauss 1992: 4-10, Fettes 1998, Nettle and Romaine 2000).”*⁹

Static numbers are not the only ways to measure the health of a language. The ages of fluent speakers, and the proportions and levels of fluency are even more telling indicators. For example, in the largest Maliseet community (pop. about 1,500) where the Maliseet/Passamaquoddy language is considered to be the healthiest,¹⁰ only about one-fourth to one-third of the population can be considered fluent, but that proportion is rapidly declining since most speakers are over the age of 60. With fewer than one in five (1000 out of 5000) who can speak the language, Maliseet/Passamaquoddy has been judged variously from critically endangered (Canada 1990), to viable (Norris 2002), but with only about 10 more years of viability if present trends continue.¹¹ Mi'kmaq, on the other hand, with somewhat over 6000 speakers, is healthier since there are some large Mi'kmaq communities (pop. over 2,000)¹² which have higher proportions of speakers and many of them younger than 50. Still Mi'kmaq is estimated to have only about 30 more years of viability unless drastic action is taken soon.¹³

⁸ Norris 2002: 19.

⁹ Bear Nicholas, 2009 forthcoming.

¹⁰ Nekwotkok (Tobique) with a population of about 1500.

¹¹ Bear Nicholas, 2009 forthcoming.

¹² Such as Eskasoni and Elsiboktok.

¹³ MacEachern 1998.

The reality is that a rapidly growing number of First Nations communities across Canada have no speakers at all, and even those communities with the highest proportions of speakers have almost no fluent child speakers, one of the most telling indicators of the dire state of a language. With the rapidly aging and declining number of speakers which stood at only 24% nationwide nearly ten years ago, time is clearly running out to address the problem, and to take the drastic action that is so desperately needed. For this we must first look at the international research in the matters of linguistic survival and education for Indigenous children before surveying existing human rights instruments and standards.

A final point to be made with regard to the dire state of most Indigenous languages in Canada is that unless drastically different action is taken very soon, the rapidly declining state of our languages will ultimately lead to their extinction before the end of the present century. And the possibility of extinction for any language¹⁴ means extinction, also, of the history and cultural knowledge of its people for all time. Maybe even more importantly to human-kind, the extinction of any Indigenous language is just as much a loss to human chances of survival as the extinction of biological species, since the knowledge of how to maintain biodiversity is encoded in the Indigenous languages of the world.¹⁵

2. International research on the linguistic and educational damage caused by dominant language education and dominant society ideologies re the education of Indigenous children:¹⁶

As the most knowledgeable scholars in the field will attest, the critical state of Indigenous languages in Canada, as in the rest of the world, is not the result of natural processes, but the direct product of official government policies and practices that have been systematic and sustained over decades and generations.¹⁷ In Canada there is no argument about the effectiveness of residential school policies in the assimilation of First Nations children and the enormous damage done to their languages. What few people recognize is that equally effective government policies of assimilation and linguistic destruction are still practiced today, albeit in a slightly different and more subtle form. Two recent expert papers written for the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues¹⁸ are especially blunt in their insightful analyses, not only of ongoing government policies of assimilation and destruction of Indigenous languages, but also of the critical role that these policies continue to play in the consistently low academic achievement rates of Indigenous children, and the consequent damage to Indigenous nations, cultures and communities around the world. In the analysis which follows we draw heavily on points made in these expert papers to explain how these processes work.¹⁹

¹⁴ This section drawn from Bear Nicholas 2005.

¹⁵ Maffi 2001, Skutnabb-Kangas 2003.

¹⁶ Much of this section is drawn from Bear Nicholas 2008 draft.

¹⁷ Skutnabb-Kangas 2000:xxxi-xxxiii, Day 1985, Contento 1993.

¹⁸ Magga, Nicolaisen, Trask, Skutnabb-Kangas & Dunbar, 2005 and Anders-Baer, Dunbar and Skutnabb-Kangas, 2008.

¹⁹ The text of this section is also a reworking of Bear Nicholas 2008 (Draft).

When schools for Indigenous or minority language children are conducted in the medium of a dominant language, it is the mere fact of the physical separation of children from proficient adult speakers for the better part of the day that effectively denies these children the opportunity to become proficient in their mother-tongue. When these children consequently do not become proficient in their mother-tongue, they are much less likely to use their language and to transfer it to the next generation. The consequence for Indigenous or minority languages is that once several generations are exposed to this form of education, their languages become underdeveloped, particularly in formal areas, precisely because they are not used in school where children spend most of their day. And since the speakers of the languages who are subjected to this form of education inevitably come to believe that their language has less value than the dominant language, each passing generation of speakers tends to use their own language in fewer contexts, and the dominant language in more contexts.²⁰

According to Magga et al, this process is a subtractive one in which *“a new (dominant/majority) language is learned at the cost of the mother tongue which is displaced.... [in effect it] subtracts from the child’s linguistic repertoire, instead of adding to it.”*²¹ This form of education is generally known as *“subtractive education,”* but it has also been called *“submersion education”* for the fact that Indigenous children forced into this situation must either sink or swim. The process has also been appropriately identified as *“linguistic genocide”* or *“linguicide,”* and defined by Skutnabb-Kangas as *“killing a language without killing the speakers.”*²²

Though these policies of subtractive and linguicidal education for Indigenous Peoples may not kill the speakers there is now evidence that they do serious mental and physical harm, and so contribute enormously to educational failure, and social and cultural harm. Anders-Baer et al correlate the submersion²³ of Indigenous and linguistic minority children in dominant language medium schools to serious forms of mental harm, including *“social dislocation, psychological, cognitive, linguistic, and educational harm,”*²⁴ which in turn play a central role in the low academic performance rates of Indigenous children, and ultimately in the social, economic, and political marginalization of Indigenous Peoples worldwide. To quote again from Anders-Baer et al:

“...[T]his dominant language medium of education prevents access to education because of the linguistic, pedagogical and psychological barriers it creates. Without binding educational linguistic rights, especially a right to mainly mother tongue-medium (MTM) education in state schools, with good teaching of a dominant language as a second language, given by competent bilingual teachers, most indigenous peoples and minorities have to accept subtractive education

²⁰ Anders-Baer et al 2008:1-3.

²¹ Magga et al 2005:3.

²² Skutnabb-Kangas 2000:311-318. 362-374: See also Sutherland 2002.

²³ See Skutnabb-Kangas 2000:582 for a definition of submersion education.

²⁴ Anders-Baer et al 2008:2.

where they learn a dominant language at the cost of the mother tongue which is displaced, and later often replaced by the dominant language.”²⁵

By its very nature, subtractive language learning in education for Indigenous Peoples constitutes a fundamental attack on the cognitive capacities of Indigenous children, which in turn, may now be seen as the chief factor in the world-wide phenomenon of low educational achievement and high “push-out”²⁶ rates among Indigenous children. And it is the growing body of evidence concerning these negative consequences of subtractive submersion education for Indigenous children that is now leading to the increasing stigmatization of such practices on the international level.²⁷

The most common cause for this high push-out rate is that children of Indigenous or linguistic minorities tend to take only two years “*to achieve peer appropriate levels*” of conversational ability, according to Jim Cummins, the foremost Canadian scholar in issues of bilingualism and language survival, but five or more years to achieve equivalent academic language skills. As he has pointed out, “*psychologists often failed to take account of the difference between these two aspects of proficiency when they tested minority students*” they consequently end up labeling students as “*‘learning disabled’ or ‘retarded’ on the basis of tests administered within one or two years of the students’ exposure to English in school.*”²⁸ This finding has special relevance in explaining the low English proficiency found, for example, among Cree students after many years in English medium schools in northern Ontario.²⁹ It also explains the generally low academic performance among Indigenous or linguistic minority students elsewhere, who, though relatively fluent in English, still do not acquire the necessary academic skills to succeed when submersed in dominant language schools from an early age. In being labeled early in their educational career as disabled or worse, they tend to be the students who, sooner or later, get pushed out of school.

There are now, also, very serious concerns that, while school completion rates are almost universally used as measures of the success of an education system, high rates do not necessarily mean benefits either for the individuals or their communities. In the first place, increased rates of school completion do not correlate with correspondingly high levels of academic proficiency, especially for monolingual Indigenous or minority language students. Indeed, evidence from the United States indicates that “*...mono-English-speaking American Indians’ longer stay in school does not translate into greater educational proficiency when compared to the reading, writing, and computational literacy found among bilinguals [who have been instructed in the medium of their mother tongue].*”³⁰ This is perhaps the most significant fact underlying the thesis of this paper.

²⁵ Anders-Baer et al 2008:3-4.

²⁶ As Skutnabb-Kangas has pointed out that this term “push-out” is far more accurate than “dropout” since it is the subtractive education system that is mostly to blame for this phenomenon.

²⁷ Magga et al 2004.3, 5-6, 8, Kosonen, Young & Malone 2007:6-7, Skutnabb-Kangas 2008c.

²⁸ Cummins 1991:169-170.

²⁹ Toohey 1985:97-99.

³⁰ Brod & McQuiston 1998:152.

Secondly, Magga et al have demonstrated how Indigenous children subjected to subtractive or submersion education, “*or at least their children, are effectively transferred [from their own group] to the dominant group linguistically and culturally*”³¹, whether or not they are removed from their own community to attend school. There is only one good term for this process and it is “*assimilation*,”³² since there is no question that Indigenous children who manage to complete subtractive education programs must also assimilate to some degree or other to the dominant society culture of the school in order to succeed.

As a result, the only real choices offered to Indigenous children in subtractive education are the choices of sinking or swimming, “failure” or assimilation.³³ Since a high proportion of those who “fail” tend to remain in their communities, and a high proportion of those who “succeed” tend either to move away or to remain as an assimilated element within their communities, there is no way that either consequence can be considered beneficial to Indigenous Peoples and communities.

Since language is the foundation of culture, its destruction in individuals on a mass scale inevitably leads to the disruption, even destruction of whole communities and cultures. This process, now clearly caused by subtractive models of education, has even been called a “*weapon of mass destruction*.”³⁴ While racism, discrimination, dispossession, and low socio-economic conditions are admittedly important factors contributing to the dismal circumstances of Indigenous Peoples worldwide, Magga et al demonstrate that “*the use of the wrong teaching languages (and lack of indigenous content, methods and ethos in schools) is one of the most important factors, possibly the most decisive factor [in creating these circumstances]*.”³⁵ Indeed, these same scholars have now identified subtractive/linguicidal state education policies, specifically, as the major culprit in the physical harm suffered by Indigenous Peoples in the disproportionately high rates of “*youth and adult criminality, alcoholism and drugs use, suicides, unemployment, negative health and housing conditions*” mentioned above.³⁶

In the end, it is not just Indigenous societies that pay the price; it is Canadian society, as well, since high drop-out rates are now understood to be the most significant factor in high social costs among Canadians alone,³⁷ whose average dropout rates stand at only about 20%. With First Nations “drop-out” rates standing more than two times higher than those for Canadians, the costs for the damage inflicted on First Nations must also be at least twice what is spent on Canadians.

³¹ Magga et al 2004:4. See also Anders-Baer et al 2008:5-10.

³² This process is also called “*cognitive assimilation*” by Battiste 1986 and it has parallels in the mass society phenomenon known as “*manufacturing consent*.” See Herman & Chomsky 1988 and Anders-Baer et al 2008:13.

³³ Bear Nicholas 2001:10. See also Chisholm 2994, Curry 2004.

³⁴ Skutnabb-Kangas 2008b.

³⁵ Magga et al 2005:6-7.

³⁶ Magga et al 2005:6-7.

³⁷ Yalnizyan 1998.

Finally, there would also be immeasurable benefits to human-kind in maintaining Indigenous languages, since, as mentioned above, the maintenance of linguistic and cultural diversity is now understood to be just as critical to human chances for survival on earth as the maintenance of biodiversity.³⁸ Needless to say, the overall consequences of subtractive education and linguistic destruction must come to be understood as universally negative.³⁹

It is useful at this point to consider the work of Raphael Lemkin, the original author of the *UN Convention on the Crime and Punishment of Genocide* (1948). He clearly understood linguistic genocide to be central to the process of “*cultural genocide*,” and that the destruction of a people through the destruction of their linguistic, cultural, social, economic, spiritual, and political systems, was as fundamental to the meaning of genocide as the outright killing of members of a group.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, his concepts of linguistic and cultural genocide did not get written into the final form of the Genocide Convention due to opposition from western states, including Canada. As Anders-Baer et al have noted, “*Ironically, delegates from some countries, including the United States and Canada, were also apparently concerned that the inclusion of cultural genocide could lead to claims by indigenous groups[!].*”⁴¹ This in itself is a damning admission.

3. The existing rights to MTM education as outlined in various international human rights instruments:⁴²

The most fundamental crime, according to many analyses, is that children of Indigenous and linguistic minorities in almost every country of the world, including Canada, are required by law to be schooled in the medium of a dominant language, with no option for MTM education. And it is precisely because such an education actually produces dire consequences, both for the languages involved and for their speakers and their forms of life (their culture), that such educational practices are increasingly being understood as a direct violation of fundamental international human rights instruments.⁴³ What follows is a brief analysis of these instruments specifically for their relevance to Indigenous linguistic and educational rights.

