ADULT MOHAWK LANGUAGE IMMERSION PROGRAMMING

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ABSTRACT. One method the Mohawk people have used intermittently since 1985 to help with the revitalization and preservation of the Mohawk language is adult immersion programming. In 2001, this study was conducted throughout the Mohawk Nation to determine what factors contribute to the retention of adult students in Mohawk language-immersion programs. Information gathered from program administrators, instructors, students, and two Mohawk Elders is brought together to provide a 'one-minded' overview of what works and what doesn't work in adult Mohawk immersion programming.

PROGRAMME D'IMMERSION EN LANGUE MOHAWK POUR LES ADULTES

RÉSUMÉ. Une méthode utilisée de façon intermittente par les peuples mohawks depuis 1985 pour aider à revitaliser et à préserver la langue mohawk réside dans les programmes d'immersion pour les adultes. En 2001, on a mené cette étude dans toute la nation mohawk pour déterminer les facteurs qui contribuent au maintien des étudiants d'âge adulte dans les programmes d'immersion en langue mohawk. Les renseignements recueillis auprès des administrateurs du programme, des chargés de cours, des étudiants et de deux Anciens sont réunis pour donner un aperçu « monovalent » de ce qui donne des résultats et de ce qui n'en donne pas dans les programmes d'immersion en mohawk pour les adultes.

TSI NIKARÌWAYEN. Ronate'nyentenh ne Kanyen'kehaka ne Kanyen'keha ahshakotirihonnyen' nene senha rotikesten tsi nahe 1985 shityohseroten tho nayawen'ne ahontya'tanonhstate' ne Owenna tahnon onen ahotirihon' ahontatihseke'. 2001 shiyohseroten, akwah tsi ok nonwe kanakerahsera'kehshon ne Kanyen'kehaka, takatahsawen' wa'kateriwayenhste' ne akerihwatshenri' oh naho'tenhshon wahotiyenawa'se' nene senha rotiksten Ronterihwayenhstha ahonterako' ne kawennotahkwen onen rotiweyentehta'onh. Wa'kerihowaroroke' tsi wa'tyakwahtharen' nene Shakotirihwahseronnyennis ne Kanyen'keha karihwaten, nene Shakotirihonnyennis, nene Ronterihwayenhstha, tahnon oni ne Tehotikstenha Yatatis tho nayawen' ne akerihwatshenri' tsi naho'tenhshon rotiyenawases tahnon yah tehotiyenawases ahatiweyentehta'ne' ne Kayen'keha.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Today, the Mohawk Nation is fighting against a deadly enemy – language loss. We, as Mohawk people, have identified the drastic decline in the intergenerational use of the language in our community events, business transactions, and personal affairs. The intergenerational use of the Mohawk language in the home environment of the Mohawk people is a rare exception. Even though Mohawk communities have concentrated on developing and administering bilingual and immersion programs in their children's elementary and secondary school programs for the past 30 years, fluency in the language is still declining in our territories.

A national language survey launched by the Assembly of First Nations in 1992 found that only 4 of the 16 remaining Aboriginal languages in Canada have a reasonable chance of surviving over the next century (Kirkness, 1998). The four potentially surviving languages included Cree, Inuktitut, Dakota, and Ojibwa; the Mohawk language was not listed as a language destined for survival. However, as a means to revitalize the use of the Mohawk language in the territories, many parents, educators, and community leaders agree that drastic measures need to be taken in order to revive the language. Many see "immersion programming" as the prime drastic measure. Very recently, within the past 15 years, Mohawk communities have become increasingly involved in designing and developing adult immersion programs as one method of language restoration.

At an Iroquois Language Conference held in 1997 at Kanatsiohareke Mohawk Territory in upper New York State (see map at front of issue), participants from the Six Nations of the Confederacy gathered to discuss the state of our heritage languages. It was very unsettling to realize just how close to death our language is. As statistics prepared from the Conference would indicate, in the Mohawk Nation less than 10% of its populace of an estimated 35,000 people are fluent speakers (Kanatsiohareke Newsletter, 1998). It is not difficult therefore to understand why all Mohawk communities are experiencing a shortage of fluent adult speakers and a noticeable declining use of the language. It is imperative that each Mohawk community takes on the responsibility to revive, rejuvenate and restore our heritage language.

Like other Mohawk communities, Mohawk as a second language has been offered at the elementary school in my home community of Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory for the past 30 years, but the language is still rapidly disappearing from use. The on-reserve population of Tyendinaga is approximately 2,800 and in 1985 it was estimated that fewer than 10% of the people were fluent speakers of Mohawk (Corbiere, Freeman, Lazore, & Stairs, 1995). Today, there is an estimated 0.23% of the population who are fluent speakers; the language in Tyendinaga remains on the verge of extinction (Maracle, 2001).

