

# Talk Medicine: Envisioning the Effects of Aboriginal Language Revitalization in Manitoba Schools

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The seven indigenous languages of Manitoba represent a spectrum of linguistic viability. At the most viable end of the spectrum are Cree, Inuktitut and Ojibwe, arguably the most robust Aboriginal languages in Canada, with more threatened languages like Dakota and Michif at the other end of the spectrum. The relevance of Cree, Ojibwe, Oji-Cree, Dene, Inuktitut, Dakota, and Michif to the social and political history of Manitoba, as well as the unique features of the languages themselves, make these languages ideal for protection and revitalization. Manitoba schools have the potential to be well-structured and suited to implementing several models of language revitalization, and as such, they are an essential component in a revitalization initiative.

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## INTRODUCTION

As vehicles of the millenniums-old philosophies, oral literatures, sciences, histories, music and religions indigenous to a geographically large and diverse region, the loss of any of the seven Aboriginal languages of Manitoba would be a tragedy. Cree was historically spoken from the east coast of Turtle Island (North America) to the western edge of the prairies, yet lacks official status in all but the northernmost stretches of that territory (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2005, p. 76). The Dene language faces extinction despite being related to Navajo, one of the most vibrant language indigenous to Turtle Island (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2009). Extending into the United States, Ojibwe and Dakota join Inuktitut, a dialect of which is the sole official language of Kalallit Nunaat (Greenland), as truly international languages, and yet each of them face the threat of decline. Oji-Cree is similarly threatened, despite being formed by the two most spoken indigenous languages in Canada. Michif is arguably the most Canadian of languages, comprised of Turtle Islander and European elements, with a smattering of global influence, and yet, without revitalization efforts, it may disappear within a

few generations. Should any of these languages become extinct, their phonological, morphological, and syntactic uniqueness would be lost to the world. More tragically, Manitobans would lose languages which encapsulate their shared history.

However, by adopting effective practices of language revitalization, these languages can be saved. While linguistic preservation is, in itself, a justification of revitalization initiatives, there are a number of other benefits resulting from the revival of these languages. By integrating its own indigenous languages into existing curriculum, Manitoba schools have the opportunity to effect positive change within the classroom and throughout communities. It is the possibility that casting a stone locally can have an larger – perhaps even global – impact that beseeches Manitoba schools to help revitalize Aboriginal languages.

#### RATIONALE FOR REVITALIZATION

At the most fundamental level, the revitalization of each Aboriginal language in Manitoba is necessary and desirable as a means of facilitating cultural and linguistic preservation, revitalization, and diversity. A United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report entitled *Language Vitality and Endangerment* notes that the loss of any language results in “the irrevocable loss of unique cultural [and] historical knowledge” (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2005, p. 72). Accordingly, Cree, Inuktitut, Oji-Cree, Dene, Ojibwe, Michif and Dakota all have important and unique linguistic features, histories, and political significance, which more than justify their potential for revitalization. The following is a brief and by no means exhaustive rationale for increased efforts at revitalizing the indigenous languages of Manitoba.

The viability status of indigenous languages is one reason why they should be adopted as official languages of Manitoba. There are about 61 Aboriginal languages spoken in Canada, and of those, only Cree, Ojibwe, and Inuktitut are considered viable languages (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2005, p. ii). All three of these languages are historically spoken in what is now Manitoba, and continue to be spoken in the province today (Manitoba Education and Training, 2010). Unfortunately, every indigenous language of Manitoba and Canada may be regarded as endangered and consistently losing speakers (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2005, p. iii). While First Na-

tions languages such as Dakota and Oji-Cree may be protected by law within communities, the Métis people lack the power to directly affect Michif language laws in their communities due to the absence of a Métis “homeland”, and not surprisingly, Michif is one of the most critically endangered languages in Canada (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2005, p. iii). In order to restore the Aboriginal languages in Manitoba, from the most robust to the most endangered, revitalization efforts should be initiated and supported by all Manitobans.

Local languages must be preserved also as a means of preserving local history. The formation of Canada was and continues to be largely shaped by the interactions between Euro-Canadians and First Nations, Métis and Inuit people. The influence of local Métis and First Nations in the establishment of Manitoba is even more pronounced, and accordingly, the loss of Manitoba’s indigenous languages would result in the loss of culture and shared history of the land from pre-contact to contemporary periods. Ojibwe creation stories, the adventures of Dakota cultural heroes, oral narratives detailing the bitter history between the Dene and Inuit in the north, the ecological and geographical history of the land according to the Oji-Cree, the birth and development of Michif and its use by the “Father of Manitoba” Louis Riel, and first-hand accounts of residential school survivors written in Cree: these are only some of the important historical resources that would be impacted should the indigenous languages of Manitoba be lost. The very history of what is now Manitoba is encapsulated in its languages, and knowing this, provincial schools have an obligation to preserve them.

