

## **Why Immersion Education?**

### **Amos Key Jr.-The Cayuga Experience**

Amos Key is a faithkeeper from the Mohawk Turtle Clan of Six Nations of the Grand River. He spoke of the success of immersion education at Six Nations of the Grand River since the longhouse has taken control over the education of its people. Six Nations has approximately 23,000 people on the band role, and only roughly 300 speak their mother tongues of Mohawk, Cayuga and Onondaga.

The Cayuga Immersion school board has graduated more than 70 students since 1999, most of which have gone into the local workforce or have pursued post-secondary education without any difficulty in English. The student retention rate with the school board is at least 95 percent, much higher than that of the Ontario school board, which has a drop out rate of 70 percent for First Nations students. Graduates of the Immersion schools have equally high averages compared to students streamed in English, and more than 85 percent of the students pass the English proficiency tests the first time around, compared to less than 40 percent of those who attend provincial schools. Many graduates are also able to conduct many of the traditional ceremonies of the longhouse, which is the spiritual and ceremonial basis of Six Nations culture referring to cultural continuity. Immersion education is able to equip future parents with the ability to pass on their way of life. The Ontario First Nations Language Action Group works with the Chiefs of Ontario, specifically Chief Nelson Toulouse, and has created a Manifesto on Education outlining specific demands to the federal government for their assistance to continue to provide quality immersion education that is second to none for the people of Six Nations.

Linguistic genocide is the First Nations holocaust, and this is why Immersion Education is important. Canada's systematic and premeditated attack on First Nations languages, referred to as linguicide, is nothing less than a crime against humanity that is defined by the United Nations International Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Specifically, sections of Article II state that forcibly transferring children of one group to another group, and causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group are both definitions genocide. The human toll of linguicide on First Nations civilizations, their societies, and institutions is a bloody stain and a shame on Canada and her institutions. The resulting aftermath is nothing less than a crime against humanity.

### **Overcoming Barriers to Immersion:**

#### **David Leitch-Canada's Legal Obligation to Fund Immersion Education**

This paper has attempted to answer the question asked, whether Canada's First Nations also have the constitutional right to educate their children in their own language at public expense. The word "also" acknowledges the fact that section 23 of the *Charter* specifically gives that constitutional right to Canada's official-language minorities. It is clear that First Nations do not have exactly the same right as official-language minorities; the latter right is, for example, subject to the test of "where numbers warrant". The pedagogical challenges facing First Nations would also be very different than those facing official-language minorities.

Still, this paper has proposed a positive answer to the question posed. It has done so by reading the Supreme Court of Canada's jurisprudence in relation to aboriginal rights together with its jurisprudence in relation to section 23 of the *Charter*. The paper has postulated that Parliament can be obliged to adopt legislation implementing the constitutional right of First Nations to educate their children in their own languages. Such legislation would give First Nations an enforceable right and would permit the courts to measure and evaluate that right against constitutional standards. The paper has also expressed the opinion that even if federal legislation implementing this right is not constitutionally required, it would still be within the federal government's legislative authority, it would be justified and it would survive *Charter* scrutiny.

## **Overcoming Barriers and Challenges to Immersion**

### **Kathy Michel –One of the Founders of the Chief Atham School Immersion Program**

Kathy Michel is a founder of Chief Atham School Immersion program in British Columbia. The program which began in 1987 with only three children, now has anywhere from 38 to 50 students, and all content is taught in the Secwepemc language.

Outlining the growth of the program, the barriers they have overcome and the successes they have had, she stressed that it is possible to start an immersion program in communities without many people or resources. For example, without government funding and relying solely on fundraising through raffles, bingo and a commitment on the part of the community, the program ran successfully for the first three years. The funding the program currently receives through INAC covers the bare minimum of staffing.

Consensus in the community is not a requirement when attempting language immersion. There is no time to waste as the Secwepemc language is dying. Their program is able to coexist with those individuals in the community who disagree, or choose to send their children through English schooling. Many in the community are hesitant about immersion and like to see the outcome with the children. What they do see is that immersion education does produce strong, articulate adults who know their language, and who go on to postsecondary education.

Their program is a grassroots success story and they are trying to motivate other communities to begin immersion programming despite having smaller populations. Every year they are developing fluent speakers who will pass this knowledge to their children, and perhaps the language will begin to flourish once more. They are also seeing elders in the community connecting with the young. She stressed the importance of being persistent and adhering to one mission: to teach the language and the culture in the language and that this is the goal of immersion education.