I believe that it is vitally important for the revitalization and preservation of our language that we remain vigilant to the language initiatives that have been developed and are operating in various communities throughout the Mohawk Nation. Because language immersion for adults is a relatively new development within Mohawk communities, no formal collection or documentation of information pertaining to the adult immersion programs is available nation-wide. Therefore, as a concerned community member, Mohawk parent, and adult language-learner, I undertook this study to learn what factors contribute to student retention in adult Mohawk language-immersion programming within the Mohawk Nation. As a result, the research provides information on Mohawk communities having experience in developing and administering adult language-immersion programs, including background information on the programs themselves – length, size, locations, administration, recruitment, funding bodies, amongst other aspects.

Personal reflections of my own language-learning experiences and my participation in adult Mohawk language-immersion programs have contributed to this research project as well. Whenever I hear fluent speakers I am reminded of the fact that I am illiterate in my own language although I have been struggling to learn the language for the past ten years. I have been fortunate however to have experienced language-learning in two types of language classes: those with more technical vocabulary-learning programming and those using immersion, where I encountered a more holistic language-learning experience complete with cultural teachings, spiritual experiences, physical activity, and emotional attachments. As a result, it has only been through immersion that I have been able to realize the power that the Mohawk language holds. The minuscule amount of time I have spent immersed in the language has provided me with only a flicker of the beauty that exists within the language – a flicker of being able to see in the language and to feel in the language. In drawing on my personal experiences, I am certain that the critical state of the Mohawk language today dictates no other process for our Nation members to acquire fluency than through immersion programming. I especially hope results of this study will be used in the development and implementation of an adult immersion program in Tyendinaga Territory to assist in the revival of the intergenerational use of the language.

Immersion, for the purpose of this research, is defined as a method of language instruction, which in this instance is Mohawk, whereby the learner is instructed directly in the language as well as being taught (in English) about the Mohawk language. The immersion programs are not to be confused with adult Mohawk language classes that may be held in communities as periodic day or night courses. Although both immersion programs and language classes may run from one week to one year in length, the primary difference between the two is that a daily full-time operation provides the

learner with a continuous language-learning environment and usage opportunities for an established length of time. The language instruction, depending upon the proficiency of the learners, may actually be a partial immersion program that works at preparing the learner for total immersion instruction.

At a presentation to the American Indian Language Development Institute in 1999 at the University of Arizona, Kenneth Hale discussed the "degrees of immersion" (Maracle, 2001) and expressed the importance of having community planners decide what degree of immersion the program will develop once programming is determined. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) states that "the strategies that work for one community may well work for another" (p. 105), but I would like to stress the fact that not every immersion program may be suitable to every community due to the fact that communities are at different levels of language loss. However, the information from this study I see as relevant in assisting the design and development of adult language-immersion programming in all eight Mohawk communities (see map).

PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY

The study on adult immersion programming concentrates on those Mohawk territories where daily full-time adult immersion programs have operated in the past and on territories where such programs are operating at present. Although I have language-immersion experience, it is experience from only one immersion program, when in actual fact there have been a total of five programs operating across the eight territories that comprise the Mohawk Nation. Past programs of various lengths have operated on the Kahnawake Territory, Tyendinaga Territory and Wahta Territory and, at present, adult immersion programs are operating on the Six Nations Territory and Kanatsiohareke Territory. These five different adult Mohawk immersion programs became the focus of my study and, in order to present a more complete analysis, it was necessary to interview those who were involved in adult immersion and have them relate their experiences from their own perspectives. I attempted to make contact and interview representatives from three different groups of people whom I refer to as "stakeholders," for each group has a vested interest in the operation of their respective language projects. Due to the potential number of participants in this study and the large distance between the territories, I decided that the best method to collect the data would be to travel to each of the communities and, if possible, conduct structured interviews with participants from each of the stakeholder groups – the program coordinators, language instructors, and students.