While the public school system must embrace the revitalization movement, so too should all Manitobans. The author contends that while Aboriginal people should take a leadership role in revitalizing their languages, all Manitobans should be sensitive to the importance of the Oji-Cree, Dene, Dakota, Ojibwe, Inuktitut, Michif and Cree languages. The prominent role of indigenous languages in the establishment of the province designates them as heritage languages of all Manitobans. For example, while the Dakota language may historically be connected to the Dakota people, it is vital that everyone in Manitoba, not only the Dakota, embrace and support Dakota as a heritage language. This concept is in keeping with Fishman’s (1990) idea which states that the classic perception of “the ‘Xmen-with-Xish’” must be abandoned in order for language revitalization to occur.” That is, it is impor-

tant to separate race and language to eliminate perceptions that only *Xmen* can or should speak *Xish*, and that a language belongs to a certain group. Every Manitoban lives in a province that is, in part, the legacy of the Ojibwe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dene, and Dakota-speaking First Nations, the Michif-speaking Métis, and Inuktitut-speaking Inuit. Thus, it can be said that indigenous languages comprise the heritage languages of all Manitobans. The key role that indigenous languages have had in the political development of modern Manitoba, and therefore its status as the heritage language of all Manitobans, means that all Manitobans should strive to revitalize these important resources.

Formed by the histories, ontologies, and world views of indigenous peoples across thousands of years, the Aboriginal languages of Manitoba are structurally unique. Their extinction would mean the end of an entity as organic and evolved as any native flora or fauna. For example, Michif is a mixed language, born from the contact between French and mostly Cree speakers. Many such “contact languages” exist throughout the world. Usually called pidgins or creoles, they exist wherever contact has occurred between people speaking very different languages, necessitating the creation of a common language. These languages typically feature grammars formed from the easiest aspects of each source language, basic and limited vocabularies, and one basic sound system (Fromkin, Rodman, Hultin & Logan, 2001). However, Michif resisted this simplification, and instead became, in the words of Michif scholar Peter Bakker, an “impossible language” which “challenges all theoretical models” (Abley, 2003, p. 51). Instead of a simplified grammar, Michif has incorporated the complex grammatical gender of French (masculine/feminine) and Cree (animate/inanimate), as well as the phrase structures of each language. The vocabulary consists of French nouns and Cree verbs, with other parts of speech representing both languages. Because both languages are represented in Michif, the language’s phonological system is composed of two sound systems. Because it resists classification as a pidgin or creole, Michif is technically classified by linguists as a “mixed language”, although it is different even from other known mixed languages (Bakker, 1997). Given the unique nature of the Michif language, steps should be taken to preserve it for future study, along with the other indigenous languages of Manitoba.

## DEFINING THE GOALS OF REVITALIZATION

The overarching goal of language revitalization is to give life again to declining, endangered, critically endangered or extinct languages. As the process of revitalizing a language is an important, but labour-intensive process, establishing clear objectives as an indicator of success is important to realizing the most fruitful results within the limits of temporal and monetary resources. To articulate those goals, it is important to understand what constitutes a healthy living language, both in terms of socio-political context, as well as in terms of language use.

Language revitalization may be considered as a means of combating language decline. As such, the factors involved in language decline may offer insights as to the end goals of language revitalization. Andrea Bear Nicholas noted that Aboriginal languages in Canada have declined as a result of the "outlawing of Indigenous languages, the privileging of colonial languages and the overt strategies of shame, punishment and abuse employed in the education of First Nations children" (2008, pp. 18-19). If these are the factors to blame for the decline in Aboriginal language use, then a revitalized language may be one which enjoys government support through official status and inclusion in provincial curricula, one which is funded and supported in equal proportion to the colonial languages (English and French), and is used within a society that respects and engages Aboriginal students and acknowledges the value of Aboriginal knowledge. The Assembly of First Nations Chiefs Committee on Languages likewise noted that the goals of their National First Nations Languages Strategy include legislating First Nation languages as official languages, establishing an "endowed First Nations Language Foundation", and helping to train professionally certified First Nation language instructors (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2005, p. 48). While these goals are important as far as overcoming the bureaucratic and political obstacles in revitalizing indigenous languages, they appear to suggest that the status of a language is completely dependent upon political and governmental support. Though these socio-political aspects are important, there is more to a revitalized language than official status, perceived equality, and a presence within the education system.

Bauman's scale of linguistic viability suggests that regardless of socio-political status, the viability of a language depends upon the number of speakers and the rate at which that language is being transmitted to younger

generations (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2005, p. 34). Bauman stated that:

Flourishing languages [the most viable] have speakers of all ages, and intergenerational transmission occurs without disruption; the language is supported in all parts of community and home life, schooling, and communications. (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2005, p. 34)

Accordingly, the goals of language revitalization may be described as increasing the number of speakers and increasing the rate at which the language is transmitted to children. More specifically, it may be described as creating as many fluent speakers as possible (broadly defining fluency as the ability to speak a language accurately, confidently, and without conscious effort in a number of situations), and facilitating the use of the language across as many generations and in as many facets of daily life as is possible. Further, it is presumed that this process must continue indefinitely, just as it does with any flourishing language such as English. According to this definition, a revitalized language might best be described as one which is likely to be spoken in the future by succeeding generations. The revitalization process must therefore be aimed at realizing this ideal.