A. The UN International Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948)⁴⁴:

Under this Convention the practices aimed at extinguishing the world’s languages were originally defined as linguistic genocide in Article III(1) of the Final Draft as follows:

³⁸ Maffi 2001.

³⁹ See also Rasmussen 2000, Kosonen, Young & Malone 2007:10-11. The only exception to this dismal picture may be the fact that those who have been pushed out of school tend to be those who have resisted assimilation and maintained their language, at least to some degree. As a result some analysts have gone so far as to suggest that resistance to education has been the chief factor in the survival of Indigenous languages to the present.

⁴⁰ Anders-Baer et al 2008:9-10, Chrisjohn et al 2002:238-239. See also New York Times 1999, Docker 2004, Costello 1988, Bear Nicholas 1999, Rasmussen 2000, and Skutnabb-Kangas 2008b.

⁴¹ Anders-Baer et al 2008:17.

⁴² Drawn from Bear Nicholas 2005 and 2008 draft.

⁴³ Magga et al 2005:9-11. See also deVarennes 1999.

⁴⁴ www.un.org/millennium/law/iv-1.htm

“Prohibiting the use of the language of the group in daily intercourse or in schools, or the printing and circulation of publications in the language of the group.”⁴⁵

Even though this article was deleted in the General Assembly by 16 states, and is thus not included in the Genocide Convention, there was agreement among all member states about this definition of linguistic genocide. Therefore, it can still be used in cases where schools do not offer the option of Indigenous languages as teaching languages in all subjects, and where teachers do not usually know these languages, since the children in such situations are effectively prohibited from having their language used in school. As such, they are being denied their rights under this UN definition of linguistic genocide.

Under several articles of the final form of the Genocide Convention to which Canada is a party, genocide is defined in ways that should be considered applicable to Canada, both in the past and in the present. **Article II(e)** declares *“forcibly transferring children of the group to another group”* to be one definition of genocide. This article is clearly applicable to Canada’s practice of forcibly removing Indigenous children from their families and communities and placing them in residential schools for nearly forty years AFTER the passage of the Genocide Convention in 1948. (The last residential school was closed in 1986.) For this crime Canada has neither confessed nor been held accountable.⁴⁶

But even now that the residential schools have been shut down, the central policies of assimilation continue through the imposition of an alien culture and language in schools offering no option for MTM education. Indeed, this practice serves the same purpose and has the same effect as forcibly transferring children from one group to another, whether or not they are physically removed from their own communities. And the process involves force to the extent that provincial laws mandate that all children, including Indigenous children, must attend schools, which, for the most part, offer no option of MTM education.

As discussed above, there is mounting evidence that the practice of subtractive education actually stunts children’s cognitive growth, and produces adverse material, social, economic, psychological, and political consequences for dominated peoples around the world. This makes Canada’s practice of subtractive education fit two other UN definitions of genocide, **Article II(b): “Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group”** and **Article II(c)** which declares *“Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part”* to be a crime of genocide.

That this country has never been charged under any article of the Genocide Convention is because of another change made in the Convention by a block of western countries prior to its passage, a change which has effectively qualified and limited the conditions under which a crime of genocide can be considered punishable. That significant change was the inclusion of clause requiring that, for states to be found guilty of genocide, the

⁴⁵ This and much of this section on the Genocide Convention is drawn from Bear Nicholas 2005.

⁴⁶ Chrisjohn et al. 2002:246 and 2008.

enumerated crimes must be committed “*with intent to destroy in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.*” As a result, it has been extremely difficult under the Convention to prosecute Canada or any country for having operated residential schools or for carrying out linguistic or cultural genocide in education, primarily because there is normally no evidence a country *intended* to destroy Indigenous Peoples through residential schooling.⁴⁷

What is important to know is that Canada was one of those 16 western states which acted to ensure that this clause requiring intent, got written into the final version of the *Genocide Convention*.⁴⁸ Indeed, it was the same 16 nations, including Canada, which also managed to block the inclusion, in the final version, of both linguistic and cultural genocide, the very concepts that had been central to Lemkin’s original draft and intention of the Convention, as described above.⁴⁹ That most, if not all, of these countries had open policies of assimilation in the late 1940s is of significance here.

Though Canada is a signatory to the Genocide Convention, this country has taken its defiance of the intent of the Convention a step further by excluding three out of five of its articles in the Canadian Criminal Code defining genocide: Article II(b) on causing bodily and mental harm, Article II(c) on inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about physical destruction, and Article II(e) on forcibly transferring children of one group to another, from its own Criminal Code.⁵⁰ It is clearly no coincidence that the excluded articles are the very ones which would be most applicable to Canada. An accord with its consistent denial of any applicability of the Genocide Convention, Canada has also omitted any reference to these definitions of genocide from its supposed apology of 2008 for residential schools, and it is these omissions which make this so-called apology decidedly not an apology.⁵¹

B. *The Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 (CRC):*⁵²

Under Para 1(c), Art. 29 of this Convention to which Canada is a signatory, states must provide “*respect for the child’s parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values,*” but according to Magga et al (2005),

“...it would seem clear that an education in a language other than the child’s mother tongue and which contains no recognition of that mother tongue is an education that is unlikely to contribute to respect for the child’s own cultural identity, language and values.”⁵³

Two principles need to be articulated here. One is that whether or not a child speaks the language of his or her people, it is still his or her mother-tongue, for it is still the language

⁴⁷ Anders-Baer et al 2008:14. Chrisjohn 2008a has pointed out that the only proof of the intent most certainly exists in Privy Council Records, but these are permanently closed to the public.

⁴⁸ Skutnabb-Kangas 2000:316-318, Chrisjohn et al 2002:238-239.

⁴⁹ Skutnabb-Kangas 2000:316-318, 362-374, Chrisjohn, et al, 2002, Anders-Baer et al 2008:10-14.

⁵⁰ Government of Canada, Department of Justice, Canadian Criminal Code, subsection 281.1(2) on Hate Propaganda, Department of Justice 1970.

⁵¹ See Chrisjohn et al, 2008a.

⁵² www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.ht

⁵³ Magga et al 2005:13.

that children need to fully communicate with and learn from elders, and it is the language needed to participate to the fullest in one's own community. The other principle is that according to the international research, educational effectiveness for Indigenous children is related to the extent to which mother-tongue is used as the medium of instruction, EVEN where children do not enter school speaking their mother-tongue. In light of these principles, Canada is in severe violation of this Convention, and not just for those children who are fluent speakers when they enter school, but also for those who have not had the opportunity to become proficient in their languages.

A further point to be made is that the central meanings and values of a particular form of life are simply not translatable into other languages.⁵⁴ This means that the culture of a particular First Nation cannot be separated from its language, except in a most superficial and meaningless manner, nor can it be taught through the medium of a non-Indigenous language. This also means that the rhetoric about expecting and even demanding dominant society schools to provide Indigenous children "*culturally relevant learning*" (in either English or French) is little more than empty rhetoric.⁵⁵ French parents would not expect their children attending Norwegian or Pakistani schools to learn French culture; and in spite of the best intentions on the part of provincial schools in Canada, it is unrealistic to expect provincial schools to teach First Nations children their culture, and certainly not at all through the medium of dominant languages. In the end, Canada is clearly in violation of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* simply by teaching Indigenous children in the medium of English or French without offering the option for MTM education.

C. The International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights (ICESR) of 1966:⁵⁶

This Covenant actually sets out four essential elements in the right to education—*availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability*. Magga et al have focused on the accessibility element as the one most relevant to the link between education and language. In doing so, they quote Dr. Katarina Tomasevski, former UN Rapporteur and leading global expert on the right to education, who has said that "*mere access to educational institutions, difficult as it may be to achieve in practice, does not amount to the right to education.*"⁵⁷ Given that minority-language children generally do not perform as well as dominant language children in dominant language medium programs, equal access to education is thus denied to Indigenous children wherever education is offered only in English (or French), and this amounts to a violation of the terms of the ICESR.

Indeed, Magga et al cite important legal precedents declaring that education provided only in the dominant language amounts to a denial of the right to education for speakers of minority languages. In stating that "*there is no greater inequality than the equal*

⁵⁴ Henderson 1994.

⁵⁵ See for example AFN, CCOL, draft paper on "First Nations Control of education: Indian Control of Indian Education Revisited --Preparing our Children for the Future, point 6.2, page 9.

⁵⁶ www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/a_ceschr.htm

⁵⁷ Magga et al 2005:10.

treatment of unequals” one court also mandated affirmative steps, including MTM education, to ensure equal access for minority language speakers to education.⁵⁸

Considering the ICESR (para 1) requirement that education must provide for “*the development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential*” Magga et al declare that

“...it could be forcefully argued that only MTM education, at least in primary school is consistent with the provisions of Para 1, because any other form of education tends not to guarantee the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, nor does it enable children who are subject to non-MTM education to participate as effectively in society.”⁵⁹

As pointed out above, any education of Indigenous children conducted in a dominant language, as is the norm in Canada, is an education that is subtractive of the child’s linguistic repertoire, and is thus thoroughly assimilative in effect. In causing harm to both the child’s personality and his or her culture, there is no doubt that it negatively affects the child’s potential for the fullest possible development. In so doing, the rights of Indigenous children under ICESR are clearly violated.

D. The International Labor Organization Convention No. 169 Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries of 1991 (ILO #169):⁶⁰

Though Canada is not party to this human rights instrument, it has added considerable substance to developing international linguistic rights standards for Indigenous Peoples by declaring the following in Article 28:

Children belonging to the peoples concerned shall, wherever practicable, be taught to read and write their own indigenous language or in the language most commonly used by the group to which they belong. When this is not practicable, the competent authorities shall undertake consultations with these peoples with a view to the adoption of measures to achieve this objective.

And:

Measures shall be taken to preserve and promote the development and practice of the indigenous language of the peoples concerned.

Article 29 of this Covenant also articulates the goal of education for Indigenous Peoples as follows:

*“The imparting of general knowledge and skills that will help children belonging to the peoples concerned to participate fully and on an equal footing in their own community and in the national community shall be the aim of education for these peoples.”*⁶¹

Here, clearly, is unequivocal recognition of the obligation of state education systems to provide Indigenous children the knowledge and skills needed to participate in their own

⁵⁸ Magga et al 2005:10 & 12 describing the cases of *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) and *Cyprus v. Turkey* (2001).

⁵⁹ Magga et al 2005:13.

⁶⁰ www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/62.htm

⁶¹ ILO Revised Convention (No. 169) concerning Indigenous and Tribal People in Independent Countries (1989) 28 I.L.M. 1382 (1989) in Magga et al 2004:2. See also deVarennes 1993a.

societies, as well as in the dominant society. Most central to the prerequisites for full and equal participation in a First Nations society is proficiency in the language of one's own people, and central to the fullest knowledge of one's culture is the opportunity to learn it through one's mother-tongue. But if any Indigenous children, or their children's children, are denied the opportunity to learn through the medium of their mother-tongue, as is the practice in Canada, they are being denied even the opportunity to participate fully in their own communities.

E. UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 2007:⁶²

Though this important document was shamefully not signed by Canada, it has accomplished significantly more to date than any other human rights instrument to raise international standards concerning educational and linguistic rights for Indigenous Peoples. A blunt statement in the preamble of this Declaration asserts "*the right of Indigenous families and communities to retain shared responsibility for the upbringing, training, education and well-being of their children, consistent with the rights of the child,*" something which is not even remotely possible where Indigenous communities and parents are forced to surrender their children to an education system conducted in the medium of a dominant language.

Other articles in the Declaration which guarantee important linguistic and educational rights denied in Canada include:

Article 3, which proclaims the right of Indigenous Peoples "*to self-determination...and cultural development.*"

Article 8 which declares that Indigenous Peoples "*have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture*" and mandates states to "*provide "effective mechanisms for prevention of, and redress for: (a) Any action which has the aim or effect of depriving them of their integrity as distinct peoples, or of their cultural values or ethnic identities;" [and] "Any form of forced assimilation or integration."*

Article 13 which declares that Indigenous Peoples have "*the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures...*"

Article 14 which confers "*the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages...*" and the right "*to those Indigenous Peoples "living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language."*

Article 24 which assures that "*Indigenous individuals have an equal right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.*"

⁶² United Nations General Assembly, A/61/L.67, www.afn.ca/misc/UNDR.pdf

Article 31 which establishes for Indigenous Peoples “*the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions,...oral traditions, literatures.....*”

Disturbingly, Canada was one of only four countries in the world, together with the US, Australia and New Zealand, which voted against this Declaration, in spite of the fact that it had actively and positively contributed to its final form for over two decades, and in spite of the fact that it is merely an aspirational document. What is equally troubling is the extent to which Canada and this block of nations acted to scuttle the Declaration altogether, in the days before the final UN vote.⁶³

F. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court of 17 July, 1998 (RSICC):⁶⁴

This Statute, to which Canada was, ironically, the first signatory, holds much hope for Indigenous Peoples. In the analysis of Anders-Baer et al (2008), a number of clauses in this statute could be readily interpreted to include subtractive forms of education as crimes against humanity. For example, its definition of “*persecution,*” alone, posits “*the intentional and severe deprivation of fundamental rights contrary to international law by reason of the identity of the group or collectivity to be a crime against humanity.*” Since there are now several court decisions and numerous international human rights instruments which could also be interpreted to include the right to MTM education as a human right (such as ILO #169),⁶⁵ this Statute could well be considered a catch-all statute bringing even human rights instruments not signed by Canada, to bear in Canada. Indeed, Anders-Baer et al conclude that “[*t*]he concept of ‘*crimes against humanity*’ provides a good basis for an evolution that will ultimately lead to the stigmatization through law of subtractive educational practices and policies.”⁶⁶ That linguistic genocide may sooner or later be specifically identified as a crime against humanity is heartening, but considering the imminent extinction of so many of Indigenous languages in Canada, it may simply not matter in the case of most languages.