In addition to investigating the five different immersion programs, I also felt it especially important to discuss this study with two Elders from the Mohawk

Nation – Tom Porter and Ada Doreen – whom I felt could lend valuable insights and words of encouragement for Mohawk language acquisition. Unstructured interviews were scheduled with these two Elders to discuss the study I was undertaking and my reasons for doing so. They in turn shared their experiences, hopes, and dreams for the Mohawk language and language learning. Their voices in the research project stress the importance that language plays in the lives of Mohawk people. My meetings with the Elders were held at their kitchen tables over a cup of tea. Despite their incredibly busy lives, they afforded me two to three hours of uninterrupted time to talk about the Mohawk language. Tom Porter, a spiritual leader originally from Akwesasne Mohawk Territory, is a fluent speaker who founded Kanatsiohareke Mohawk Territory in the Mohawk Valley in 1993. Tom is renowned throughout the Mohawk Nation for his endeavours in the past several years to establish a "Carlisle- [Carlisle Indian Residential School] -in-reverse" type of educational program in the community of Kanatsiohareke. He has been instrumental in coordinating ongoing cultural gatherings and language-immersion programs for adults and children in the community. Ada Doreen from Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory, who refers to herself modestly as a "senior citizen," has worked for many years to re-learn her language that she lost as a child when she was enrolled in the local federal elementary school. Today she is a strong advocate for the language and remains an active participant in language efforts for her family and community members. I was not only sincerely thankful for the time spent with each of the Elders but was inspired in the process by their profound belief in the Mohawk language.

Now I step back for several paragraphs to review the history of adult language-immersion programming in each community involved in my study. In Kahnawake Territory, although language initiatives have been ongoing to provide training for speakers and non-speakers in the community, in September 1985 a 10-month adult Mohawk language project was piloted that became the first adult language-immersion program in the Mohawk Nation. The goal of the project was to train teachers to fill the increasing number of immersion teaching positions becoming available at their recently established total-immersion elementary schools. Nine qualified teachers with some language familiarity were selected from community schools to participate in the one- [school] year immersion program (Cross & Jacobs, 2000). A teacher on staff in the elementary immersion school was selected to develop the project curriculum and deliver the program to the Kahnawake teachers. Since 1985, there has been no adult immersion programming provided for community members until September 2002 with the start-up of another 10-month immersion program for language-teacher training.

It was not until six years after the completion of the Kahnawake project that another adult Mohawk language-immersion program was initiated in the

Mohawk Nation. For the first two weeks in July 1992, an adult immersion project coordinated by the education department ran in Tyendinaga Territory. The program was designed to instruct adults in learning language that was useful in the home and could be practiced with their children who were already learning the language in their school program. Two language teachers from Kahnawake Territory, one of whom was a graduate of their 10-month language program, were contracted to team-teach the class of 30 adult students in Tyendinaga who were at the beginning stage of their language learning. This 2-week project was the only adult immersion program to be held in Tyendinaga until July 2002 when a 4-week adult language-immersion program was delivered by three language teachers; one of whom was the instructor of the 1985 immersion program in Kahnawake.

Following the 2-week language initiative in Tyendinaga, the Mohawk Nation next saw a 6-month program begin in Wahta Mohawk Territory in September 1997. The adult language project, coordinated by the education department in Wahta, was designed and developed as an accredited course through Brock University. The aim of the program was to address the concern for the decreasing number of Mohawk speakers in the community and to increase their cultural and traditional awareness. A fluent speaker from Kanesatake Mohawk Territory was primarily responsible for the development of the curriculum and resources for this program, and was contracted to instruct the 6-month immersion program as well. However, there has been no further adult Mohawk language-immersion programming offered in the community since the completion of the 6-month program in March 1997.

In June 1998 as a direct result of the Iroquois Language Conference held in 1997, a Mohawk language-immersion program, coordinated primarily by spiritual leader Tom Porter and community volunteers, was initiated in the new Mohawk Valley community of Kanatsiohareke. The 4-week language program was delivered by five language teachers hired from Akwesasne and Kahnawake territories, and provided the registered students with the unique opportunity to experience the language by living, learning, and working in the Mohawk community. A summer Mohawk immersion program has continued to be delivered annually by fluent Mohawk language teachers from other territories to students from different Mohawk communities. With various developments and improvements being made to the summer session since 1998, the program has emerged into one that consists of four 2-week sessions with four levels of language learning being offered, from beginners to fluency. There is now discussion on offering language-immersion programming in Kanatsiohareke at other times of the year.

The fifth community to offer a full-time adult Mohawk language-immersion program was Six Nations Grand River Territory. The Onkwawenna Language Project (Richards & Maracle, see this issue) is a 9-month program which began its first year of operation in 1999. The language project, now

in its fourth year of operation, is coordinated by a Mohawk member of Six Nations who is a graduate of the Wahta language-immersion program in 1997. Although initiated "because there was no program available in the territory for adult speakers" (Maracle, 2001), the immersion project has been developing into a language program that is attracting participants from other Mohawk territories. Until September 2002 and the start-up of the Kahnawake language program, the Onkwawenna Language Project was the only long-term adult Mohawk language-immersion program operating in the Mohawk Nation.