#### REVITALIZATION FOR ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES: POTENTIAL MODELS

The revitalization of any language can be a long and difficult process. However, there are a number of steps that have been proven effective in language revitalization projects around the world. Scholars generally agree on a number of criteria necessary for language survival, which include:

- Community support for the language,
- Perceived prestige of both the language and speakers of the language within the community,
- Transmission of the language from older to younger generations,
- Presence of the language within the state education system,
- Presence of a written form of the language, and
- Spaces within the community where use of the language is actively promoted and encouraged.

The first and most important part of revitalizing a language is the presence of support at the community level. Various experts in the field of linguistics assert that truly effective revitalization occurs only with a combination

of official support and community involvement. Fishman (1990) claimed that members of the community “must be convinced” that revitalizing the language in question is in their “best interests” (p. 92). In her influential work, *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice*, Leanne Hinton (2001) also asserted that community involvement is key to the success of any revitalization program. The First Peoples’ Heritage, Language and Culture Council further advocates language revitalization as a process that requires support not only in schools, but at all levels of the community (2010). Revitalization projects in countries such as the United States, Ireland, and South Africa have met with mixed success, largely due to the fact that, despite being protected by law, community support for revitalization of indigenous languages is low or lacking (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2005). Community support is vital for the retention and revitalization of indigenous languages.

One way of rallying community support of a language is to increase its presence in institutions of influence and prestige. A language with speakers considered to be successful, influential, and distinguished may facilitate its development as viable and robust (Crystal, 2000). One way to create such speakers is to grant the language official status. Judd (1983) noted that teaching any language is a political act, and being taught a language is being taught that the language is important. While official status and support in itself does not guarantee success, languages around the world have enjoyed revitalization as a result of increased prestige associated with official recognition.

Perhaps most notably, the Maori language in Aotearoa (New Zealand) is an official state language used in government, schools, and elsewhere throughout the community (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2005, p. 78). Maori has subsequently become a vibrant, living language in Aotearoa by marrying grassroots support with government support which places speakers of the language in important positions within government, education, and business. This has also occurred to a lesser extent within Canada. As mentioned earlier, both Nunavut and the Northwest Territories have granted several Inuit and First Nations languages official status, and those languages are now present within government and public institutions (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2005). One of these languages, Inuktitut, is considered one of the healthiest indigenous languages in Canada and is present in their Legislature, the Nunavut curriculum, and within the community (Depart-

ment of Canadian Heritage, 2005). Another example of effectively reinstating a First Nations language as the everyday language of a community can be noted in the success of the Kahnawá:ke language law (1999). This effectively made Kanien'kéha an official language of the Kahnawá:ke Nation (1999), and along with Kanien'kéha immersion programs in Kahnawá:ke schools, succeeded in reinstating the language as an everyday language of the community. The law mandates use of the language in education, business, community events, and government, and in doing so, has helped to nurture bilingual speakers who can pass the language on to their children (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2005, pp. 87-88). While the Department of Canadian Heritage warns that official status does not necessarily ensure the revitalization of a language, it does note that it can play a major role in encouraging the use of minority languages in a variety of public spheres, such as government, education, and daily life (2005, p.78).

The presence of minority languages within the education system is especially vital, since schools tend to be perceived as champions of societal values (Young, Levin & Wallin, 2008, pp. 8-9). By creating a physical space for indigenous languages to be used and encouraged, Manitoba public schools could reinforce their importance for students and families. Further, these languages can be integrated into the provincial curriculum, which is commonly regarded as an outline of "which knowledge is valuable" (Young, Levin & Wallin, 2008, p. 227). As instructors of a curricular subject thus designated "valuable", fluent Aboriginal language speakers will also enjoy elevated status, influence, and prestige. All of these factors have been found to be important in revitalizing threatened languages, and Manitoba schools have the ability to mandate their implementation.

As mentioned above, language revitalization is almost entirely dependent upon increasing the number of children learning and using the language in question. In Fishman's *Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale for Threatened Languages* (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2005, p. 85), almost every stage of the revitalization process is aimed at transmitting the language from older to younger generations (see Table 1).