While Canada is not a signatory to the most important international human rights instruments, it is a signatory to the *International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights*, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, and other instruments,⁶⁷ which means that it is bound to uphold their terms, at the very least. As well, the fact that Canada is not a signatory to other instruments⁶⁸ does not mean that this country can continue to turn a blind eye to evolving international standards in the matter of linguistic genocide and access to education for Indigenous Peoples.⁶⁹ In fact, Canada ignores such standards to its own peril, not only for the costs it incurs in inflicting harm on Indigenous Peoples, but also for the hypocrisy it reveals in Canada’s very public stand of posing with other western states “*as some sort of a human rights police force in other parts of the world in*

⁶³ Indigenous People’s Caucus 12 November 2006.

⁶⁴ www.unchr.ch/html/manu3/b/62.htm

⁶⁵ See also Skutnabb-Kangas 2008a:479-566, deVarennes 1993b.

⁶⁶ Anders-Baer et al 2008:17.

⁶⁷ See Skutnabb-Kangas 2008c.

⁶⁸ Skutnabb-Kangas 2000:493-496.

⁶⁹ deVarennes 1993:647-655 and 1993b.

the name of democracy."⁷⁰ According to Skutnabb-Kangas, "*Western States have created a myth of themselves as guardians of human rights in the world, including the myth that they respect all human rights themselves.*"⁷¹

In spite of the weaknesses in the Genocide Convention and the various attempts of many states to evade charges under the Convention, it will become increasingly difficult for these states to continue their subtractive and assimilationist educational practices since the link between the forcible imposition of education conducted in the medium of a dominant language and the dire consequences experienced by Indigenous Peoples is now indisputable. In other words, states will be unable to plead ignorance of these consequences much longer, and unable, therefore, to deny intent in the future.⁷² In the words of Anders-Baer et al, "*...international human rights law has developed to the point where policies of assimilation are now at odds with relevant international standards.*"⁷³ It is clearly in Canada's self-interest now to begin reading the writing on the wall, and thoroughly acquaint itself with the relevant research and the rising standards in linguistic and educational rights for Indigenous Peoples.⁷⁴

4. The dire state of Indigenous Education in Canada:⁷⁵

There is absolutely no doubt that the dismal state of Indigenous languages in Canada, as outlined in #1 above is a direct result of both historical and contemporary policies in this country. What has been far less obvious until recently is the extent to which the almost universal practice of subtractive education is a central factor in the persistent high rates of school non-completion among Inuit and First Nations children. Recently released statistics on school completion rates for Indigenous young people (2006) show that there has been no improvement in the rates in over a decade. In 1996 over fifty percent of Inuit and on-reserve First Nations youth age 21 to 24 had not completed school. In 2001 and 2006 the rates were precisely the same.⁷⁶

Considering the example of one Canadian province, a policy paper on Aboriginal Affairs as far back as 1989 called on the provincial government to "*cooperate with the Aboriginal people and the federal government in their efforts to retain and promote the Micmac and Maliseet languages*" as a matter of policy.⁷⁷ Across Canada there have been numerous expressions of pious concern about the dismal state of Indigenous languages for decades, yet nothing substantial has been done to address the concerns. Instead,

⁷⁰ Skutnabb-Kangas 2000:556

⁷¹ Skutnabb-Kangas 2000:549-557.

⁷² Poirier 1994, Anders-Baer et al 2008:8-9.

⁷³ Anders-Baer et al 2008:10.

⁷⁴ Skutnabb-Kangas 2007.

⁷⁵ Much of this section is drawn from Bear Nicholas 2008 draft.

⁷⁶ CESC 2007, Mendelson 2008:1, Richards 2008: 3-4. See also Goar 2008, Friesen 2008a, and Hambrook 2008. In New Brunswick alone, the rate of school completion for on-reserve youth in 2006 was only slightly higher, with about 55 percent completing school in this province. This is still a disturbing and telling statistic when compared to the average school completion rate of 80 to 90 percent among non-Aboriginal youth across Canada.

⁷⁷ NB Department of Intergovernmental Affairs 1989 quoted in Milne 1994:43.

subtractive and assimilative educational policies have continued to erode Indigenous languages at rapidly accelerating rates.

Another, and perhaps more troubling, concern is that even the so-called “successes” of Indigenous children in dominant language school systems do not actually bode entirely well for Indigenous forms of life and languages, much as Canadian authorities would argue otherwise. More often than not, success for Indigenous students in schools of the dominant society means assimilation to some degree or other. Considering proficiency in mother-tongue alone, many researchers have discovered an inverse correlation between level of education and level of mother-tongue proficiency, i.e., the higher the level of education, the lower the level of mother-tongue proficiency.⁷⁸ Some have gone so far as to assert that resistance to formal education may have been the single most important factor in the survival of Indigenous languages in the past. This inverse correlation should have begun to ring alarms well before now, but almost no one has dared to consider what it might mean.

The general attitude of Canada is that whatever assimilation policies may have existed in the past, they no longer exist in the present, especially now that residential schools have all been closed down.⁷⁹ But that was over twenty years ago (1986) and the decline in Indigenous languages has proceeded more dramatically in the same period, than ever before.⁸⁰ Though the residual effects of residential school indoctrination are at least partly to blame, the international research has pointed out unequivocally that Indigenous children in most countries today, including Canada, are still “*effectively transferred to the dominant group linguistically and culturally,*” in any schools where education is conducted in the medium of the dominant language, where there is no reasonable alternative, and where “*parents do not have enough solid research-based knowledge about the long-term consequences of the ‘choices’.*”⁸¹ This would include most, schools in Canada, since education in a dominant language is effectively mandated by force of law in this country.

Unfortunately, this situation includes even First Nation communities in Canada where schools are, for the most part, still operated under the control of the federal department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), and now increasingly under the thumb of the provinces, which together effectively compel these schools to use dominant-language provincial curriculum materials and teachers trained in dominant language institutions. Anders-Baer et al are blunt about what is occurring:

*“Today’s indigenous and minority education is organized **contrary to solid research evidence** about how best to enable [indigenous] children to achieve academically in school. Dominant language medium education for indigenous children often curtails the development of the children’s capabilities, perpetuates poverty, and causes serious mental harm.”⁸²*

⁷⁸ Bear Nicholas 1996:5.

⁷⁹ Chrisjohn 1998.

⁸⁰ King 1995:8.

⁸¹ Anders-Baer et al 2008:4.

⁸² Anders-Baer et al 2008:4.

5. The good news from international research on the benefits of Bilingualism and MTM education for Indigenous Peoples:

In the last two or three decades Indigenous educators in Norway, New Zealand, Hawaii, India, Nepal, and other pockets around the world, have been taking control of the education systems of their children by implementing MTM education, and the results have been astounding. In Canada, as well, more than two dozen First Nations and Inuit communities are currently offering education to their students in the medium of the mother-tongue, with excellent results.⁸³ What these brave communities are demonstrating, is something that was not easily demonstrated before--that there are enormous educational and linguistic benefits to be gained from such programs.

Drawing from the research into these efforts Magga et al have described the ideal MTM education as follows:

“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).”⁸⁴

And the benefits in this form of education are now being seen to accrue not only to endangered languages, but also to their speakers, their communities and cultures, as described in this quote from Colin Baker:

“The evaluations of immersion bilingual education and heritage language education tend to favor ‘strong’ forms of bilingual education and heritage language education. Such studies indicate that such bilingual education not only results in bilingualism and biliteracy but also tends to heighten achievement across the curriculum. Strong forms of bilingual education tend to raise the standards and performance of the children. However, these results do not stop at individual achievement. In societal terms, there are benefits for the economy in strong forms of bilingual education.”⁸⁵

According to Jim Cummings as early as 1984, these same principles apply even to minority language students judged to be academically at risk:

⁸³ Heimbecker 1997. See also Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Culture 2005:87-88, Bear Nicholas 2005, and transcripts of a Conference on Immersion Education held at St. Thomas University, October 2005 at www.educatorsforimmersion.com.

⁸⁴ Magga et al 2005:7. See also Save the Children 2007:4-5.

⁸⁵ Baker 2006:287. See also Genesee 1976 & 1987, Cummins 1984 & 1991, Linde & Lofgren 1988, Danesi 1988, Lindholm 1990, Lindholm & Aclan 1991 and 1989, Skutnabb-Kangas 2000:570-573, 600-612, 2005, Lauctus 2000, Thomas & Collier 2002, UNESCO 2003, Benson 2004, and Save the Children 2007:16-17 for educational benefits, and Skutnabb-Kangas 2000 & 2003, Nettle & Romaine 2000, and Maffi 2001, for the broader benefits in terms of peace, cultural and biological diversity, and sustainability to be derived from the maintenance of Indigenous languages.

“[T]here is evidence that strong promotion of L1 [mother tongue] proficiency represents an effective way of developing a conceptual and academic foundation for acquiring English literacy [for all students].”⁸⁶

Such an understanding of the benefits of MTM education for all students has been emerging from hundreds of studies world-wide and for over thirty years.⁸⁷ And overwhelmingly, the greatest educational benefits have been found to accrue to those students with the longest exposure (late-exit students) to MTM education. In a study comparing Spanish speaking minority students in English only programs, with early-exit MTM students, and late-exit MTM students, the results were consistent, though contrary to what received wisdom has been saying:

The late-exit students got the best results [in mathematics and general achievement]. In addition, they were the only ones who had a chance to achieve native levels of English later on, whereas the other two groups were, after an initial boost, falling progressively further behind, and were judged as probably never being able to catch up to native English-speaking peers in English or general school achievement.”⁸⁸

In their summary of another study, the largest longitudinal study ever undertaken, including all types of educational programs and 210,000 students, Magga et al state that *“[A]cross all the models, those students who reached the highest levels of both bilingualism and school achievement were the ones where the children’s mother tongue was the main medium of education for the most extended period of time.”⁸⁹*

Indeed, the expert papers discussed here have received virtually no attention at all, nor has there been any mention of the works of Anders-Baer, Dunbar, Skutnabb-Kangas or Magga in the latest flurry of proposals for improving the education of Indigenous children in Canada.⁹⁰ Yet, the knowledge of enormous benefits to be gained from MTM education has been around in Canada as early as the 1970s.⁹¹ Almost two decades ago, for example, a study by the Standing Committee on Indian Affairs declared that

“Research has shown rather conclusively that mother-tongue language development can enhance second language acquisition: in other words, that literacy skills first learned in the mother tongue are transferable to second languages.”⁹²

And a 1994 study of literacy issued by the Assembly of First Nations also asserted that *“Studies completed by UNESCO have demonstrated that learning in the official languages was more successful if literacy was established in the mother tongue first. Learning First Nations mother tongue literacy is the most important factor towards attaining individual / collective empowerment”⁹³*

⁸⁶ Cummins 1984:150-151.

⁸⁷ Magga et al 2005:4.

⁸⁸ Magga et al 2005:5 drawn from Ramirez et al 1991.

⁸⁹ Magga et al 2005:5 drawn from Thomas & Collier 2002.

⁹⁰ See for example Mendelson 2008.

⁹¹ Lambert & Tucker 1972.

⁹² Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs 1990:5.

⁹³ Assembly of First Nations 1994:6.

These studies hold astounding implications for the education of Indigenous children in Canada, especially in the current spate of hand-wringing over high push-out rates for Indigenous students. More than anything, the studies demonstrate, beyond a doubt, that not only are there enormous educational benefits to be derived from late-exit MTM programs, but also that educators across the board in Canada have been looking in all the wrong directions for answers to address the dismal failures in the education of Indigenous children. This phenomenon is addressed further below under the topic of Barriers to MTM Education.

6. The benefits of Bilingualism to First Nations:

The scenario of all First Nations citizens becoming proficient in their mother tongue is almost too wonderful to imagine, but it is not an unreasonable goal. More than half of the world is bilingual, and living proof of the cognitive, social and economic benefits to be gained from bilingualism, as have already been discussed above. Indeed, there are huge economic benefits to be derived from MTM education for First Nations insofar as it could save enormous costs now spent on poverty, alcoholism, poor health, violence, suicide, and in picking up the pieces. Just imagine what these monies could be used for instead!