### **Dr. Robert Phillipson -English: A Lingua Franca or an Anglo American Frankenstein?**

Dr. Robert Phillipson spoke on the issue of linguistic imperialism, and its role in the extermination of diversity of languages and cultures. He stressed the need for care with terminology when analyzing language and power and for analyzing power structures. Dr. Phillipson demonstrated that the neutral-sounding term *lingua franca* may conceal economic forces (*lingua economica*) or refer to scholarly activities (*lingua academica*) or language policies that enforce subtractive learning and lead to mother tongues being eliminated (*lingua tyrannosaura*). He stated that English is not a neutral means of communication when used between people with different mother tongues. It is often an instrument further the economic agenda of corporate neo-liberalism. Calling it a *lingua franca* is therefore misleading and dangerous. When one teaches a language one is also teaching a culture.

There is a clear historical pattern of English being used to exterminate other languages and their cultures. The expansion of English worldwide has never been a neutral process. In the modern world, with education, higher education in particular, no longer being seen as a public good, we are in a phase of the commodification of education internationally. Young Brits and Canadians who happen to be native speakers of English can go off and teach English with minimal qualifications – but as agents of linguistic imperialism. Claiming that global English is in the interests of ‘the world’, of everyone, dissociates it from the purposes that neo-liberal English serves. Claiming the neutrality of English is as false as the claim that territories in North America were *terra nullius*. These are issues which should be at the forefront when dealing with language policy and thinking about language hierarchies, equality and diversity in education.

He referred to many of the fallacies that are put forward as central tenets in justifying education using a monolingual, subtractive approach (see his 1992 book, *Linguistic imperialism*), showing that there is a commercial interest in pretending that these tenets are true. In his view, global English is a myth, a

normative project and something the dominant would like to bring about rather than a reality. Linguistic diversity can be achieved even with those who have lost their language. We have to move forward along lines that ensure respect for all language groups. Especially in a world where *lingua frankensteinia* are a serious threat, we can use the school system to achieve the maintenance of linguistic diversity.

## **Immersion Home Education**

### **Diana Steinhauer & Steve Andreas -Cree Immersion at Home**

Diana Steinhauer, Cree, is from Saddle Lake, Alberta. With her husband and mother, the family has been educating their child in Cree through home language immersion since 2002. She spoke of what has been effective for them and addressed issues that arise when considering immersion education.

Language learning requires diligent effort. Despite not speaking fluent Cree, she believes it is crucial to begin teaching her then five-year-old son. She believes a suitable environment for immersion language learning is important and the family has rid their home of outside English media. They also began by allocating a space in their home in which Cree was the only medium of communication starting with a half hour each day, though they have since expanded this space to include the entire home and the time in Cree has also expanded immensely.

Initially, the family implemented Stephen Greymorning's Accelerated Second Language Acquisition approach as it emphasizes spoken language in an immersion environment. A language template was developed as a map to guide and drive their initial efforts. The use of pictures, toys, games, movement, actions and gestures to convey the meaning of words to their son was employed. These methods had been instrumental in remaining in the language. Within a short time, they ventured beyond the template and have since adopted a project approach to language learning. This involves giving the child the freedom to decide what he wants to learn in the language based on his own interests; an example provided was a feast project that involved learning all the language that is associated with a feast: the food, the ceremonies, the kinship terms, prayer aspects, and so on. The results were immediate as their son has become conversant in the language and as his vocabulary expanded, he initiated and created many of the activities that they used in their home immersion environment.

Another important aspect was the need for the child to be able to speak with other children in the language. They enrolled their child two days a week in an immersion school program in a surrounding area where he continues to expand his learning of syllabic reading and writing. The other three days are spent in the community. Working with the Blue Quills First Nations College, Diana recognizes the value in training fluent speakers in immersion methods and links with the College's Language Immersion for Adults program.

She believes language immersion education belongs in the home and the community and that the elders are the natural resources who can teach the language informally, as they hold the traditional knowledge required for the maintenance and revitalization of culture and language.

### **Dorothy Lazore, Ahkwesahsne Freedom School-One Nation's Approach to Immersion**

Dorothy Lazore has been involved extensively in building language immersion education programs in many Mohawk communities, and is currently involved with the Ahkwesahsne Freedom School immersion program. She spoke of the history her nation's approach to immersion education.

Stressing the importance of a sense of creativity and a willingness to be open to any approach that could be useful to teach the people to speak the language, they have always had to develop their own methodology and write their own curriculum. What began with one person's desire to learn her language has turned into a school with immersion programming from nursery to grade 6, maintenance programs for grade 7 and 8,

and adult immersion education. Schooling is year round in order to allow the students to take part in many traditional ceremonies.