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Language Status</i>	<i>Suggested Interventions</i>
8	Only a few Elders speak the language.	Implement Hinton’s (1994) “Language Apprentice” Model where fluent Elders are teamed one-on-one with <b>young adults</b> who want to learn the language.
7	Only adults beyond childbearing age speak the language.	Establish “language nests” after the Maori and Hawaiian models where fluent older adults provide pre-school <b>child-care</b> in which children are immersed in their Indigenous language...
6	Some intergenerational use of language.	Develop places in community where language is encouraged, protected, and used exclusively. Encourage more young parents to speak the Indigenous language in home with and around their <b>young children</b> .
5	Language is still very much alive and used in community.	Offer literacy in minority language. Promote voluntary programs in the <b>schools</b> and other community institutions to improve the prestige and use of the language. Use language in local government functions, especially social services. Give recognition to special local efforts through awards, etc.
4	Language is required in elementary schools.	Teach reading and writing and higher level language skills... Develop two-way bilingual programs where appropriate, where non-speaking <b>elementary students</b> learn the Indigenous language and speakers learn a national or international language. Need to develop Indigenous language text-books to teach literacy and academic subject matter content.
3	Language is used in places of business and by employees in less specialized work areas.	Promote language by making it the language of work used throughout the community... Develop vocabulary so that workers in an office could do their day-to-day work using their Indigenous language.
2	Language is used by local government and in the mass media in the minority community.	Promote use of written forms of language for government and business dealings/records. Promote Indigenous language newsletters, newspapers, radio stations, and television stations.
1	Some language use by higher levels of government and in higher education.	Teach tribal college subject matter classes in the language. Develop an Indigenous language oral and written literature through dramatic presentations and publications. Give tribal/national awards for Indigenous language publications and other notable efforts to promote Indigenous languages.

Table 1: Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale for Threatened Languages

The focus on intergeneration transmission is replicated in other models as well. The very successful “language nest” model developed in Aotearoa involves older speakers of the language interacting daily in the target language with pre-school aged children through games, singing, storytelling, and other cultural activities. Likewise, Leanne Hinton’s “language apprentice” model (1993) involves pairing a fluent Elder or senior (the language master) with a younger learner (the apprentice). Apprentices commit to meeting with the master frequently to discuss everyday topics, natural objects, personal narratives, and traditional and non-traditional stories. One important requirement of the model is that all interactions occur within the target language. Rosen (2004) noted that many of the apprentices in the program go on to become teachers of the target language, with each master/apprentice pairing resulting in several new speakers, many of them children. Experts in the field of language revitalization emphasize the transmission of the threatened language from older to younger generations as an essential part of the revitalization process.

As institutions that specialize in the transmission of knowledge to younger generations, schools might be regarded as a logical place to implement language revitalization programs. Threatened language preservationist, activist and scholar Leanne Hinton (2003) claimed that:

Given that the languages are no longer being used at home, it is demonstrably true that the fastest and most effective way to get a critical mass of new fluent speakers of an endangered language is through the school - the same institution that was used to destroy these languages in the past ...Only [there] are there enough children spending enough time for the language to be effectively taught... the best path to fluency at this time is through intensive immersion schools...where the main language of instruction is the indigenous language itself. (p. 25)

The importance of integrating languages into institutions of public education is echoed by Choi (2003), who claimed that the successful maintenance of the Guarani language as the majority language of Paraguay is due, in part, to its status as a mandatory subject within Paraguayan schools. Interestingly, Paraguay is the only country in the Americas in which the non-indigenous majority speak an indigenous language (Gynan, 2001, p. 53). Paraguayans regard Guarani very favourably, and it is claimed that up to 90% of the population of Paraguay can speak and understand the language as a result of

its continued presence within the school and throughout the community. As mentioned earlier, incorporating a language within a school helps to increase its prestige. However, it is also the most efficient way to ensure the survival of threatened languages.

Because most modern approaches to second language acquisition within schools involve reading and writing, literacy in a threatened language is frequently cited as a requirement for revitalization of that language. Warner, Butler and Van Volkinburg (2009) claimed that having a written form of a language is essential not only for the development of materials to be used in the process of teaching and learning the language, but also in the preservation of stories, games, and songs in their original forms. Choi (2003) claimed that the development of a written form of Guarani was central to its preservation, and that the continued teaching of reading and writing conventions in Guarani is central to the continued prominence of that language in Paraguay. That said, Michif expert Nicole Rosen (2004) asserted that recording and videotaping fluent speakers is superior to simply writing the language down, since written forms do not capture the nuances or spoken character of a language (p. 75). Still, Rosen does encourage the development of a written form in order to increase the perceived prestige of the language within the community, as well as to simplify the task of lesson planning for language teachers. Despite some criticism, the development of a written form of a historically oral language is nonetheless considered important to the revival of that language.

The presence of French within the mandatory Manitoba curriculum is a testament to the fact that institutions of public education are ideal places to champion minority languages. If indigenous languages are accepted as heritage languages of all Manitobans, then Manitoba schools are the ideal places to inspire and create new generations of speakers of a heritage language. In fact, as centres specializing in the education of children, schools play an essential role in the transmission of the language from older to younger generations. Further, schools are already equipped with professionals who are experts in the field of literacy education, which may be applied to the instruction of literacy in Aboriginal languages, as well as the technology to videotape and record native speakers. Manitoba schools are inherently suited to the task of teaching and preserving language, and their participation is essential if the revitalization of indigenous languages is to become a reality.

Of course, making Aboriginal languages mandatory subjects within schools will not restore them as living languages. Once a threatened language and its speakers have prestige and influence within the community, and once schools have integrated the language into their curricula, the final stage in the process of revitalizing a language is the creation of opportunities for speakers to use the language within the community. Fishman recommended the creation of spaces in which “real, natural, daily community life” can be conducted in the threatened language is central to the language experiencing further growth and renewal (1990, p. 94). Activities such as “public events, rituals, ceremonies, concerts, lectures, courses, contests, readings, songfests, theatrical presentations, radio and television programmes and publications” are the way to preserve languages and encourage people to learn them. In other words, making the language alive through its use in community life is the most interesting and one of the most important aspects of revitalization (Fishman, 1990, p. 95).