The substantial benefits to be gained by First Nations from MTM education can be seen in the many wonderful examples set by Indigenous Peoples around the world. Many other benefits to First Nations would also be significant, as can be seen in the many wonderful examples where the dismal future of so many Indigenous languages and peoples around the world has been turned completely around. One of the most important benefits could be a natural revitalization of First Nations' forms of life, their specific ceremonies, values, and practices, as derived from the specific languages, rather than from the sterile and destructive value systems of a consumer society, or from the pervasive stock of Pan-Indianisms and invented traditions, including the Medicine Wheel.⁹⁴ The government of First Nations could then be conducted in the medium of the mother-tongue, as has happened for the Saami of Norway,⁹⁵ and this would open government processes to the meaningful and active participation of all, including elders. Indeed, the ability of children to communicate with elders in the mother-tongue would certainly reignite the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and traditions, which decline has been so lamented, but inevitable under present circumstances. From such a pervasive revitalization of language and culture would likely come, also, a flourishing of creativity and cultural growth through the development of oral and written literature and other traditional and contemporary art forms. Most of all, this revitalization could stand as a natural form of resistance against the growing pressure on First Nations people to assimilate. It could also generate renewed ties to traditional lands and resources, and a stronger resolve to protect them, rather than to succumb to the enticements of corporate culture.

⁹⁴ Bear Nicholas 2008a:26-27.

⁹⁵ www.samediggi.fi/index.php?lang=english

B. THE GOALS: LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL SURVIVAL AND EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS FOR FIRST NATIONS YOUTH

Linguistic and Cultural Survival and Educational Success for First Nations:

It should be clear by now that the most important objective for achieving linguistic survival and educational opportunities for First Nations young people would be for both provincial and federal governments to commit to providing the option of MTM education in all jurisdictions where there are Indigenous children, as is already the case in Norway. In that country linguistic rights legislation in 1987 mandated the Saami language to be the medium of instruction in all Saami areas. As well, Saami children living outside of those areas were accorded the right to an education in the medium of their language as long as there are at least ten students who want it.⁹⁶ In the twenty plus years since this legislation was established the Saami language has developed to the point where it is no longer endangered (as it was in the 1980s) and where it is now possible to pursue an education in the medium of the Saami language all the way through to advanced graduate studies.

In spite of the many assimilationist pressures on First Nations, and in large part because of them, some Indigenous communities in Canada have gone ahead, and, without benefit of positive language laws, cobbled together their own MTM schools, mostly without help from the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). Indeed, the most effective MTM programs in Canada have been those in which parents have simply established MTM program for those who wanted it, without imposing them on anyone. And most of these programs have met with considerable educational success, notably in schools in the Arctic,⁹⁷ at Kahnawake in Quebec,⁹⁸ at Six Nations in Ontario,⁹⁹ at Eskasoni in Nova Scotia,¹⁰⁰ at Atahm's Lake in British Columbia,¹⁰¹ and among the Cree in Quebec.¹⁰² That governments and government agencies responsible for Indigenous languages and education appear unable to support and promote these monumental efforts is very telling. The results from these schools have already been overwhelmingly consistent with the international research that has found significant educational and linguistic benefit in MTM programs for minority and Indigenous children worldwide.¹⁰³ The results confirm that high level proficiency in literacy and speaking (not just basic communications skills¹⁰⁴) in mother-tongue, is an essential element in improved academic achievement, and in the ability, even, to become more proficient in dominant languages.¹⁰⁵ It is such research results to which the most prominent experts in Indigenous education today appear to be steadfastly oblivious.

⁹⁶ Aikio-Puoskari 2009 forthcoming.

⁹⁷ Patrick & Shearwood 1999, Taylor et al 2001.

⁹⁸ Hoover and The Kanien'kehaka Raotitiohkwa Cultural Center 1992.

⁹⁹ Key 2004, Davis 2008.

¹⁰⁰ Wade 2007: 144-148.

¹⁰¹ McIvor 2006.

¹⁰² McAlpine & Herodier 1994.

¹⁰³ Dutcher 2004, Magga et al 2005:3-5, Kosonen, Young & Malone 2007:6-9, Danesi 1988; Klaus 2003, Troike 1978, Wilson & Kamana 2001, King 2001.

¹⁰⁴ Cummins 2008.

¹⁰⁵ See Lindholm & Aclan 1991, and Cummings 2008.

As to just what should comprise an effective MTM program, Skutnabb-Kangas has provided a useful list of components,¹⁰⁶ provided here only in summary form:

- “1. *the mother tongue should be the main teaching language for the first eight years.*
2. *good teaching of a dominant local or national language as a subject.*
3. *transfer from mother tongue medium teaching to using a dominant local or national language as a teaching language [no earlier than grade 7 for cognitive or linguistically demanding subjects]*
4. *additional languages as subjects.*
5. *content-sensitive cultural content and methods.*
6. *well-trained bi- or multilingual teachers.*
7. *systemic changes in school or society are needed to increase access. This includes knowledge about how the present system harms humanity.”*

C. THE IDEOLOGICAL BARRIERS TO MTM:

In order to develop effective strategies to reach our goals of linguistic and cultural survival, as well as high levels of educational achievement on the part of our young, it is not enough to learn only about the promising research into what works and what does not. One needs to understand what barriers have existed in the past and what barriers continue to stand in the way. This is the difficult part because many of the barriers come from a natural reluctance for all parties to change engrained ways of thinking or to challenge established wisdom. Nevertheless, where the matter of the future survival of Indigenous languages is concerned, and where the educational success of First Nations children is concerned, it is precisely the engrained thinking and established wisdom that we must now have the courage to challenge, since the old strategies and received wisdoms are clearly failing. We will first consider Ideological Barriers.

1. The tendency to consider education and language as two separate issues:

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper there is no lack of concern over the matter of “*the educational gap,*”¹⁰⁷ but there has been virtually no attention to the matter of the disturbing decline in First Nations languages, or to its relation to the “*gap.*” In almost no study or policy proposal has there been any mention whatsoever of MTM education, even though research on this form of education as central to language survival has been available since the 1970s. The most any of these studies has been able to propose is more and better language teaching in core programs, which provide for the teaching of Indigenous languages as a marginalized add-on in English or French-medium education programs. Only one Canadian study has praised pre-school MTM programs for Indigenous children, but it concludes with a chilling comment:

*“the program is aimed at pre-schoolers and therefore has the chance to establish the Maori language and culture with children **before the assimilation of the regular school system sets in.**”*¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ See Skutnabb-kangas 2008c:5-7 for details and rationales.

¹⁰⁷ See Dunville 2008.

¹⁰⁸ MacPherson 1991:14.

Strikingly, there is no mention in this particular report of the assimilation that occurs in the regular school system in Canada, but the implication is that such assimilation is normal. Of even more shocking concern is the advocacy in some studies¹⁰⁹ for English Second Language (ESL) techniques to be used in First Nations schools, a recommendation which is oblivious to the cultural racism inherent in ESL programs.¹¹⁰

Only in the major 2005 study of Aboriginal languages funded by Heritage Canada is there any mention of immersion education. But even here there is a clear inability to address the promise of MTM education. Instead what is addressed is “*immersion language education*,” which reveals that the authors are speaking only of immersion as a tool in language education, rather than education in the medium of the language. Though the authors state that immersion language education has “*clear educational and social benefits*,” and though they urge that funding for immersion language education be made available to First Nations from some of the same funds allocated for official languages in Canada, they dedicate only two pages out of 140 to the topic, and totally fail to make the distinction between “*immersion language education*” and education in the medium of the language. In so doing they have completely missed an opportunity to educate on the promise of MTM education in the matter of linguistic survival. Indeed the two page section on the matter concludes un-enthusiastically with the comment that “*immersion language education can play an important role in language revitalization.*”¹¹¹

Considering the omission of MTM education from most reports on either education or language survival for First Nations, it is no surprise that educators in Canada do not even seem aware of its promising potential, or of the fact that it is one of the most important linguistic rights to which Indigenous Peoples are entitled. But ignorance is no excuse since recognition and support of the linguistic rights of all must come before demand for those rights, especially in the case of subjugated peoples, as in Canada.

If educational authorities in Canada could accept the mounting research evidence about the relationship of linguistic genocide and subtractive education to the consistently poor educational consequences experienced by Indigenous Peoples, we could now begin devoting our collective energies and resources to building a new MTM-based educational system for Indigenous Peoples, rather than wasting more time and money in the endless and fruitless efforts now aimed at maintaining practices that do not work.

2. Racist and Assimilationist Ideologies

A second issue that needs to be understood is the prevalence of assimilationist and racist ideologies today, not only on the part of those who wish that First Nations people would assimilate, but also, somewhat surprisingly, in our own thinking. Here a deeper look at the sources of racism and assimilation is needed in order to understand how deeply rooted these processes have been in the dispossession and theft of Indigenous lands and resources that began in the 16th and 17th Centuries.

¹⁰⁹ See for example Garrow et al 1996:38.

¹¹⁰ Phillipson 1992:20.

¹¹¹ Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures 2005:87-88.

Early racist ideologies that justified dispossession held that Indigenous Peoples were savage or not quite human, and therefore not deserving of any human rights, including rights to life, liberty and land. It is these ideologies that justified wars and violence against First Nations wherever they stood in the way of the European drive for wealth and empire.

By the 19th Century another racist ideology began to take shape in the belief that physical characteristics determined internal characteristics, and in the belief that there was a natural hierarchy of “races” ranging from darker and so-called “uncivilized” ones, to whiter and presumably more civilized ones. Known as Social Evolutionism, it held that higher “races” had a duty to civilize the “lower” ones. On the one hand, it has served to justify the continuing dispossession of First Nations occurring in the name of Manifest Destiny across North America at the time. On the other hand, it legitimated the establishment of the residential school system, which was dedicated to assimilating Indigenous Peoples and eradicating their languages. Indeed, the eradication of Indigenous languages was considered essential to the process of civilization since they were understood to be the link which tied Indigenous Peoples to their lands.¹¹² Thus, where Social Evolutionism legitimated dispossession, residential schools and linguistic destruction facilitated the process.

In the early 1900s a new and ominous twist was added to the ideology of Social Evolutionism. It was the belief in Eugenics, which held that the world would benefit from the eradication of undesirables, including not only Blacks and “Indians,” but also persons judged to be “feeble-minded.”¹¹³ It saw the inception of intelligence testing,¹¹⁴ the sterilization of unsuspecting Indigenous women, life threatening medical experiments on Indigenous children in residential schools, the notorious declaration by Duncan Campbell Scott, Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs, that the objective of his department was “*to continue until where is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed in to the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department...*,”¹¹⁵ and even the Holocaust.¹¹⁶

With regard to First Nations Peoples in the Americas, Chrisjohn and Young have described the drive for assimilation as rooted in the need to

“cover up the wholesale theft of North America from Aboriginal Peoples, to avoid having to compensate those whose property was stolen, to obviate the need to treat fairly with those owning property to be stolen in the future, and to obliterate the chain linking specific genocidal actions taken against Aboriginal Peoples (such as the actions that occurred in residential schools) to the legal, political, economic, and social elite that conceived and implemented genocide.”¹¹⁷

¹¹² Bear Nicholas 2001:12.

¹¹³ Black 2003, McLaren 1990.

¹¹⁴ Gersh 1987.

¹¹⁵ Titley 1986:50.

¹¹⁶ Bauman 1989.

¹¹⁷ Chrisjohn & Young 1997:56.

The fact that racism and assimilation are still alive today is thus rooted in the material reality that Indigenous Peoples are still denied their lands and resources. For the most part, in fact, it is educational and political authorities within the dominant society who continue to promote solutions based in assimilationist ideologies. Since it is these authorities who also have access to the resources to fund research, it explains why research results generally manage to echo and support such solutions, while routinely ignoring or dismissing the large bodies of research that critique such ideologies, as is the case with research into the role of linguistic genocide in education.¹¹⁸ And while some analyses may offer important suggestions, such as the need for Indigenous control and jurisdiction over education,¹¹⁹ the farthest most existing analyses go in the matter of language survival is to emphasize only the need for more and better language teaching (core programs) in schools, in spite of the fact that core language programs in school have generally failed to produce any fluent speakers. Most studies, as a result, still overwhelmingly miss the most important ingredient-- MTM education, without which there will be neither language survival for Indigenous Peoples, nor any potential for educational success.

3. Deficit Theories in Education

It is directly out of the ideologies of racism and assimilation that a particular class of educational theories has arisen and achieved the status of “*established wisdom*,” taught even in some universities today as legitimate. They can only be referred to as “deficit theories,” since they posit, essentially, that something is defective in the Indigenous child, his or her language, culture, community, family, or so-called “race”, rather than in the education system, the medium of instruction, or in the larger society. Central to these theories is the belief that there are presumed genetic differences or characteristics in Indigenous children which account for supposed “*Aboriginal learning styles*,”¹²⁰ and susceptibilities to all sorts of “problematic” behaviors, including suicide, alcoholism, crime,¹²¹ and so on. These theories are cited also to explain supposed “*learning disorders*,” as well as the low academic performance and so-called high “drop-out” rates of Indigenous children.

Solutions derived from these theories, therefore, generally focus on fixing or adjusting the child through deficit-based or compensatory strategies which include more and more testing, tracking, teacher-aides and tutors in English (or French), and even more colorful curriculum materials, since First Nations children supposedly cannot learn from black and white texts(!). The supposed solutions to First Nations “*behavioral disorders*” and/or “*difficulties*” in adjusting to school consist of the employment of more and more psychologists, social workers, and support workers to counsel, and more often than not, drug First Nations children judged to be lacking in social skills and anger management strategies. Nowhere in this scheme is there concern for developing and building on the

¹¹⁸ Skutnabb-Kangas 1986:172. See for example Mendelson 2008, Richards 2008, Canadian Press 2008, Friesen 2008, *The Miramichi Leader* 2008. See also The Learning Partnership (www.thelearningpartnership.ca), The CD Howe Institute (www.cdhowe.org), The Fraser Institute (www.fraserinstitute.org).