The goal of immersion education in the community is to produce fluent speakers of the language who are then able to return to the classroom to pass on their knowledge to the younger generation. They have developed a three-year adult literacy and training program at the Ahkwesahsne School that allows this to happen. The participation of the parents in the community has been central, as well as that of the elders, who hold the knowledge that needs to be passed on.

She concludes by stressing that language is very precious, and it is important to work with the people who are driven and have the desire to learn. First Nations people are capable of setting up an immersion education system from nursery right through and including the university level with dedication, creativity and a positive attitude. In a community of 12 000 people where there is only 1 000 speakers of a language, there is an immediate requirement to bring the language back to the people.

### **Ruth Norton-Task Force on Aboriginal Languages**

Ruth Norton, a former member of the Task Force on Aboriginal Languages, spoke of the process involved in the composition of their federal report. The aim of the report was to compile the voices of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples from across the country, putting forth their demands to the federal government in relation to languages. Thirteen consultations were held across the country from July to September of 2004.

The lack of the financial resources for in-school and out-school programs and the fact that the majority of youth do not speak the language were general difficulties raised. This situation was observed to be very much a legacy of the Canadian government's educational policies towards Native peoples: residential schools and integration. Considering this, the recommendations put forth place the responsibility on the federal government to make funds available directly to First Nations people at the community level. These funds would enable the implementation of programs that support immersion education and the promotion of First Nations cultures for all people in the community.

It is planned that within the next five years there be the development of a national strategy on how to retain, encourage and revitalize languages to ensure their survival. What is required is the systematic implementation of alternative programs to allow for the full immersion of entire communities in the language.

Stressing the federal government's responsibility to fund these initiatives, diligence is also required on the part of the leaders of the Assembly of First Nations. As representatives of First Nations people, they need to ensure that this government upholds the recommendations put forth from the Task Force on Aboriginal Languages.

### **AFN/CCOL -Assembly of First Nations' National Language Strategy**

#### **Deputy Grand Chief Nelson Toulouse-Ontario Representative of Chiefs' Committee on Languages**

Deputy Grand Chief Nelson Toulouse, Anishnabe, serves as the Ontario representative on the Chiefs' Committee on First Nations Languages and education. He states that it is critical that Aboriginal peoples not become complacent, many languages are suffering and there is a great urgency to do what is required to save the languages of the people. In his role as a leader, he believes it is important to participate with the different communities in their struggles for language. In Ontario, he and other Chiefs have been supporting the establishment of a Native Teachers' Association, which was initiated by the Language Action Committee to ensure language survival. As leaders, they are hoping to implement a strategy based on the advice from the experts, such as those directly involved in the struggle at the community level, and to be able to push such a strategy politically at the federal level.

## Shelly Bressette-Assembly of First Nations

Shelly Bressette from the Assembly of First Nations shared the AFN/CCOL position on language and cultures, which was clarified to the federal government on behalf of First Nations peoples through the Task Force on Aboriginal Languages. Faced with the threat of extinction of First Nations languages, the CCOL was formed. The National Strategy developed by the CCOL with the goal of protecting First Nations languages has as its foundation that control should lay in the hands of the people, specifically at the community level. The strategy had fourteen recommendations aimed at meeting this goal, as well ensuring the provision of funding to support these initiatives.

One of the roles of the Assembly of First Nations is to lobby the federal government for adequate resources and funding for the regions, to enable projects to be implemented which promote the preservation and protection of First Nations languages. Funding presently comes from the Department of Heritage Canada, through Aboriginal Language Initiatives, though First Nations do not fall under the Canadian Heritage Multicultural Languages mandate. First Nations people have treaty rights and Aboriginal rights, as affirmed by the Constitutional Act, which are therefore distinct and separate rights from those protected by Heritage Canada. The CCOL position is that Indian Affairs is not “off the hook” for funding First Nation languages and that the federal government has a fiduciary responsibility to properly resource sustainable community based, regional and national language initiatives that will revive and protect First Nation languages. Current funding levels are not sufficient to allow this to happen.

## Dr. Tove Skutnabb-Kangas (<http://akira.ruc.dk/~tovesk/>)-The International Landscape

Dr. Tove Skutnabb Kangas is an international researcher, leader and activist for international linguistic human rights. She has coined the concept “linguicism”, describing discrimination on the basis of language: “ideologies, structures and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate and reproduce an unequal division of both material and non material power and resources between groups which are defined on the basis of language”.