While extending use of Aboriginal languages outside of the classroom would be necessary for their revitalization as everyday languages, Manitoba schools can still play a major role in creating opportunities to use these languages within the community. The creation or translation of dramatic works in Dene, Oji-Cree, Dakota, Cree, Inuktitut, Michif and/or Ojibwe would be an opportunity to bring the community together, as would an indigenous-language radio station run by students. Creating Aboriginal-language magazines featuring student work, writing contests, and community advertising would be another way schools could participate in the extension of languages into the community. Encouraging garage bands to write original music with indigenous language lyrics is another possibility, in the vein of Welsh punk rock bands “Super Furry Animals” and “Gorky’s Zygotic Mynci”, which are credited for helping to encourage use of the Welsh language among youth in Wales through their use of Cymraeg in their lyrics and on their websites. There are a myriad of creative ways in which schools can help to support the use of Aboriginal languages within the community. Because of their unique role, Manitoba schools are key partners in the movement for revitalization.

#### BENEFITS OF REVITALIZATION BEYOND THE PRESERVATION OF THE LANGUAGE

The importance of community support for the revitalization of threatened languages cannot be overstated. While most revitalization programs

within Canada involve small communities coming together to save their heritage language, the proposal that indigenous languages be made official languages of Manitoba, as well as mandated languages of study within schools, involves the support of a large population spread over a large geographical area. Accordingly, the benefits of learning indigenous languages must be made explicit to gain public support for such a large revitalization to be successful. The intention here is to build support at the grassroots level for preserving indigenous languages, not only for their continued survival, but for the many other benefits inherent in language study and the revival of indigenous languages, which will manifest themselves at an individual, community, and global level.

Research in language acquisition suggests that there are multiple and profound cognitive benefits to being multilingual in any language. Studies show that bilingual children outperform monolinguals in cognition testing in a variety of areas, such as visual-spatial ability and language awareness, and multilingual people also have higher reading speeds than monolinguals (Charbonneau 2008, Grin 1996, Lindholm 2006, Edwards and Newcombe 2006). These benefits appear to extend beyond the school career: bilingual seniors take longer to develop dementia and Alzheimer's, due to the ability of their brains to access information in more than one way (Charbonneau, 2008). These cognitive benefits inherent to the study of any language are themselves reason to consider mandatory indigenous language education in schools.

Perhaps related to the idea that language study improves cognition is the notion that multilingual people tend to be more educated, and they tend to learn additional languages more easily than monolinguals. One Irish study reported that adults who speak both English and Irish were more likely to stay in school and attend university than monolingual English speakers (Watson & Pádraig, 2009). Another study suggested that children who study mixed languages or creoles learn to perform better in each source language. The study involved Australian Aboriginal students being educated for three years in the Kriol language (a creole of English and indigenous Aboriginal languages) to determine if students' abilities in both English and Kriol would improve. Researchers found that the bilingual students had a greater awareness of language, they constructed more complex and grammatically correct sentences in both languages than their monolingually-educated peers, and

they had more positive attitudes towards each language (Murtagh, 1982). Murtagh also concluded that there is a “very definite trend towards the superiority of bilingual schooling over monolingual schooling” (p. 30).

According to the above research, the study of indigenous languages would have a plethora of cognitive benefits for students in Manitoba schools. By studying indigenous languages as additional languages, students may perform better academically, as do students of other heritage or international languages. They would experience the “brain gym” (Charbonneau, 2008, p. 7) effects and benefits of studying the complex structures of non-Indo-European languages. If studying a mixed language is conducive to proficiency of the source languages, this would mean students of Oji-Cree or Michif would experience a smoother transition to the study of Ojibwe, Cree and/or French than they would as monolinguals. Further, if they learned the concepts of masculine/feminine and animate/inanimate as children in language nests, these potentially confusing aspects of grammar will already be innate. Likewise, Cenoz and Genesee (1998) argued that while multilingual people are reported to perform better on tasks of concept formation, visual-spatial ability, creativity, and have better linguistic awareness, both languages must be considered of equal prestige within the community. Ball (2009) further noted that Aboriginal language education is important for developing “social inclusion, cultural identity, cognitive development, school readiness and educational achievement” (p. 40). In light of the psycholinguistic research on the cognitive benefits of additional language acquisition, students would benefit from mandatory Aboriginal language instruction in Manitoba schools.