¹¹⁹ NIB/AFN 1988a & b, MacPherson 1991, McCue & Associates 1999.

¹²⁰ Sawyer 1991, Leavitt & Merasty 1994, Province of New Brunswick 1997.

¹²¹ Dalley et al 2000.

child's proficiencies in his or her own culture and language as the basis for learning other proficiencies. In the matter of high unemployment among First Nations, the solution is presumed to be more career-counseling, streaming of students into vocations at earlier ages; and psychometric testing, though testing with instruments developed for the dominant society poses serious ethical issues.¹²²

Another class of solutions aimed at educators and school personnel advocates “*understanding*” for the presumed genetic and cognitive differences (“*learning styles*”) in Indigenous children, which, if properly achieved, would presumably mean better support for Indigenous children in adjusting to school.¹²³ A related strategy calls for Indigenousizing the school, through the development of “*culturally-appropriate*” curriculum, the hiring of more First Nations people in the schools, the establishment of more core language and culture teaching, and more pressure on parents and communities to become involved in these efforts.¹²⁴ As well-intentioned as these strategies may seem, it is now quite clear that while they are ostensibly offered in the interest of Indigenous children, they are not only ineffective, but actually work to support assimilationist goals insofar as they serve to attract Indigenous children into what is essentially a destructive system for them. In other words, they are mere window-dressing that effectively conceals and promotes the real educational agenda of assimilation.¹²⁵

In effect, the so-called new solutions for “*helping*” Indigenous children to conform to the school are simply more of the same old solutions that have been employed since the early days of integration in the 1970s,¹²⁶ and they are still predominantly founded on the same ideologies that openly advocated for assimilation in the 1960s. Insofar as they are based on the thesis that educational problems stem from the presumed individual and internal characteristics of First Nations children, they are no less racist than the ideologies of the past four centuries. And the extent to which educational authorities buy into these theories blaming Indigenous Peoples even for the social, political, and economic disarray in their communities,¹²⁷ illustrates how well they serve to deflect the blame and responsibility from the larger society or the school, onto First Nations children, their parents, their culture, or even their genes for the difficulties experienced by Indigenous children in school. This phenomenon has been quite aptly described as “*Blaming the Victim,*”¹²⁸ and it will continue to justify the exercise of power and control over subordinated peoples¹²⁹ until such time as those peoples stand together to deny the legitimacy of deficit-based theories in education.

¹²² Chrisjohn, Pace, Young & Mrochuk 1998:199-219, Deyhle 1987, Greenfield 1997, Stafford 2005.

¹²³ See Provincial Indian Education Curriculum Development Advisory Committee 1989, Perley 1997 & 1999.

¹²⁴ Skutnabb-Kangas 1986:166-167 and 1988:32-36, Phillipson 1992, and Gonzalez with Melis 2000. See for example Friesen 2008a which praises the presence of Aboriginal elders in schools as one solution.

¹²⁵ Bear Nicholas 2001:18-19. See for example Friesen 2008a which praises the presence of Aboriginal elders in schools as one solution.

¹²⁶ i.e., National Indian Brotherhood 1972, Union of New Brunswick Indians 1972.

¹²⁷ Which circumstances should now be understood as a consequence of dispossession and linguistic genocide worldwide.

¹²⁸ Ryan 1971.

¹²⁹ Wotherspoon, T., 1991.

4. English only Ideologies:

One form of racist and assimilationist ideologies are the English-only ideologies which characterize most countries of the former British empire.¹³⁰ For the most part English-only ideologies rest on a whole host of erroneous beliefs (received wisdom) about the learning and teaching of English. As listed by Robert Phillipson, they include the following fallacies:

1. *English is best taught monolingually*
2. *The ideal teacher of English is a native [English] speaker*
3. *The earlier English is taught, the better the results*
4. *The more English is taught, the better the results*
5. *If other languages are used much, standards of English will drop.*¹³¹

What the research on MTM education programs is telling us, however, is precisely the opposite from this received wisdom:

1. English is best taught bilingually in mother-tongue medium schools;
2. English is best taught by bilingual teachers who speak the language of their pupils;
3. English is best learned once pupils are fully proficient in their mother-tongue;
4. The more English is taught to Indigenous children before they are fully proficient in mother-tongue, the less proficient is their English;
5. The use of mother-tongue as the medium of instruction for 6 to 8 years produces generally more proficient English speakers.

Yet one glance at schools, both on and off reserve, would demonstrate the extent to which these fallacies dominate educational policies for First Nations students.

1. Most teachers in English-medium schools are monolinguals;
2. English teachers are rarely speakers of an Indigenous language, or of any other one for that matter;
3. the learning of English is now being emphasized earlier and earlier in preschool by state authorities, even, shockingly, in mother-tongue medium programs on reserve;
4. more English and more English tutoring are still the primary responses to the so-called “educational gap”; and
5. the use of mother-tongue in school, except in core language programs, is still discouraged out of fear that it will hurt children’s opportunities to learn English.

What we have here is the persistence of English-only fallacies and received wisdoms that have survived not because they are correct, but because they serve the interests of the wealthy and powerful elements in society.¹³² As such, they present a huge barrier to the potential of MTM education for First Nations children, especially when First Nations people, themselves, come to believe in them.

¹³⁰ Gonzalez with Melis 2000.

¹³¹ Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas 1986, Phillipson 1992:185, Skutnabb-Kangas 2000:575-578.

¹³² Skutnabb-Kangas 1986, 1990 & 2000:378-462. .

5. The effects of Assimilation in the Education of First Nations people:

It is well known that state-run education systems play an enormous role in indoctrinating all Canadians into the political and economic ideologies of the state¹³³, chief among which is the belief in monolingual proficiency in the dominant language as “*a passport to social and economic advantage.*”¹³⁴ As former Anthropology Professor Richard Costello has argued in relation to the Mi’kmaq:

*“Today, Canadian government policy encourages young Micmac to participate in a system of state-supported universal education. The outcome of this experience is not only literacy in English or French, but also a political indoctrination in support of the ideals of parliamentary democracy and capitalist free-enterprise.”*¹³⁵

For Indigenous students in provincial schools, this indoctrination amounts to another form of cultural genocide since the social, economic, political and spiritual values of the dominant society imposed on them are generally not only alien, but also usually destructive of Indigenous forms of life. And the destruction is particularly effective when Indigenous children are educated solely in the dominant language.¹³⁶

How these ideologies replicate themselves occurs in several ways. Clearly, one way has been the extent to which all Indigenous People have themselves been indoctrinated, as was so poignantly expressed by the former Premier of the Northwest Territories, Steven Kakfwi as follows:

*“No human being would allow anyone to suggest that they are worthless, that they have no right to exist in continuity of themselves in the future, no values worth passing on to others in the future. No people would knowingly give away their right to educate their children to someone else of whom they have no understanding, except where people have been led to believe they do not have such rights.”*¹³⁷

This statement demonstrates the awful damage done to Indigenous Peoples who for the most part are indoctrinated, often through the means of shame and punishment, to accept alien values and alien authority over their lives. Kakfwi’s statement also shows how people subjected to indoctrination then come to replicate the values they have internalized in the myriad of decisions that they make as adults. Central to most values internalized by colonized peoples is a high value placed on literacy in the dominant language, which is often based on two mistaken beliefs derived from English-only ideologies-- that Indigenous languages have little practical value in the modern world, and that monolingualism in a dominant language is a valid goal.¹³⁸ This process, also

¹³³ Apple 1982, Delpit 1988. Most of the obstacles listed in Brod & McQuiston 1997:153 relate to the consequences of this indoctrination.

¹³⁴ Nettle & Romaine 2000:138.

¹³⁵ Costello 1988:9. See also Bear Nicholas 1997, *New York Times* 1999.

¹³⁶ See for example Temple 1988 and Rasmussen 2000.

¹³⁷ Kakfwi 1977:143.

¹³⁸ Phillipson 1988:349, Brod & McQuiston 1998.

known as “*self-colonization*” or “*neocolonialism*,” presents a difficult challenge to Indigenous communities, but it is one which must be understood as a direct consequence of the punishment, shame and indoctrination experienced by almost all First Nations people in education:¹³⁹

Sometimes, too, even solid new policy directions can be stymied by the power of assimilationist and English-only ideologies. Such is the case of the bold new declaration of the National Indian Brotherhood titled “Indian Control of Indian Education” of 1972 (ICIE).¹⁴⁰ Previous to that declaration the principle of assimilation had been openly advocated as national policy in the Hawthorne Report¹⁴¹ and the notorious White Paper of 1969¹⁴². But after those policies were unequivocally rejected by First Nations leaders in the ICIE paper, assimilation literally became a bad word, one which even the federal government dared not espouse. As revolutionary as the ICIE policy was, however, it contained seeds that would eventually deter our peoples from achieving the high goals it set out to achieve. Though it pushed strongly for education of First Nations youth to be controlled and operated by First Nations, and though it was the first to declare the right of First Nations to educate their children in the medium of the mother-tongue, there were two loopholes in the policy.

One was the fact that ICIE sanctioned integrated education in provincial schools as a reasonable alternative to the day schools that had been operating on reserves, as long as First Nations communities could acquire some measure of control over the process, and as long as curriculum and personnel could be put in place to honor and reflect First Nations cultures in provincial schools.¹⁴³ In many ways, the acceptance of, and even the enthusiasm for integration at the time paralleled the aspirations of American Blacks who were just emerging from their long struggle against racial segregation. But the situation of First Nations was very different from that of American Blacks insofar as First Nations had their own languages and unique forms of life that they fervently hoped to perpetuate.

What the authors of ICIE could not have foreseen was the speed with which First Nations languages would begin to disintegrate in a system operated exclusively in the medium of a dominant language, and they could not have foreseen the enormous power and effect of assimilation, as described above, on their children in an English- or French-medium of instruction. But the hope was high that integration would open doors of opportunity in Canadian society, without threatening First Nations languages and cultures.

The other loophole in the policy lay in the need for First Nations people to be trained as teachers to replace the non-Native teachers who had tried so openly to assimilate First Nations children. It lay in the very plan to have large cohorts of First Nations people across the country trained to become teachers. Almost immediately universities queued up to receive the large amounts of money suddenly made available for them to provide

¹³⁹ Altbach 1971, Senese 1991, Bear Nicholas 2001:22-24.

¹⁴⁰ National Indian Brotherhood 1972.

¹⁴¹ Hawthorne 1966-67.

¹⁴² Government of Canada 1969.

¹⁴³ NIB 1972.

the training. Once again, the authors of the ICIE policy could not have foreseen that this training of First Nations teachers would actually serve to indoctrinate teachers in at least one key area—in the priority of English as the medium of instruction. What invariably happened was that the newly minted teachers returned home after their training and began to teach primarily in the medium of English (or French) using only dominant society curriculum. While there were some immeasurable benefits of having First Nations children taught by First Nations people, the fact that these teachers, who were mostly fluent in their mother-tongue, were teaching in the medium of English or French, sent a strong message to young people regarding the priority of English (or French) over the mother-tongue.¹⁴⁴

It is within these dynamics that the pressure to become monolingual English speakers may be understood as a central strategy of the powerful elites to maintain power and control over the lives and lands of Indigenous Peoples, even today. Indeed, the usual choice they offer is “*either to learn English and give up mother-tongue, or remain poor.*” But this “either-or choice is not a free choice when relatively poor and weak linguistic minorities are given no option but a mandatory subtractive education in order to learn English, as is the case for Indigenous children in most of Canada. The reality is that it does not need to be an either/or choice.¹⁴⁵ As Nettle and Romaine have stated:

“Attempts to ‘modernize’ people by force are thus at best misguided, and at worst conceal other agendas. We accept that the modern world economy will require many more people to use English and the other global languages, but this does not mean that they have to lose their mother tongues if they choose not to do so. It is not an either-or choice.”¹⁴⁶

Considering what is now known about the many benefits of bilingualism and MTM education (enhanced proficiency in MT and a dominant language, as well as improved opportunity for school completion and economic benefit) it must now be recognized that in place of the “either-or” choice, the goal for Indigenous Peoples must be presented as “both-and”, both mother-tongue AND collective economic development.¹⁴⁷

D. Legal, Political & Material Barriers to MTM

Education

Where ideological barriers are difficult to change or resist, the following legal, political and material barriers are more amenable to action, as daunting as they may seem.

1. Lack of First Nations Control over First Nations Education:

In spite of the hopes raised by the ICIE policy developed by the National Indian Brotherhood in 1972, the promise of full First Nations control over community schools has been largely inhibited by a myriad of imposed regulations demonstrating that

¹⁴⁴ Another way in which English-only ideologies get to replicate themselves occurs when English monolinguals are hired as teachers for First Nations schools. See Costello 1988:8-9, Taylor, Crago & McAlpine 1993:7-9, and Bear Nicholas 2001:22-24.

¹⁴⁵ See Skutnabb-Kangas 2000:291-471 (esp. p. 371) for a comprehensive articulation of these issues.