She stresses that in revitalizing languages, there are strong forces and barriers which must be faced; it is important to know and name these. We must have a solid analysis of the arguments and actions which are today being used to kill the planet’s linguistic and cultural diversity and biodiversity. These various types of diversity are correlationally and probably also causally related. Where there are many different species of animals, plants, etc, there are usually also many languages. Much of the knowledge of how to maintain biodiversity is encoded in small languages. By killing the languages and cultures of indigenous peoples, the world’s elites are also in the end destroying the prerequisites for humankind to live on this planet. Indigenous peoples around the world must fight against linguistic and cultural genocide and biocide. Earlier and most of the present education of indigenous children fit two of the definitions of genocide in The United Nations International Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (E793, 1948; 78 U.N.T.S. 277, entered into force Jan. 12, 1951; for the full text, see <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instreet/x1cpcpg.htm>) (“the Genocide Convention”). Article II(e): “*forcibly transferring children of the group to another group,*” and Article II(b): “*causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group.*”(emphasis added). Formal education and mass media are the most direct causes of linguistic genocide but behind them are the political, economic, social and techno-military forces, the neo imperialism and neo colonialism perpetuated by the elites of the world.

Education for indigenous and minority children must lead to high levels of multilingualism, through strong forms of bilingual education. Children must be given a fair chance to achieve academically. Education should foster a strong positive multilingual and multicultural identity, positive attitudes towards oneself and others, and a strong chance of awareness and competence building. All of these are prerequisites for working for a more equitable world for everyone locally and globally.

She points out that far too often when indigenous and minority children face difficulties in schools, explanations blame the child, the parents, or the community instead of the educational system of the dominant society. An educational system that requires all children to adapt to the dominant model is responsible for violating children's human rights. Human rights should guarantee the basics needed for survival, including a dignified life. Educational linguistic human rights are one of the necessities from which price tags should be removed.

## **Establishing and Maintaining an Immersion Program in a Critically Endangered Language**

### **Kaiatitahkhe Annette Jacobs, Mohawk**

Kaiatitahkhe Annette Jacobs is Mohawk from Kanawake. She was a teacher and a principal and now works as curriculum coordinator and writer at Karonhianonhnha immersion school. Karonhianonhnha is one of two elementary schools in the community. The student population is approximately two hundred and fifteen students. The initial immersion program began as a Nursery & Kindergarten pilot project in 1979, with students streamed into a partial setting at grade 1. The partial setting continued until 1986 and the total immersion began. In 1992, they restructured and increased the nursery and kindergarten to full day total immersion programs, the grade four from a partial program to a total immersion setting and grade five and six as a transition period into English with a Mohawk maintenance program. That is what exists today.

Speaking of some of the trials and tribulations and some of the successes of the immersion program in Kanawake, she stated that the Mohawk language is listed as endangered. The community is losing their first language speakers at an alarming rate. The challenge for them is to produce second language speakers, fluent enough to replace those that they are losing. The total immersion program at Kahnawake is an integral part of the education system. It went through many changes from its initial introduction. Though immersion started in Kanawake in 1986, the program did not happen all of a sudden. They had run the gamut of L2 programs and gone through much emotional turmoil before deciding to take the plunge into immersion. Despite their initial inexperience in developing language programs their goal has always been fluency in the language.

In a fluency and literacy evaluation of the grade four students who have been in immersion for six years, findings determined that over 85% of these students were as fluent as native speakers of the same age. The students who attend the immersion program are also exposed to all that is positive about who they are, Kanien'keha:ka (Mohawk). They know their language, they have a secure identity, they have knowledge of their history, culture and traditions, and the necessary academics to continue successfully in whatever they chose to do. They believe that the Kanien'keha immersion program is a key contributor to the survival of the Mohawk language.

### **The McGill Studies 1984 – 1988**

Researchers at McGill University conducted a series of longitudinal studies concerning the immersion program in Kahnawake (Chartrand, Holobow & Lambert, 1986; Genesee, Holobow & Lambert, 1987; Holobow, 1988; Holobow, Lambert, & McGilly, 1984) The results of this research indicated that participation did not adversely affect the English and mathematics achievement of the participating students.

### **Dr. Donna Goodleaf, Mohawk, Kanawake**

Donna Goodleaf is the Executive Director of the Kanien'kehaka Raotitiohkwa Cultural Centre in Kahnawake. She discussed how cultural centers play an important role in providing language services across Canada to First Nation's people. Cultural Centers should serve as dedicated catalysts for community change and help, lead and support in passing on the language.