The implementation of indigenous language education within schools need not replace existing subject areas. As contemporary curriculum stresses the importance of holistic education and the breakdown of divisions between disciplines, the study of languages offers a convenient conduit between subjects. For example, younger students in Melita may learn the Dakota words for colours in art and numbers in mathematics, as well as traditional songs in music. Older students in Berens River may use Michif or Oji-Cree to explore concepts of hybridity inherent in much of contemporary Canadian literature. A student in Winnipeg may explore pre-contact government in Ojibwe, another in Minnedosa may listen to a lecture in Cree about minority groups in social studies, and a field trip in Churchill may feature a lesson on traditional ecological knowledge in science via Inuktitut. As the focus on interdisciplin-

arianism becomes more and more important, so too does the potential contribution of indigenous language education. The integration of Aboriginal languages across the curriculum would thus have multiple benefits for students in Manitoba schools.

There are also many social benefits of studying these unique languages. Intergenerational interaction, cooperation, and respect are just some of these benefits, inherent in the “language nest” and “language apprentice” models of revitalization advocated above. Indeed, the act of pairing mostly older adults with children bridges two polarized segments of the community population. While many seniors in Canadian society experience isolation, exploitation, and neglect, these models attempt to value that segment of the population for the wealth of life experience they may offer youth, who may lack positive elderly role models. Children learn that seniors are the keepers of important knowledge and wisdom, and come to respect older generations while forming positive, mutually beneficial relationships with them. Further, senior citizens are valued for their expertise in both language and child care, they enjoy a sense of purpose and belonging within the community, and they find opportunities to connect with contemporary youth. In addition, the language apprentice model is renowned for its effectiveness in creating fluent speakers as well as its facilitation of realistic, natural communication between Elders and youth (Rosen, 2004). This intergenerational bonding is just one of many social benefits arising from language revitalization.

As living links to the past, these Elders may also hold the key to educating all Manitobans of important traditional ways. However, this type of education may be especially effective in instilling cultural pride in Aboriginal students. While it has been stated that Aboriginal languages are heritage languages of all Manitobans, and that this compels all Manitobans to participate in the revitalization of them, there are many benefits of studying indigenous languages for all students in general and Aboriginal students in particular. In *Coyote and Raven Go Canoeing* (2006), Peter Cole advocated “indigenous knowledge as agenda, not addenda” (p. 207), and suggested that the failure of the school system for many indigenous people around the world is that “It doesn’t sound as if the shape of [their] education was related to [their] culture” (p. 274). Another theorist, Terry Osborn, echoed that sentiment in his book, *Teaching World Languages for Social Justice* (2006). Osborn argues that if social justice involves “sharing social power and benefits equally” (p. 26),

then the disparity of prestige enjoyed by majority and minority cultures and languages reflects an unjust society. In order to rectify this disparity, educators must aim to resist “positivist aspects of teaching” (p. 28). In other words, students must be shown that a given society’s majority language, culture, and perspective are not universally relevant or desirable. In fact, Osborn claimed that the most desirable classroom is one in which dialogue and non-violent conflict between various cultures is a recurring theme, espousing that “teaching world languages for social justice is not conformity; it is confrontational” (p. 36). That is, it is through embracing divergent viewpoints, through incorporating non-standard dialects, through giving validity to all nations, languages, and artefacts, and simply through setting a place for indigenous and immigrant culture at the same table (or around the same fire) that social justice truly occurs. Therefore, embracing indigenous cultures and languages has positive repercussions for indigenous peoples. In this light, educating students in Aboriginal languages may help to inspire cultural pride in Aboriginal students, as well as respect for indigenous cultures in non-Aboriginal students. In any case, this type of social justice is a major social benefit arising from the recognition of indigenous languages as important languages to study, as well as a conduit for further recognition of the value of Aboriginal knowledge.

Traditional Aboriginal models of sustainability are one of the most relevant aspects of this body of knowledge. As Manitoba curriculum continues to stress the importance of sustainability education, the potential for this to occur via indigenous languages cannot be ignored. Niji Mahkwa School in Winnipeg appears to be embracing this concept. Along with Children of the Earth High School, Niji Mahkwa mandates the study of either Cree or Ojibwe as a graduation requirement. Further, Niji Mahkwa organizes regular outings in which traditional knowledge is transmitted from Elders to students. For example, students may go sage picking, during which time they would learn to identify sage amongst other plants, learn the places and conditions in which sage grows, the potential uses of sage, and the practice of responsible harvesting. Further, students would be getting exercise, working together, learning traditional stories and gaining ecological awareness and knowledge, all while speaking their indigenous languages. As Rosen (2004) asserted, one of the challenges facing any language teacher is making the content meaningful to students, and to avoid teaching vocabulary and

grammar structures that students will likely find no opportunity to use. By participating in interesting activities in which students can use indigenous languages, they are more likely to retain them, find them relevant, and enjoy using the language. Because sustainable perspectives are woven so tightly within indigenous languages, activities that involve teaching these perspectives through the medium of the language in question become essential for effective sustainability education.

Niji Mahkwa School is one institution in Manitoba that is already implementing elements of indigenous language education and sustainability teachings. If all Manitoba students were invited to participate in events such as these, the potential to gain ecological awareness while learning indigenous languages would be promising. Accordingly, students would learn outdoor skills such as fishing, foraging, building shelter, making fires, locating and using traditional medicines for first aid as they learn indigenous languages. This type of education would likely not only engage students, but it would also encourage the adoption of attitudes towards preservation of both the environment and the indigenous languages of Manitoba. Again, as a way of encouraging students to respect the earth and the green space around them, the introduction of indigenous language education in Manitoba schools would have profound benefits within the community.