¹⁴⁶ Nettle & Romaine 2000:147.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

administration and control are two different things.¹⁴⁸ With only a few exceptions these schools have turned out to be only “*band-operated*” schools, as opposed to “*band-controlled*” schools.

In Canada, a troubling new model of educational governance is now being promoted. It is the corporate structure which allows bodies of people claiming educational expertise to access funding from the Federal Government to form decision-making bodies over First Nations education, without any particularly democratic form of membership where First Nations communities are concerned. One such body now in existence is tri-partite in make-up with federal, provincial, and First Nations representatives, as was first recommended in a 1996 study.¹⁴⁹ What is troubling about this format is that it has removed decision-making and control over education from First Nations parents and communities altogether. Though it is currently made up of a majority of First Nations individuals, several of those individuals are employees of either the federal or provincial government, which means that the federal and provincial governments are positioned to exercise considerable control within the organization—clearly not the sort of First Nations jurisdiction over education envisaged by ICIE in 1972, or by succeeding reports out of the AFN over the years. Indeed, though this body may include some education directors and chiefs or former chiefs from First Nations communities, it is under no mandate to make public its decisions, to hold public meetings in the communities or to be accountable to parents or First Nations governments. In fact, one of the first duties it accepted was to advise the provincial government on matters pertaining to education on reserve,¹⁵⁰ even though provincial governments have no jurisdiction on reserve.

Another troubling agreement that this organization has developed is one in which “*50% of the fees paid by First Nations students attending public schools will be reinvested in the school district to be specifically targeted to First Nations education initiatives.*”¹⁵¹ What is problematic about this agreement is that it is not likely to make MTM education possible since decisions regarding the allocation of those funds will be shared and probably dominated by the requirements of the provincial school system. Considering that MTM education needs to be established first at an early preschool level, there is almost no way that the extra funds for provincial schools are likely to be used for this purpose since such early preschool programs currently exist only on reserve.

While individuals involved in these new education initiatives may have sincere desires to make a positive contribution towards improving First Nations Education, it is clear that the structure is deeply flawed. As for MTM education, there is no evidence that any attention at all is being paid to international research in the matter,¹⁵² nor is there

¹⁴⁸ Bear Nicholas 2001:16-17.

¹⁴⁹ Garrow et al 1996, Communications New Brunswick, 2005.

¹⁵⁰ Dube to First Nation Education Initiative (NB), October 11, 2005.

¹⁵¹ Enhanced First Nation Education Programs and Services Agreement 2008, Memorandum of Understanding 2008, Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, Fact Sheet at www.cmec.ca/releases/press.em.stm?id=87

¹⁵² Though expertise in First Nations education was supposed to have been the contribution of the province to the process according to the May 2005 announcement of the initial \$400,000 grant to this educational initiative. Province of NB 2005. www.gnb.ca/cnb/news/edu/2005e0600ed.htm

evidence of any awareness or concern with linguistic rights, or the harm now known to be inflicted on Indigenous populations by education in the medium of a dominant language. What is most disturbing about this development is the ease with which the federal and provincial governments have been able to privatize decision-making in education for Indigenous Peoples, and to maintain control over the process, without so much as a nod to democratic principles.

a. external controls inhibiting language maintenance

Where language is concerned, just a few examples will suffice here to demonstrate the assimilationist power of still existing external controls:

- i.** in the requirements of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) that mandate the use of provincial (English or French language) curriculum (except in Quebec and the NWT),¹⁵³ and the employment of teachers trained and certified by English or French teacher-training institutions;
- ii.** in the pressure being placed on First Nations schools to integrate their education programs more closely with provincial education programs, and to allow the provincial departments of education a greater role in on-reserve schools, as in the case of the recently proposed education agreement between the Province of New Brunswick and First Nations;¹⁵⁴
- iii.** in the apparent ready availability of funding for dominant language preschool programs for Indigenous children,¹⁵⁵ without priority for MTM education, and without extra resources for schools embarking on MTM programs of instruction;
- iv.** in the national policy which separates language funding from education funding for First Nations, with Heritage Canada (HC) being the sole purveyor of the former, and INAC being solely responsible for the latter. Indeed, official policies actually disallow language monies allocated by Heritage Canada from being used in schools. Hence, a recent study of Aboriginal languages in Canada funded by Heritage Canada directed no attention to the international research considered in this paper, and gave no attention at all to the critical importance of MTM education in the matter of linguistic survival.¹⁵⁶

There is little question that such policies are intended to privilege English medium education programs and to inhibit both incentive and capability on the part of First Nations educators to implement MTM education programs. Indeed, the separation of language and education funding at the government level has also had a serious effect on the ability of First Nations and First Nations organizations to direct funding to MTM education insofar as these organizations and First Nations are forced to treat education and language as two separate entities, often with separate administrative units, as well.

b. Lack of Language Planning Mechanisms:

¹⁵³ LaHache 1996:10.

¹⁵⁴ i.e., Goals 3.4 and 6 Provincial Aboriginal Education Committee which call for more collaboration and an alignment of learning outcomes between Band operated schools and provincial schools.

¹⁵⁵ Huras 2008.

¹⁵⁶ Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures 2005.

This division of education and language monies has effectively deprived First Nations parents, educators, and language activists the opportunity to engage in education and language planning together. In separating funding for the endeavors, it has also insured that neither pot is sufficient to ensure optimal benefits, either in education or in language maintenance and survival. And since language monies have been separated out from non-discretionary education monies, there has also tended to be less scrutiny and accountability for language monies within cash-strapped First Nations communities. And this has often meant that language monies get treated as discretionary, and, unfortunately, often spent in ways not always contributing directly to language maintenance and survival. It is possible that this separation may have been conceived as one way to free language programs from the largely dominant-language-only education policies of INAC, but in the end it has made language maintenance elusive and MTM education almost impossible to achieve.

Instead of language planning which would require cooperation within language groups, what has characterized language funding has been competitiveness within jurisdictions and often within language groups. As well, many decisions regarding the allocation of language funding are made exclusively at the political level (by the federal department of Heritage Canada, the Assembly of First Nations, and local chiefs), without any requirement for language-wide planning or consultation, at all. At present the funding under the Aboriginal Language Initiative (ALI) and the Critically Endangered Languages (CEL) program is generally split evenly between the regions and then by the chiefs in each region, regardless of the size of the communities, or the state of the languages, and usually without any consideration at all for language-wide needs. Ostensibly these funds are then used to employ community members to teach the language or to work on language projects, even in communities where there are no speakers. But since accountability is required only to Heritage Canada there tends to be no accounting or reporting within language groups, and therefore no open evaluation as to the effectiveness of particular projects and personnel, even at the local level. Because of this lack of language planning and accountability there is no real way of knowing that the funds are even used for language purposes in all cases.¹⁵⁷ The political basis of language funding allocation and the corresponding lack of accountability are perhaps the most telling and troubling aspects of the current system of Indigenous language funding.

The absence of such an inclusive and collective process, unfortunately, has had the effect of producing a sense of powerlessness amongst even the most committed language activists and educators, when, in fact, they need to be centrally involved in language planning and decision-making for any positive changes to occur. Their usual recourse, as a result, is either to find a place in the assimilationist system teaching window-dressing language courses, or to strike out on their own to try for government grants to do their own thing, so to speak, in the area of language. While such projects usually have some value, at best they tend to be short-lived, and at worst, they tend to fragment the language activists instead of drawing them together to develop long and short-term goals in the area of MTM education.

¹⁵⁷ It has even been reported that language funds have been used to pay off community indebtedness at times.

2. Lack of positive Linguistic Rights

In the Fall of 2007 the new government of Canada clawed back \$160 million that had been earmarked by the previous Federal Government for Indigenous languages in Canada. As a consequence, the hope that the downward spiral of First Nations languages might have been reversed was dashed. It was a case that might have been prevented altogether had there been any positive linguistic rights enshrined in Federal law that would have guaranteed funding for First Nations languages. It is in situations such as that one, where linguistic human rights are still not sufficiently protected in either national or international law that countries such as Canada continue to get away with linguistic genocide.

Without any doubt, it is the legislation of positive linguistic rights that is one of the most important keys in the revitalization of Indigenous languages. Indigenous Peoples would definitely benefit from information on the rising international standards in linguistic rights so that they can push for these rights, and push for governments to meet these standards through the legislation of positive linguistic rights, whether or not First Nations parents demand them.

In order for linguistic human rights to be positively respected, Skutnabb-Kangas has listed the following objectives:

- 1 *“high levels of [bi- or] multilingualism;*
- 2 *a fair chance of achieving academically at school;*
- 3 *strong, positive [bi- or] multilingual and [bi- or] multicultural identity and positive attitudes towards self and others; and,*
- 4 *a fair chance of awareness and competence building as prerequisites for working for a more equitable world, for oneself and one’s own group as well as others, locally and globally.”¹⁵⁸*

It is only through MTM education that any of these goals will be achievable.

3. Lack of Information as to the benefits of MTM education as discussed above:

It is now known, thanks to the exhaustive work of such scholars as Tomasevski, Magga, Anders-Baer, Dunbar, Skutnabb-Kangas and others, that dominant language schooling for Indigenous children is, indeed, deadly to their health and safety, their communities and their nations. It is now known, also, that MTM education is the only reasonable solution to reversing the damage being done by subtractive education practices.

Nevertheless, parents of Indigenous children still tend to choose dominant language schools for their children, in part because:

1. they lack good research-based knowledge about the long-term and generally harmful consequences of dominant language medium schools;
2. they lack awareness of their linguistic rights;
3. they lack information about the benefits of MTM education;
4. they are often indoctrinated into English-only ideologies arising from their own education and their own difficulties with the dominant language;

¹⁵⁸ Magga et al. 2004:2.

5. they often face enormous economic pressures and mistakenly assume that an English-only education is the only way out of poverty;

In all cases, a minimum of information could assist parents in making more fully informed decisions. Like cigarette packages, dominant language medium schools should come with a wrapper warning Indigenous parents of the harm that these schools can cause to their children, at the very least. In a portion of one of her works subtitled *“Schooling can be deadly,”* Katarina Tomasevski, has described what needs to be done for states to begin respecting the rights of linguistic minorities. She declares that it *“requires the identification and abolition of contrary practices,”* which she admits are daunting projects:

“One important reason is the assumption that getting children into schools is the end rather than a means of education, and an even more dangerous assumption is that any schooling is good for children.”¹⁵⁹

It is in these basic assumptions that both governments and parents must be disabused to make way for decisions informed by the latest research in the education of Indigenous children.

4. Poverty and Lack of Sufficient Funding to mount MTM education programs:

Without a doubt, the poverty and general lack of independent revenue sources are the most significant factors motivating community and individual decision-making around language choice, for the reality is that Indigenous languages in Canada, like most of the world’s threatened languages, are spoken by the poorest populations in this country. But this situation of poverty is an externally created one, the result of both colonial dispossession and ongoing colonial control. In the case of schools on reserve, most receive from the Federal Government, on average, as much as one-quarter to one-third less funding per capita than public schools.¹⁶⁰ And it is this reality that makes the possibility of developing a strong MTM program almost insurmountable since such a program would easily require considerably more funding per capita (at least initially) than what is currently allocated even to public schools. While this disparity creates a serious material handicap for First Nations communities, it is impossible to explain away except in ideological terms since INAC, which is responsible for the education of First Nations children on-reserve, continues to champion old solutions and studiously resists providing sufficient funding or support to communities seeking to establish MTM education. Furthermore, the under-funding of First Nations schools has been quite effective in achieving the assimilationist goal of driving Indigenous children living on reserve into provincial (and dominant language) education systems for decades.

Individuals in First Nations communities also tend to perceive fluency in the dominant language as a passport out of their poverty, and so for them dominant-language education is a rational choice. The problem is that the destruction of Indigenous languages is also a rational choice on the part of the developing world, which views Indigenous languages and forms of life as major barriers to accessing resources for the world’s elites. According to Nettle and Romaine

¹⁵⁹ Tomasevski 2004: para 50, as quoted by Magga et al 2005:14. See also Tomasevski 2001.

¹⁶⁰ AFN 1991, LaHache 1996:10, McCue 1999:30-34, Burns 2001, Friesen 2008a, Ivison 2008.

“Developing-world elites often have more of an interest in forcing peripheral regions into the mainstream economy—so that they can be controlled, and so that their resources and labor can be turned into cash for the mainstream elite—than those regions have in coming in voluntarily.”¹⁶¹

The most fundamental concern here is that poor Indigenous populations are rarely informed of these objectives on the part of powerful economic elites. Indeed, the intense struggle over natural resources in Canada goes a long way toward explaining the mounting pressure on First Nations to give in to provincial and/or corporate pressure for increasing external control over their nations, lands, communities and schools. On balance, the agreements between First Nations and governments or corporations seem to involve greater losses for First Nations than for the governments or corporations, largely as a result of the power imbalance—the general poverty of First Nations and the huge economic and political power of governments and corporations whose wealth has been derived, ironically, from the stolen lands and resources of First Nations.

Two serious consequences of the relative poverty of First Nations have had a strong negative impact on the potential of communities to develop MTM education programs. One is in the relative unavailability of either immersion teacher-training, or funding for individuals to take such training. INAC has, in fact, refused support for the development of a university based immersion teacher-training program in New Brunswick,¹⁶² possibly the only such program in Canada and even North America. As noted at the beginning of this paper, this lack of support for such training is all the more glaring in light of the generous outpouring of funding for English-only teacher-training for First Nations people that is currently proceeding.