In her position, Donna Goodleaf has helped establish an initiative that promotes language revitalization. This initiative involves providing an alternative learning environment for language acquisition. Through an

interactive computer program utilizing images, texts, and voicing techniques, comprehension, speaking and listening skills are increased in hopes of reclaiming the language. Local businesses assisted in funding a computer lab to enable more people to make use of this program. Other initiatives that have been implemented are: a girl's singing group and a language immersion camp each summer for children ages 6 to 12.

Dr. Donna Goodleaf then elaborated on another initiative that has been tremendously successful in allowing the language to be heard. She discussed that their cable television network produces a show once a month that is strictly in the language. It serves to inform the public of different language and cultural events happening in the community. They also broadcast a puppet show for the children. They have received a grant from the Brighter Futures Program which has enabled this project to become a reality. The project is now entering into its second year of programming (9-30 minute shows per year).

She then concluded by illustrating the goals of the program: to promote and foster oral proficiency and literary ability, to provide culturally relevant content to promote an understanding of one's identity, and thereby increase one's self esteem and pride.

### **Mentoring and other Non-School Immersion Strategies:**

#### **Laura Wee Lay Laq- Stó:lō (Halq'eméylem Language) BC**

Laura Wee Lay Laq is from the Stó:lō Nation in British Columbia and speaks the Halq'eméylem language. She spoke of the development of a non-school language immersion program in her community. This program took five years to accomplish.

Working closely with the elders and children in the community, they have managed to receive the support of the Chiefs and Council. What began with a few people for an hour a week has grown to twenty regular people interested in learning the language and sharing their knowledge. Believing that language comes from the community, they do not follow designed curriculum. Their program is not solely focused on language learning, but enables the coming together as a community to engage in activities that help to ensure the preservation of the language.

Ms. Wee Lay Laq is also involved in the formation of a language nest foundation called Truth Speakers. This foundation will consist of funds raised through auctions and events in the community. The aim will be to provide financial support to any community in need to enable the development of community based language immersion programs that help ensure the revitalization of First Nations languages.

#### **Roger Paul, Gabe Paul, Carol Dana, Maulian Dana, Madonna SakTomah, Wenona Lola- Penobscot Indian Nation**

The Penobscot Nation has been running an immersion program with the help of a Barry Dana two-year grant. Though they are nearing the end of their grant allocation, their program is only getting stronger. They have implemented immersion education into the school, and they also hold quarterly immersion camps. These camps are weeklong and involve complete immersion in the language. They stress that this type of situation also allows for complete immersion into the Penobscot identity and culture. Many realize after attending the immersion camps that it is possible to have a community of fluent speakers again.

The Penobscot Nation also runs a language apprentice immersion program, allowing younger students to learn the language in the hopes that they will return to the school and teach the children. The students that go through this program are the future, the future speakers, the future of the Penobscot language and culture.

## **Support Programs for Immersion:**

### **Brian MacDonald-Curriculum and Resource Development**

Brian MacDonald has been involved in curriculum and resource development with the Onion Lake Cree since 1996. He spoke of the how they have proceeded to develop curriculum for their immersion program and difficulties they have faced.

The Onion Lake Cree have developed curriculum specifically tied to the people's way of life, revolving around the seasons. This curriculum is based on traditional Cree practices of the community, and much classroom time is spent engaged in traditional activities in order to teach the language. The framework is a generic one that could be incorporated by other First Nations communities across Canada, substituting Cree content for their own. The curriculum is computerized, following a syllabic standardized writing system, and through Microsoft publisher, the curriculum can be changed to another language. The possibility is there for the future marketing of the curriculum to other communities.

Sufficient funding for the development of full curriculum has been an obstacle. They have managed to get funding through a five-year commitment from the federal government as part of the New Paths Initiative, yet this funding is simply not enough. Parents are concerned that sending their children to immersion schooling will be at the expense of English fluency. MacDonald points out that this is simply not the case since children are already fluent in English prior to attending immersion schooling. As well, children who do not have fluent speaking Cree parent(s) are also able to succeed in the immersion program.

Finally, the parents of all the children are very much involved in the Cree immersion program, participating in fundraising and school activities. Elders are also involved in the development of the curriculum and are very supportive.