Interestingly, this concept of community encompasses more and more people as the world becomes more and more interconnected. Accordingly, local initiatives can potentially have a global impact. This is undoubtedly true for language revitalization initiatives, and countries around the world can attest to the unifying power of supporting and sharing a common language. For example, the official recognition of Gaeilge in Northern Ireland corresponds to a reduction of violence between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Papiamentu is the common language and symbol of national identity in Aruba, unifying an incredibly diverse population. The adoption of French as a second official language of Canada has helped to lessen tensions between English and French speaking populations. Finally, the Guarani language is a powerful component of Paraguayan identity, and speaking Guarani has also become a sign of sophistication. Language is a powerful tool for unification, and has the potential to eliminate “us vs. them” tensions. The introduction of indigenous languages as common languages among the diverse population of Manitoba may also serve to reduce tensions between various populations

within the province, serve as neutral languages of mediation and interaction between colonizers and the colonized, bridge linguistic and cultural gaps, and become unmistakable signs of a shared Manitoban identity and culture. Perhaps Manitoba could join the ranks of other political bodies that have used language to construct bridges between disparate populations, and inspire others to do the same. In this way, incorporating indigenous languages into public schools is more than simply revitalizing the language; it is about building peace and mutual understanding among peoples.

There is the potential for indigenous language education to assist in the recognition and support of local cultures, history, and wealth. In this way, it can be said that incorporating indigenous languages into Manitoba schools would facilitate the decolonization of the world economy – the teaching and learning of indigenous languages in Manitoba can help to slow and perhaps reverse neo-colonialism in a variety of ways. By mandating language education in schools, a demand for speakers, translators, interpreters, and teachers is created. This occurred in Ireland, which experienced an immediate shortage of professionals qualified to fill positions within the language field when Irish became an official language of the European Union (Wilson and Padraig, 2009). Accordingly, it became economically viable not only for the population to embrace their traditional language instead of the majority language, but to formally recognize and validate the important skills of traditional people. In this way, mandating language education makes speaking that language economically viable, encouraging people to embrace their local languages and resist the encroachment of colonizing languages and customs.

At the same time, embracing indigenous languages elevates the education and status of historically disenfranchised groups and makes them an important segment of the population, able to contribute to a common societal goal. A current problem noted by Blair and Laboucan (2006) involved the certification necessary for instructors to teach in public schools. While Alberta also has at least one college diploma program aimed at training professional indigenous language instructors, most speakers of Aboriginal languages are elderly, and attending college courses may not be a practical solution. One proposed solution involved giving Elders honorary degrees, or considering them adjunct professors (Blair and Laboucan, 2006, p. 211). By giving indigenous languages a stronger presence in Manitoba, provincial schools would also make traditional knowledge economically viable in the contemporary

world, resulting in the preservation and promotion of said knowledge. At the same time, they can recognize and validate the knowledge of Elders through honorary degrees and/or professorships. This would increase the teacher base of indigenous languages, but also increase the prestige of speakers and employ them in traditional, yet relevant work.

As societies would continue to embrace their local languages, they would begin to create opportunities to celebrate them, as aforementioned in the discussion of Fishman's model. The revival of Hebrew in Israel is largely attributed to both the use of the language in local neighbourhoods as well as across the nation (Abley, 2003). The creation of community events such as concerts, markets, festivals, film screenings, contests, and dances requires the creation of signs, books, newspapers, marketing materials, dramas, and popular music in the target language. The commercial demand created by language revitalization thus engages local businesses in creating products and services to be consumed locally. Manitoba publishers, media, factories, printing presses, and production studios could simultaneously be engaged in the revitalization process and enjoy significant returns. At the same time, non-monetary goods, such as traditional ideas, stories, songs, and dramas, are preserved, learned and celebrated, and contemporary works are nurtured and shared. Again, the preservation of a language can result in the decolonization of the world economy, both in regard to the increased role of local business, as well as the recognition of non-monetary wealth in the form of ideas and knowledge.

#### CONCLUSION: COOPERATIVE AND CONCURRENT REVITALIZATION

The revitalization of a single language requires a significant investment of time, money, and dedication. In Manitoba, the effort to revitalize seven languages may seem unattainable. However, there are a number of reasons why cooperative and concurrent revitalization can benefit and assist the process of revitalizing Inuktitut, Oji-Cree, Dene, Dakota, Michif, Ojibwe, and Cree.