The second consequence of the impoverished situation of First Nations communities has been the lack of funding or support for the development and publication of curriculum materials in the language. Indeed, there are very few publishing houses even interested in the publishing of such materials. This has meant a serious scarcity of materials available for teachers involved in the development of MTM education programs, and this means that the few individuals capable of teaching in the language must also develop their own materials themselves. Little wonder that even fluent teachers may be reluctant to get involved in MTM education programs, at present.

5. Rapidly declining Critical Mass of Speakers

It is the direct result of the four preceding factors-- lack of full control, lack of positive linguistic rights, lack of information, and lack of sufficient funding—that First Nations languages are in such a dire state, as described in the first section of this paper. The reality for many First Nations languages, in fact, is that it is already too late to be able to implement MTM education in the near future. But this situation is not irreversible as long as there are still some speakers, as will be outlined below.

E. RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

¹⁶¹ Nettle & Romaine 2000:160-161.

¹⁶² Bear Nicholas 2009:214, forthcoming.

1.) Full Jurisdiction over Indigenous Education and Language

For at least two decades studies at the national level have advocated for a national Aboriginal language foundation¹⁶³ and full jurisdiction over First Nations languages¹⁶⁴ and education¹⁶⁵ as important strategies, in addition to the need to establish protective legislation for Indigenous languages in Canada. After twenty years no progress has been made on any of these fronts, and the AFN finds itself today still actively promoting these same strategies, without any new research or analysis and without any mention of MTM education.¹⁶⁶

While the demand for authority over education and language is fundamentally sound and appropriate, there is a huge problem in the idea of having separate authorities over these two arenas. It would mean, above all, that we might never see the establishment of a national policy supporting MTM education as the single most important strategy for both language survival and educational advancement. Should Indigenous Peoples in Canada establish separate national institutions to treat the two arenas it would amount to a capitulation to what appears to be a determination by government to derail any efforts toward MTM education through the separation of funding for education and language.

a. Examples of Indigenous Control over Education

So, if it is Indigenous control over education and language, how may it be achieved? Some good examples already exist in Canada in the Kativik School Board¹⁶⁷ and the Cree School Board,¹⁶⁸ both formed in 1975 under the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement between the Inuit and Cree of Northern Quebec and the Federal Government. Both school boards are responsible for language and education together, both have mandated mother-tongue as the language of instruction, both are elected authorities, and both authorities are representative of the Indigenous communities they serve.

a. Need for Language 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. But this lack of adequate funding should not be allowed to preclude other actions, especially actions aimed at supporting effective use of limited funding to achieve linguistic survival. The critical state of languages across the country is precisely

¹⁶³ See Jameison 1988:99-106.

¹⁶⁴ See Jamieson 1988:67-69, MacPherson 1991:42-44, Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures 2005:99-103.

¹⁶⁵ See NIB/AFN 1988, MacPherson 1991, McCue 1999. AFN 2006:3.5.2.

¹⁶⁶ This failure to address the need for MTM education is especially strange since the AFN was a joint partner with St. Thomas University in an international conference on immersion education in 2005.

¹⁶⁷ James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement 1975, Section 17, Taylor & Wright 2001, Kativik School Board n.d.

¹⁶⁸ www.gc.ca/pdf/LEG000000006.pdf; Section 16, McAlpine & Herodier 1994.

the situation which calls for language planning most urgently. According to one analysis, the objectives of language planning must include the following:

- 1.) intervention in language decline,
- 2.) explicit efforts to redirect the course of a language,
- 3.) systematic analyses of the existing situation, including ongoing evaluation of alternative practices, and ultimately,
- 4.) politically implemented action.¹⁶⁹

In light of the current chaotic situation of language funding across the country what should be considered a prerequisite for access to language funding in any given language are language-wide committees of fully informed speakers and language activists (not necessarily all speakers) to evaluate existing programs, determine language-wide needs, and to make decisions as to the most effective strategies to be pursued so that even the communities without any speakers may ultimately benefit. Considering that the lack of child speakers is one of the most important indicators in the decline of our languages, then creating child speakers through MTM education must be considered as the number one priority for reversing language shift and maintaining Indigenous languages.¹⁷⁰

2. Positive Linguistic Rights Legislation for Indigenous Languages:

For at least two decades there have been calls for positive language rights for Indigenous languages in Canada. In 1988 the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB)/Assembly of First Nations (AFN) called for “*official status*” for Aboriginal languages, “*constitutional recognition, and accompanying legislative protection.*”¹⁷¹ Yet no national legislation protecting Indigenous linguistic rights has been achieved in the two decades since that call. Considering the absence of legislation protecting and promoting Indigenous languages at both the international and national levels, provinces could also demonstrate vision and leadership in this area by passing their own legislation to protect, support, and promote Indigenous languages, just as the NWT,¹⁷² Yukon, and Nunavut have already done to declare Indigenous languages as official languages,¹⁷³ or as Quebec has done to declare Inuit and First Nations as having the right “*to maintain and develop their own languages and cultures*” and the “*right to government funding and [the responsibility] for setting up their own institutions and strategies.*”¹⁷⁴ Of course, language legislation would only be the beginning, but it would at least require that educational authorities begin developing a reasonable alternative to the subtractive and assimilative forms of education currently imposed on First Nations children in most parts of Canada.

As pointed out by Skutnabb-Kangas:

¹⁶⁹ Christian 1989:197. See also Hornberger 1994, Hinton 2001.

¹⁷⁰ See Kosonen, Young & Malone 2007:15-16.

¹⁷¹ NIB/AFN 1988:16. See also Jameison 1988:54.

¹⁷² NWT Literacy Council 2002.

¹⁷³ Fettes 1998:125.

¹⁷⁴ LaHache 1996:12.

*“there are relatively few binding positive rights to MTM education or bilingual education in international law... Today most language-related human rights are negative rights, only prohibiting discrimination on the basis of language....”*¹⁷⁵

The same holds true across Canada where there are no positive linguistic rights for any Indigenous languages except in the NWT, Yukon, and Nunavut.

Finally, it needs to be stated that while MTM programs could be implemented without protective language legislation, the enshrining of positive linguistic rights for First Nations is likely the only way to effectively ensure that the option for MTM education is made available to all First Nations children who would want it.

On the national scene, thus, pressure needs to be placed on the Federal Government

- i.)** to pass national legislation incorporating positive linguistic rights for all Indigenous languages in Canada, as has already been done in Norway,¹⁷⁶
- ii.)** to ensure that the recognition of linguistic rights does not amount to tokenism as it has in the United States and elsewhere¹⁷⁷ significantly more funding must be allocated to support the establishment of mother-tongue medium programs in all Indigenous communities;
- iii.)** to sign on to the *United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Rights* (2007), with its strong clauses on linguistic rights,¹⁷⁸ and
- iv.)** to promote the passage of international laws providing positive protection for the linguistic rights of Indigenous and linguistic minorities worldwide.¹⁷⁹

Although there are no positive linguistic rights in Canada, there is a strong sense that the right to MTM education for Indigenous Peoples already exists in Canadian law and treaties with First Nations. All that may be required to have positive linguistic rights established is a test case claiming damages for denial of the opportunity to become proficient in mother-tongue (as the French in Canada have done).¹⁸⁰ The question for governments now is how feasible is it to wait for such costly court challenges when energy and resources could be directed to identifying the destructive practices and respecting the linguistic rights of Indigenous Peoples across Canada?¹⁸¹

The good news is that in those areas of the world where linguistic rights have been enshrined in law there have been hugely positive consequences for the Indigenous languages and peoples involved. For example, in 1987 the government of Norway passed legislation mandating that the highly endangered Saami language become the

¹⁷⁵ Skutnabb-Kangas 2008a.

¹⁷⁶ Aikio-Puoskari 2005.

¹⁷⁷ Brod & McQuiston 1997:151 citing the Native American Languages Act, P.L. 101-477 (U.S. Statutes at Large, 1990): 104 pt. 2:1153-56, Fettes 1998.

¹⁷⁸ [www:// iwga.org/sw248.asp](http://iwga.org/sw248.asp) See also excerpts from the Report of the International Expert group meeting on Indigenous languages 21 January 2008, United Nations Economic and Social Council, Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, E/C.19/2008/3 in the Appendix here.

¹⁷⁹ See linguistic rights as named by the

¹⁸⁰ Tremblay 1987, Nahanee 1993, deVarennes 1994 & 1997, Poirier 1994, Leitch 2005.

¹⁸¹ Skutnabb-Kangas 2007.

language of instruction in all Saami areas.¹⁸² As a result of the legislation, Saami is no longer severely endangered, and there is now even an entire university conducted in the Saami language at Kautokeino, Norway. Not only has the language benefited, but so have the people of Norway in terms of increased levels of education and overall improved states of well-being for the Saami. Considering that the total number of Saamis in Norway is comparable to the numbers of Indigenous Peoples in the Canadian Maritimes alone, it would seem possible, and just as necessary, to have such legislation passed here before it is too late.¹⁸³

3. Public education into the negative effects of subtractive education, and the positive benefits of MTM education:

In order to generate public support for MTM education, information on the dangers of subtractive education and the benefits of MTM literally need to be “marketed” to parents and educators in communities where there is still reluctance or fear of MTM education as the result of generations of intense indoctrination.¹⁸⁴ At present, the widespread indoctrination of Indigenous Peoples into the harmful prejudices concerning Indigenous languages (described in section C-5 above), poses an enormous barrier to the establishment of MTM education. Dunbar and Skutnabb-Kangas have touched on the need to address the indoctrination of parents and community leaders when

“[m]any parents... want to send their children to English-medium schools, because they see this as a way out of poverty and towards good English competence, a prerequisite for upward mobility. [However] for the large majority of the children, English-medium education does not lead to the promised outcomes, as countless research results show. MTM education would in most cases be a better way to reach the goals and achieve real capability building...”¹⁸⁵

Only by deliberately mounting a campaign to counter the indoctrination with clear and concise literature about the dangers of dominant language education and the benefits of mother-tongue and MTM education, will it be possible for parents and educators to make informed decisions about MTM education. One excellent example of such marketing is that done by the Welsh in their campaign to raise the status of their language.

4.) Funding for MTM Program Development

Positive linguistic rights legislation is almost certainly a prerequisite to ensure sufficient financial support for MTM education, and financial support is essential if Indigenous languages are to be given a chance for survival, in the same way that the French language has been supported and maintained. However governments are ultimately convinced to provide the needed financial support for MTM education is unimportant, but it is clear that all rationales, moral, economic and rights based ones, need to be actively marshaled in the struggle.

¹⁸² Aikio- Puoskari 2005 and 2009 forthcoming.

¹⁸³ Bear Nicholas 2007.

¹⁸⁴ Nicholson 1997, Edwards & Newcombe 2006.

¹⁸⁵ Magga et al 2005:8

There is no question, too, that for Indigenous languages to survive, it will require significant financial support, especially where there has been systematic suppression and destruction of these languages. Most state authorities in Canada, however, seem to believe that MTM education would be too costly to undertake considering the many needs entailed in developing curriculum and training teachers in so many Inuit and First Nations languages.¹⁸⁶ But as various analysts have pointed out, there is a strong argument in economics to be made for governments to respect the linguistic rights of minorities. According to Misra & Mohanty (2000), an economic analysis of poverty “shows that not using the indigenous or minority mother tongue as the main medium of education violates the human right to education **and perpetuates poverty.**”¹⁸⁷

The work of Francois Grin takes this analysis a step further and asks what costs and benefits can be gained from maintaining cultural (and linguistic) diversity as compared to not maintaining such diversity. Grin argues that the costs of maintaining diversity are “*remarkably modest*” compared to the enormous costs required to address the disastrous educational and social consequences of subtractive educational policies.¹⁸⁸ One example will suffice here to demonstrate the economic benefits to be gained from positive respect for linguistic human rights. As Garcia, Skutnabb-Kangas & Torres-Guzman have pointed-out, the cost of keeping one person in prison for just one year far exceeds what it would cost to provide private tutoring to such a person in his or her mother-tongue for nine years.¹⁸⁹ In Grin’s opinion, it is just such cost-benefit analyses that hold greater potential to persuade governments than the moral/human rights-based arguments, which rely on the goodwill of states. To quote Skutnabb-Kangas, it is not a question of whether states can afford to implement MTM education or not, but rather, “*Can they afford not to implement it?*”¹⁹⁰ Clearly the task here will be to do the extensive cost-benefit analyses to support and promote the need for MTM education.

Considering the serious disparities in the funding of First Nations schools there must be commitment made to ensuring that these schools are given funding at least equivalent to provincial schools so that they can be maintained. Though most reserve schools also impose English as the primary medium of instruction (as the result of a variety of barriers and constraints), these schools hold the best potential to offer parents a real alternative to the subtractive and assimilationist education that is standard practice in public schools.¹⁹¹ And where band-operated schools have the means to develop MTM education, they should be provided with adequate funding to ensure that the program can succeed.