### **Pre School and Elementary Immersion Programs**

#### **Ida Denny and Deanna Morris-Eskasoni.**

Ida Denny and Deanna Morris are Mi'kmaq from Eskasoni First Nation. They have been involved in the immersion program in their community as teachers and curriculum developers. In Eskasoni there is a daycare, headstart, an elementary and middle school and a high school. The immersion program is from kindergarten to grade three and has more than one hundred and thirty children. They spoke of some problems they have encountered in the immersion program.

The school board and the teachers felt strongly enough to start such a worth while project despite lacking materials. One thing they did have in the community was the language. The school followed the provincial outcomes, ensuring that the children learned the skills that were needed to be on par with English students. Much of the material could not be translated literally, but with the help of the elders they incorporated old stories and the history of their people into the curriculum.

Many problems were encountered, but the parents were determined to make this project a success. In order to enable non fluent parents to assist their children with school work, they have made available resources such a tapes and worksheets. Today they have their own wing in their school with certified teachers. The students who have gone through immersion who are now in the regular grade four classes are more mature and are the top students at that level. Ms. Denny and Ms Morris encourage other Mi'kmaq communities to do the same and implement immersion education. They have even offered to lend out their curriculum. Their only wish is that they will be able to expand the immersion program in the future.

### **Leo Fox and Joyce Goodstriker-Kainai Board of Education**



Leo Fox and Joyce Goodstriker are from the Blackfoot Confederacy. They are involved in the implementation and administration of the pre-school and elementary immersion program with the Kainai Board of Education on the Blood Reserve in Alberta. Joyce Goodstriker has been the superintendent of the school for over fifteen years, and Leo Fox is the cultural studies coordinator and a teacher at the school. They spoke of the overall structure of the school program, some of the barriers they have faced with their Blackfoot immersion program and many of the successes.

They have four schools on the reserve and the Blackfoot language is taught throughout. Though the movement for people to attend their schools has been gradual, they believe that the interest is there. They know have anywhere from one thousand to twenty one hundred children in their schools at any one time.

The Kainai School Board is truly representative of the parents in the community, and language and culture have always been top priorities. Many of the teachers have been trained by the likes of Dorothy Lazore and Steven Grey Morning and are very passionate about the language. In addition, some of the students at the school self teach themselves. This has been useful because the students become responsible for their own learning.

They stressed that First Nations people have been deprived because of the history of their education at the hands of the government, through residential schools. It is therefore very important that their languages be maintained. They believe that immersion education is the only way to do this.

### **Roger Martin-Gesgapegiag School**

Roger Martin is a teacher at the Gesgapegiag School in Gesgapegiag Quebec. He spoke of the language immersion program in their community, which began in 1979 and goes right up to grade eight. One of the reasons they were able to maintain the language in their community is due to the support of the parents and band council. He mentions that in many communities, there is a lack of support from the band council. In Gesgapegiag however, they have made it a mandate that the council support the school in its endeavors to maintain the language. He also stresses that the youth are the future of the community and it is important to invest in them. It is crucial never to give up, that working together is how a people remain strong.

### **Pauline Deconti- Kitigan Zibi Education Council.**

Pauline Deconti, Algonquin from Kitigan Zibi, spoke of the partial immersion program that she is involved with in her community. Called partial immersion because it takes place for half of the child's school day, the program focuses on teaching the language through whatever means available. This could include classroom instruction, or engaging in cultural activities in the community. One problem faced is that the immersion program does not continue after grade six, and the students must go on to high school in English. In addition, they have found themselves in a position of having to incorporate new words for modern living into the language. This has been a challenge.

Their school is strongly supported in the community, and most of their staff are now from Kitigan Zibi. They have also been inclusive to the elders, gathering them to work on the development of the language in the modern form.

Pauline has also been involved in the creation of One Algonquin Voice, a regional committee of Algonquin speakers implemented to increase the use of the Algonquin language in the communities. She and others are also working on a Master Strategy for language immersion, which will enable any community who is interested in immersion to adopt this common strategy and curriculum.

### **Pre School & Elementary Immersion Programs**

### **Debbie House, Daisy Bear Skin, Mary Diamond Bear-Cree School Board**

From the Cree School Board, Debbie House, Daisy Bear Skin and Mary Diamond Bear work in Education Services, responsible for all the education and pedagogical aspects of the school board. They do have Cree immersion in the schools. A 1988 resolution passed by the regional government mandated Cree be the language of instruction right up to grade three.

In addition, because over half the population of the area had attended residential schools, many knew how to speak the language, but did not know how to read or write. In response to this, they have implemented a Cree literacy program for adults, teachers, parents and community members and have graduated more than two hundred speakers as of late. They also have a Cree lexicon that is in its second printing, which can be accessed through the web ([www.eastcree.org](http://www.eastcree.org)) and is downloadable to distribute.