The granting of official status to all indigenous languages is central to gaining widespread support for language revitalization. That is, each indigenous language must be considered equally deserving of revitalization resources. This is in contrast with the potential argument that Cree, Ojibwe, and Inuktitut, as the three indigenous languages in Canada with the most

speakers, are the most logical choices to receive funding, official status, and mandated inclusion in curriculum due to their larger bases of speakers and thus their increased potential for use both within the community and professionally. However, such attitudes are reminiscent of the linguistic imperialism that has caused the decline of all indigenous languages across Turtle Island in the first place. Further, deciding which language is most deserving of revitalization is problematic: Ojibwe was spoken in most of southern Manitoba, yet Cree is more prevalent in other regions; Michif, as the language of the Métis, has particular historical importance in the province, and yet proficiency in Inuktitut can open the door to a number of opportunities in Nunavut and/or Kalallit Nunaat. Such debates detract from the revitalization movement. By opting to revitalize each indigenous language of Manitoba, no one language would be left out.

That said, funding seven indigenous, two colonial, and any other heritage language programs might be unrealistic for any school board, not to mention unrealistic for students. The solution may be for school divisions to offer programming based on their geographical location, with their local language and dialect featured within the school. Under such a system, divisions may receive funding for an indigenous language program, while avoiding the politics of hierarchy mentioned above. While some language overlap may occur, it can be left up to communities to decide on a single program, or the division may receive additional funding to deliver multiple indigenous language programming. In this way, each indigenous language of Manitoba is represented within the education system, and concurrent revitalization efforts can proceed.

Such concurrent and cooperative revitalization is more of a practical necessity than a theoretical ideal. In order to expand the existing lexicon to meet the demands of an entire curriculum, indigenous language speakers would almost certainly need to confer regarding the creation of words not currently used in daily parlance. Various technical terms, such as “computer” (*masinatakan cikastepayicikanis*), “Internet” (*misoweskamihk nitawatawin*), and “cellular phone” (*sewepicikanis*) all exist in contemporary Cree, and may be borrowed and adapted to the unique sound systems of Oji-Cree and Michif, if such words do not already exist. Perhaps most useful would be the adoption of calques between languages, such as the Ojibwe word for “batteries” (*animikiinsag*), meaning “little thunderbirds”, or the verb “to type” (*bakitebii’ige*),

which translates as something like “writing-by-striking”. For more contemporary terms, such as “to download”, “to rip or to burn a CD”, “to email”, “to charge”, “to connect to a network”, “to copy and paste”, and “to text”, collaborations between speakers of Manitoba’s indigenous languages may be necessary. Accordingly, this would require a number of technologically adept people fluent in these languages, which in turn would create a situation for young people in which it is economically viable to learn an indigenous language. While technological devices are one example of how the revitalization of one Aboriginal language is related to the others, there are a myriad of other semantic domains and specialized fields within the curriculum, and therefore many opportunities to support the continued and cooperative learning and use of Aboriginal languages.

The linguistic classifications of the indigenous languages of Manitoba are such that learning one often facilitates the learning of another. For example, although Michif resists easy classification into any language family, it is clearly related to other Algonquian languages. Just as learning French facilitates the learning of other Romance languages such as Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, or Romansch, so too can learning Michif lead to an easier acquisition of Cree, Ojibwe, and Oji-Cree. As Algonquian languages, Cree, Ojibwe, and Oji-Cree share morphological, phonological, and semantic commonalities with Michif. Thus, it is not difficult to see that “*tân’sísî yihkâsoyan*” in Woods Cree is related to “*tánishi eyishinikâshoyan*” in Michif, or that “*ndizhinikaaz*” in Ojibwe is related to “*dishinikâshon*” in Michif. Though Dene, Dakota, and Inuktitut are the sole representatives of their language families within Manitoba, they are nonetheless related to other indigenous languages outside of the province. Accordingly, the interconnectedness of indigenous languages makes concurrent revitalization not only possible, but desirable.

Finally, the revitalization of indigenous languages in Manitoba would serve as a model in the movement to decolonize contemporary Canada, Turtle Island, and the world. When self-government was given to the Nisga’a in British Columbia, or the Inuit in Nunavut, it was a victory for all Aboriginal people in Canada. Likewise, the historic apology from the Government of Canada to survivors of residential schools was received and deserved by all First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, not only those that had attended the schools. Further, the adoption of Maori as an official language of Aotearoa, Guarani

in Paraguay, or Greenlandic in Kalallit Nunaat, may inspire indigenous language revitalization efforts across the world. It therefore stands to reason that the adoption of indigenous languages as official languages of Manitoba, as well as mandatory languages of study in Manitoba schools, would come to benefit all nations. Accordingly, the cooperation and concurrent revitalization of all indigenous languages of Manitoba is a desirable goal.

The claims made here regarding the profound potential impact of revitalizing the indigenous languages of Manitoba may initially seem to be merely conjectured overstatements. Even if this is the case, indigenous languages are in jeopardy and almost certainly require revitalization initiatives to survive. Should this be undertaken, the process of revitalizing indigenous languages would have benefits beyond the retention of these unique languages so indicative of Manitoba history. As languages of education, they would echo within the minds and classrooms of Manitoba, throughout communities, across Turtle Island and around the world, bringing positive change with it. It is with that frame of mind that it is asserted again: Manitoba schools can indeed support the heritage languages of all Manitobans, and in doing so, truly change the world.

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