Of course, full provincial and federal cooperation would be needed to achieve these goals. A first step in this plan would be for First Nations leaders to pressure school systems both on and off reserve to begin honoring international linguistic rights standards so that First Nations parents everywhere would at least have the option of MTM

¹⁸⁶ Kosonen, Young & Malone 2007:12.

¹⁸⁷ Misra & Mohanty 2000:264 in Magga et al 2005:8. See also Burns 2001.

¹⁸⁸ Grin 2003:25-26, as discussed in Magga et al 2005:7-8, and Skutnabb-kangas 2008c:4-5. See also Snow & Hakuta 1992.

¹⁸⁹ 2006:17. See also Grin & Vaillancourt 2000 and Skutnabb-Kangas 2000:260-269.

¹⁹⁰ Skutnabb-kangas 2008c:5.

¹⁹¹ McCarty, Romero & Zepeda 2006. For a contrary opinion see Carl 2008.

education, as has already been done in Norway. In that country all Saami children, regardless of where they live, are entitled to an education in the medium of the Saami language as long as there are at least ten who want it.¹⁹² Since the educational responsibility of most Canadian provinces begins only at the kindergarten level, one approach would be for provinces to commit to implementing a kindergarten MTM program only two or three years after the launch of MTM programs for preschoolers on reserve. Overall, this project could be projected to take ten or twelve years to develop curriculum one level a year beginning with curriculum for daycare programs.

4a. Immersion Teacher-Training

Another critical need is for teachers to be trained specifically to teach in their mother-tongue, rather than (or not only) in English or French. In fact, virtually all teacher-training programs to date have focused on training Indigenous teachers to teach only in English or French. The failures of these programs in terms of improving the education of Indigenous children were anticipated as early as 1983,¹⁹³ and their negative effects on language survival were noted only two decades after the inception of most teacher training programs in the mid 1970s. For over a decade MTM teacher-training has been offered to Indigenous teachers in a Native Language Immersion Teacher Training (NLITT) Programme at St. Thomas University in Fredericton, N.B.¹⁹⁴ But since the inception of this program there has been no interest on the part of INAC to support or promote it, though the Indian Student Support Services Program was supposedly established to support the development of new programs at the university level.¹⁹⁵ And there has been no particular interest on the part of INAC to support the training of immersion teachers, either. While ideological factors most certainly lie behind this reality, there is a critical need to address this disparity and provide at least equal support for MTM teacher-training and teacher-training programs before fluent speakers in some languages become too old to teach.¹⁹⁶ Considering the rapidly declining state of most languages, and the rapidly aging group of fluent speakers who could be teachers, the need for intensive training in language proficiency is likely to grow exponentially over the next few years, both for existing teachers and people wishing to become teachers.

4b. Curriculum Development

To develop curriculum in a language is to address the issue of literacy, which has been deemed to be “[o]ne of the most complicated issues in language revitalization.”¹⁹⁷ The project is faced with enormous issues from the determination of a writing system to questions around the value and use of mother-tongue and mother-tongue literacy. As for the value of mother-tongue literacy, there is much difference of opinion, but no question of its necessity in an MTM education program lasting six to eight years. Drawing on research in the Hualapai community in the United States, Watahomigie and McCarty have identified enormous benefits to communities arising from in-school mother-tongue

¹⁹² Aikio-Puoskari 2009 forthcoming.

¹⁹³ Allison 1983.

¹⁹⁴ See Bear Nicholas 2009 forthcoming.

¹⁹⁵ King 1995.

¹⁹⁶ See Taylor, Crago & McAlpine 1993:7-8.

¹⁹⁷ Grenoble & Whaley 2006:102.

literacy, whether or not mother-tongue literacy per-se serves any particular use outside of the school:

i.) It serves as an affirmation and expression of indigenous identity.

*ii.) It represents local control over such agencies as the schools, which have historically played the role of suppressing the local language by promoting English only.*¹⁹⁸

iii.) It serves as a proactive 'bridge' between the local children and the larger society, as the bilingual educational program has improved the children's success levels in the school.

iv.) The existence of the Hualapai literacy program has fostered other measures for cultural vitality and maintenance."¹⁹⁹

Hence, there can be little argument against the development of curriculum materials for use in schools. This project, however, entails not just filling a curriculum vacuum in all subject areas, but more fundamentally, as Brod and McQuiston have explained, also to "develop and transmit complex systems of knowledge in at least an updated, expanded, recorded, and documented native language."²⁰⁰ This is no small task to be left for classroom teachers to undertake in their spare time, but one which will require well-coordinated and funded programs to bring speakers and elders together with educators and curriculum-developers in each language. Unless funding is available and a mechanism established to develop and produce mother-tongue curriculum materials, there will be reluctance, even on the part of well-trained and qualified speakers of Indigenous languages, to begin MTM teaching in school.

Considering the shortage of speakers trained as teachers in most languages, one feasible plan for the development of curriculum would be to pull out Indigenous language teachers currently teaching language at various levels in both provincial and federal schools (since those language programs are producing few if any speakers), and redirect them to a project to develop curriculum for each level. Where these language teachers are already paid by various communities and provincial school districts, there would be minimal added costs for salaries, at least. Extra financial resources would, however, be needed for training in materials development and publishing, and for specialists in developing audio-visual materials for each level. Further funding would also be needed to develop curriculum for each grade of the project, but this could be accessed through special grants, perhaps, from either the provincial or federal governments, or through redirecting funds already available for pre-school education and curriculum development.

Another necessary approach would be for national Indigenous organizations to begin (either individually or in cooperation with each other) producing basic curriculum materials that could serve as a template in all subject areas and at all levels beginning with pre-school.²⁰¹ Putting these materials in digital format, as curriculum developers in

¹⁹⁸ See Clarke & Mackenzie 1980.

¹⁹⁹ Watahomigie and McCarty 1997:107-8, as quoted in Grenoble & Whaley 2006: 128.

²⁰⁰ Brod & McQuiston 1998:150.

²⁰¹ The suggestion for a national organization to begin developing curriculum came as early as 1988 NIB/AFN 1988:72, but at that time the focus was only on curriculum for language teaching and not on curriculum for MTM education.

the Onion Lake (Sask.) curriculum Project have done,²⁰² would make such materials easily convertible into different Indigenous languages. It would also make it possible for small and impoverished communities to at least begin MTM education programs that would need only to be supplemented with content specific to each First Nation with minimal effort.

4c. Development of MTM Publishing and Printing capacities:

Indigenous communities must have access to printing, publishing, and broadcasting capacities, if only to promote their own languages and create materials for use in MTM education both in school and out, since mainstream publishers are generally not interested in publishing only in an Indigenous language. Without a doubt publishing and printing capacities within Indigenous communities would also greatly enhance literacy levels in both mother tongue²⁰³ and English or French, and it would also facilitate the production of First Nations histories, literature, and curriculum in Indigenous languages.

In conjunction with increased publishing and printing capacities, First Nations or consortiums of small First Nations communities without print media could establish nation-wide newspapers for the purpose of enhancing biliteracy, while at the same time serving as a forum for issues of concern to each community. A very important immediate purpose for such a newspaper would be to educate communities about the benefits of bilingualism and MTM education. It could also serve as a voice from the margins, to publish what the mainstream press refuses to publish.

5. Massive Programs of Language and Teacher Training:

The unfortunate reality for many First Nations languages at present is that there simply are not enough speakers young enough to be able to mount an MTM education program in every community. It is for this reason that priority be given to intensive language training for potential teachers. In the case where there are only a few elderly speakers, the master apprentice program should be considered a necessity, and that apprentices should be assigned to every speaker willing to participate. To insure that there is a direct link between master-apprentice programs and early childhood teaching, apprentices should be committed to working in early childhood centers as soon as possible and until such time as they are proficient enough to take on full responsibility for these programs. In cases where universities are willing to support such programs, they should be enlisted to provide as much intensive language training as possible, but primarily, once again for those planning to become teachers. This would not disqualify parents and others wishing to learn their mother-tongue, but there should be clear priorities in such programs for future teachers and childcare workers.

Where the state of a language is better there are several options:

- i.** In communities where there are fluent people already trained as teachers, they should be encouraged to take training in immersion teaching methods so that they may be phased into immersion classrooms as soon as possible.

²⁰² www.onionlake.ca/Language_Keepers/Introduction/Introduction.html

²⁰³ McLaughlin 1992.

- ii. Where there are still speakers young enough for teacher-training they should be urged to take training that would qualify them to teach, at least at the preschool level.
- iii. Where there are non-fluent teachers they should be encouraged to gain fluency in intensive adult fluency programs tied to immersion teacher-training programs; and
- iv. Where there are people with neither proficiency in the language nor teacher training, there should also be intensive adult fluency programs tied to immersion teacher-training programs so that they can become immersion teachers as soon as they have achieved basic proficiency levels.

6. Support for Adult Literacy Needs and Potentials

That adult literacy programs are needed at all today is testament largely to the utter failure of education for Indigenous young people in the past. Therefore, the first line of action on the matter of adult literacy must be to insist that Indigenous children have access to MTM education in the future. The second line of action must be to incorporate the principles outlined here in terms of the value of MT literacy as a means of enhancing literacy in a second language. According to the AFN study quoted above: “*Studies completed by UNESCO have demonstrated that learning in the official languages was more successful if literacy was established in the mother tongue first.*”²⁰⁴ This means that though most adults come into adult literacy programs in an effort to learn math or English skills quickly, this need must not be used as an excuse to ignore the principles established here, and to teach English literacy exclusively. It is by providing adults, especially those fluent in their mother tongue, with literacy skills in their language that the learning time for English literacy is, in fact accelerated, not prolonged. It means, too, that teachers of adult literacy programs for Indigenous Peoples must be fluently bilingual for the best adult learning to occur.

That many of the adults seeking literacy training today are already fluent in their mother tongue suggests another possibility—that they could be mobilized in community efforts to maintain and promote their language, as an important part of a literacy program. Indeed literacy programs in other parts of the world have been most successful when they have taught adults how and why their languages have been suppressed and how and why their access to education has been limited. According to Phillipson:

*“In Mali an adult education programme in Bambara is described as having a profound effect on the learners, who could no longer see the justification for having to communicate with the authorities in French.”*²⁰⁵

Adult learners are thus a logical group to be mobilized in the development of MTM education and the struggle for linguistic human rights, and they could, indeed, participate in all facets of MT development described here, from immersion teacher-training, marketing the language, curriculum development, and language planning, to printing, publishing, and broadcasting. Aside from addressing the matter of subtractive education, which is arguably one of the most fundamental reasons for their own lack of literacy

²⁰⁴ Assembly of First Nations 1994:6.

²⁰⁵ Phillipson 1992:249.

skills, this strategy could make adult literacy truly a two-way street that ascribes value and purpose to linguistic skills the learners bring to the classroom, while furthering the goals of biliteracy and language survival.

That most adult literacy programs have drawn their methodology from ESL programs is problematic, and symptomatic of the subtle ways in which the movement toward monolingualism worldwide continues to infiltrate Indigenous communities.²⁰⁶ Even where adult learners may not have stayed in school long enough to become indoctrinated monolinguals, the emphasis in adult programs on literacy and numeracy in a dominant language only, without first valuing and developing comparable skills in the mother-tongue, will still have the consequence of indoctrinating adult learners into harmful monolingual values. Such beliefs, then, reinforce whatever indoctrination exists in the community around monolingual beliefs that mother tongue has no real value and that MTM education is a waste of time. In the struggle for Indigenous language survival care must thus be taken to ensure that adult literacy programs do not become counter-productive elements.

Conclusion

The challenge now is to shine a light on the fundamental racism that lies behind current educational policies for First Nations Peoples, and to recognize that they are decidedly NOT in the best interest of our Peoples. In short, in order for the option of MTM education to become reality in any comprehensive way, it will require a frank critique of the education system for First Nations Peoples so that assimilationist policies and practices may be identified, rooted out, and replaced. It will also require a massive re-education of our own people around these issues so that we can present a common front in the demand for MTM education and linguistic rights.

²⁰⁶ Phillipson 1992:173-270, Gonzalez with Melis 2000.

Appendix:

Some excerpts from the Report of the international expert group meeting on Indigenous languages 21 January 2008, United Nations Economic and Social Council, Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, E/C.19/2008/3:

- (h) Develop quality indigenous education policies, guaranteeing the right to mother tongue education, with the participation of indigenous peoples in all levels of planning and implementation, respecting the principle of free, prior and informed consent;
- (i) Support the creation of indigenous universities, language departments in universities and other degree programmes to promote indigenous languages as a vehicle and expression of intangible culture, traditions and expressions;
- (j) Protect and promote indigenous languages by supporting indigenous use of current and emerging multimedia technology, establishing quota systems or similar mechanisms that ensure adequate representation of indigenous languages in public- and private-owned media by providing funding for the publication of indigenous literature, and by promoting the use of indigenous symbols and signs in the public sphere;
- (k) Guarantee the right to mother tongue education for indigenous children, regardless of the number of its speakers and ensure the teaching of those languages to indigenous children who do not know them;

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Note: This paper is, in large part, a revision of and follow-up to my December 2008 draft paper on “Educational Policy for First Nations in New Brunswick: Continuing Linguistic Genocide and Educational Failure or Positive Linguistic Rights and Educational Success?” It is in many ways also a composite of earlier papers of mine on the topic of linguistic genocide and immersion education for First Nations in Canada.

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