The interest for immersion in the community is very high and courses are not just given in the classroom. Many are given on the land. They also work with the elders in the community. It is the elders who know the language and they are included as co instructors in the program.

There are many challenges that the community continues to face to ensure the continuation of the program. They suffer a shortage of trained fluent speakers in the community who are willing and able to teach immersion. It has also been struggle to gain the support of the leadership to retain language in the schools. They believe that the responsibility for the language cannot reside solely in the hands of the Cree School Board but that the people of the Nation need to ensure its survival.

### **Joyce Germaine & Faye Metallic-Listuguj**

Joyce Germaine and Faye Metallic are from Listuguj, Quebec. They work as a kindergarten immersion teacher and a language coordinator and curriculum developer. They have a core language program that is given to the children a half hour a day throughout all the grades. The Mi'gmaq immersion program was implemented five years ago. Though they do not have any thing prior to the nursery level and they aim to implement immersion right up to grade three.

The community does not have their own Native curriculum. They must translate it from English into Mi'gmaq and this has been a challenge. They do continue to develop their program themselves. Other difficulties have been attempting to overcome the skepticism of many of the parents and their reticence to send their children into immersion, believing that English will provide for better education and better employment opportunities in the future. A kindergarten-streaming test was done and the children scored high on their basic concepts, writing and skills. They believe this is living proof that the language is strong and that they can keep their language with the hope that the children will go to university carrying their language, culture and identity with them.

The ultimate goal that they are striving toward is the implementation of full immersion from head start to grade three. They would also like to gather all interested Mi'gmaq speakers, the elders and parents and enable them to get involved in the education system. They see the need to develop a training program for those who are interested in teaching the Mi'gmaq language with the hope and possibility of a rewarding career in the education field. They stress the need of support from the elders and community. The message promoted with the children is their responsibility in learning the language in order to ensure that it is passed on to the next generation.

### **Louise Simon-Wagmatcook, Lillianne Marshall-Chapel Island**

Louise Simon, Wagmatcook, teaches at the Wagmatcook First Nation School. The school has immersion from daycare up to grade two where all subjects are taught in Mi'gmaq. Grade three to grade twelve has a forty-minute period each day taught by the Mi'gmaq teachers.

They have been responsible for developing all of their own materials. They have also incorporated a program that has taught them how to make books with the children. The teachers from kindergarten to grade two began developing stories for the children to use at school with the hope of publishing them.

Lillianne Marshall works for the Chapel Island School Board. She has developed a book for the elementary level consisting of the Mi'gmaq alphabet. It is also in CD ROM format. She believes that to teach children to be proud of themselves and their Mi'gmaq heritage, they must be taught four things, Mi'gmaq beliefs, values, language, and traditions. This is the focus of the material developed.

Most of the children in the program do not speak the language. A challenge they face is even those who do know the language do not practice it outside the school. Their goal however is that by grade four when the children graduate they are fluent in the language and will eventually be recruited into the program as teachers and curriculum developers themselves.

### **Mary Joy Elijah-Oneida of the Tems**

Mary Joy Elijah is from Oneida of the Tems, Ontario. The community has a population of approximately twenty three hundred people of which about a hundred and seventeen are fluent first language speakers. She comments that in the thirty years that Indian Affairs has provided native language programming they have not produced a single second language speaker. The federal school system has failed to properly educate the community in English and has certainly not educated them in their own language.

Their community began their own schooling seventeen years ago and they now have a private language immersion school and Standing Stone School that are both federally funded. Standing Stone School is from kindergarten to grade six, after which students must be bused into the city of London to attend high school. They have immersion forty minutes a day, but hope to expand in the future.

The community is following a bi-cultural bilingual model that was advanced by Jim Cummins. They have strong programs in English and Oneida with an equal focus on academics and Oneida language and culture. She believes it is crucial to have properly defined goals before engaging in education and curriculum development.

She stresses that support from the community is vital and for this reason, they are attempting to build a culturally based curriculum writing team from the members of the population. They believe it is important to gather the elders, parents, teachers, and those who hold the knowledge of the traditional ceremonies. They are also trying to raise community awareness on the importance of immersion education in hopes that more will engage as agents of change.

Language does bring people closer to their ancestral way of life. She remarks that it is the young people who are leading the way back to the traditional way of the Oneida people. The true measure of immersion success will be when children at the schools play in their own language.

### **The Cayuga Immersion Program:**

#### **Sharing Our 20 Years of Experience at Kawenni:io/Gaweni:yo Elementary and High School- Elva Jameison, Candace Squire and Michelle Davis**

The Cayuga Immersion program began after a study was done in 1984 the results of which were shocking. There were only a few hundred speakers of any Six Nations language on their reserve. With those results, the parents decided that immersion was the only way they could retain the language and culture. They began the Kawenni:io/Gaweni:yo Elementary School with absolutely no funding, no facilities, no curriculum and even no furniture. The teachers even went without pay for a time. Through an extensive

P.R. campaign, they persuaded community members with additional monies to donate to the school. They did eventually receive funding through INAC and moved to the amalgamated school.

They have one hundred percent immersion from junior kindergarten to grade six and in grade seven and eight they have 50% in English and 50% in the language. It was the dedication of parents and their refusal to send their children to high school off reserve that gave birth to the Kawenni:io/Gaweni:y High School. They wanted their children to continue learning in the language and culture of the people.

Presently they have an enrollment of eighty-three students and though their curriculum matches the provincial guidelines, it is based on the Thanksgiving speech. They also have a coop program that enables students to spend time learning from traditional people in the community as well as an apprenticeship program. The community has a Native studies program where they focus on furthering an understanding of historical issues from colonialism, displacement and residential schools and how this past affects the present lives of the people. In addition, there is an adult immersion program in both Cayuga and Mohawk and they do have two resource centers in the community.

Despite the successes of the immersion program, there are many struggles that are faced. Primarily, the pressures of drugs and alcohol are ever-present. It is a challenge to keep the young people on track. In addition, they have noticed that there is a stereotyping that comes from children attending the immersion school, the notion that the school is not an authentic institution of learning.

The Kawenni:io/Gaweni:yo Elementary and High School is independent and autonomous. Stressing that the main goal of First Nations communities should be a takeover of their educational institutions, the time is urgent. Their school serves as an example that it is possible to build one's own parent driven immersion school with the help of the elders and the community.

### **Ahkwesahsne Freedom School and the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education**

#### **Kaweienonni Cook Peters and Kawennahen:te Cook-Immersion Works! Students are Living Proof**

Kaweienonni Cook Peters spoke of her involvement with the Ahkwesahsne Freedom School. The school began in 1979 through the support of parents in the community. Despite a huge emphasis on the culture and language of the Mohawk people, the school did not become a full immersion program until 1985. It was not until 1986 that Ms. Cook Peters was called upon to teach. Despite being a speaker of the language, her children were enrolled in the English school system and she was herself a skeptic of immersion education. During her time at the school, she observed the dedication of other parents who were sending their children to the Freedom School.

It was not until her daughter spoke to her in Mohawk that she began to consider immersion education for her child. She states that she felt ashamed that she was a holder of the language and had the ability to pass it on to her children, yet she was not doing so. At this time, she decided to enroll her daughter Kawennahen:te into the Ahkwesahsne Freedom School. She has gone from being a skeptic to a full supporter of immersion education. She believes there is simply no other way to ensure the survival of the language.

The school has a full immersion program from pre-kindergarten to grade six. Grade seven is a transition year, from Mohawk to English, in preparation for high school. They do not yet have their own high school on reserve, and must therefore send their children to the Salmon River Central High School. Kaweienonni Cook Peters stresses that her daughter is a living testament to the success of immersion education and she suffers no difficulties from having attended schooling in her language.

Kawennahen:te Cook spoke of her experience in immersion education and how she approaches teaching in the very school from which she had previously graduated, the Ahkwesahsne Freedom School. She began by sharing her fear that so many First Nation people are unable to speak their language, and that this makes

the future uncertain. She believes that it is in every child's best interest to receive an education in their own language, and wishes to subside any fears parents might have as to what the outcome for their children might be if they do attend immersion. Having been educated in the full immersion program and having made the transition to an English high school, she states that though it did take her a short time to adapt to the different atmosphere, mode and language of instruction, she has since graduated with high honors from Salmon River Central High School.

As a teacher herself, she stresses the importance of not getting discouraged due to the lack of materials. It is important to take the responsibility to make them yourself and be resourceful. She also points out that humor is very effective in avoiding the frustrations of the daily struggle.

A final point, which was echoed by many other presentations during the symposium, was the difficulty in getting children to practice the language once they are in the schoolyard. She suggests getting youth involved who can speak the language and can engage with children on the playground, designing activities that make use of the language. She has succeeded in doing so at the school with which she is involved.