With the intent of gaining further insight into each immersion program, I attempted to contact ten students who had completed the scheduled length of the program as well as five students who were unable to complete the program as scheduled. I felt that it was important that students not complet-ing the program be given an opportunity to contribute to the study as participants of immersion programming. However, due to some unavoidable circumstances encountered in the data-gathering process, not as many representatives in the stakeholder groups were interviewed as had been originally planned. Ultimately, eight graduating students and two students who did not complete their program were interviewed, thus resulting in a good representation of participants, 21 in total, including the two Elders who had input into this study. In keeping with Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) suggestion that "research methodology is based on the skill of matching the problem with an appropriate set of investigative strategies" (p.173), I at-tempted to give voice throughout this study to the experience of those who are the stakeholders in the Mohawk immersion programs. The words of the Elders emphasize the importance of the role of language-learning projects and the continued use of the Mohawk language in our everyday lives.

During initial investigations of the five immersion programs, I discovered that multiple roles were sometimes played by members of the stakeholder groups. Instances existed where the program coordinator also helped as a language instructor, other instances where the language instructors assisted with administration duties for the program, and still other situations existed where the program coordinators were also students. Another interesting observation was made where students in programs from one territory some-times became language instructors and coordinators of adult language-immersion programs in another territory. As the research progressed, I became increasingly aware of how interconnected the Mohawk territories actually are in their fight against language loss.

INDIGENOUS METHODOLOGY

Because the programs were based in different communities, and I was working with different stakeholders in each, different formalities to initiate

the study and investigate information were required. My academic back-ground in Western education, my familiarity with educational program-ming, and my knowledge of traditional teachings, together provided the skills and experience necessary to comfortably approach the various envi-ronments in the five communities. The programs ranged from culturally and socially attuned environments to those that were linguistically academic. The research I conducted in the Mohawk communities at times required culturally-appropriate methods and protocols that veered from the Western academic path. In the course of this study sometimes Western practices of formal written agreements and guarantees were set aside in favour of more respectful and traditional methods, such as the offering of tobacco.

The interviews of the Elders especially required an adherence to more traditional Mohawk practices; in fact, no paperwork whatsoever was ex-changed with either of them. The initial request for their participation in the study was perhaps the most important aspect in obtaining participant agreement. It was necessary to meet with them face-to-face and verbally present my request to them so they could clarify what I was doing, why I was doing it, and what was required of them. It was most fitting at this time that proper traditional steps be taken to express the sincerity of my request for their participation and pay my respect for the words they would be sharing. Although interview questions were prepared for each stakeholder group, listening to the oral histories of the Elders providing them an opportunity to share their knowledge and experience in the research process that could not be captured in a structured interview process. Confidentiality, although assured for each interviewee, was not an issue with the Elders. I did ask permission to record their interviews, and permission to use their names, words, and photos in my final report.

When I first approached each of the five territories conversationally and informed them of the intention and purposes of the study, I received more of a "welcome" to their programs than a need for formal permission to work with the stakeholder groups involved with the immersion programs. In Kahnawake Territory, however, a Regulatory Council for Research exists and required that I forward to them in writing my agreement to supply them with a copy of the final report of the study being conducted in their community. The autonomy that the community members held in the re-maining participating language programs was reflected in the fact that academic formalities were not specifically required at their respective sites. The environment in the Mohawk programs appeared to be more of an informal and oral connection rather than a formal written exercise. Al-though letters of information were presented to the participants at the outset of their interview, the majority of the stakeholders simply wanted to hear what I had to say, why I was doing the study, and what purpose it would serve.

Because I was solely responsible for this research project, at the outset of the study I tried to profile all aspects of information that would be beneficial to someone who was interested in designing an adult Mohawk language-immersion program, and to develop a respective research plan to collect the necessary data. The main goals of the study included firstly, locating the sites of adult language-immersion programs in the Mohawk Nation. Once I knew where the programs were, I needed to find out the formalities required to access each site to conduct the study on adult language-immersion programming. Again, once I learned the program sites, I needed to gather available documentation on the Mohawk immersion programs as well as literature on other Aboriginal language-immersion programs. The next step in the study was to actually conduct the interviews of the participants from each of the stakeholder groups in each of the adult immersion programs and meet with the two Mohawk Elders. Finally, it was imperative that the confidentiality of the stakeholders in this study was assured.

Although time had been spent orienting myself to adult language-immersion programming, and my goals and objectives were developed, the actual data-gathering process was not carried out as neatly as was originally laid out. The planned sequence of activities actually became activities that had to be carried out simultaneously during the six-month data-gathering period. Due to the emergent nature of this study, I found myself scheduling meetings, traveling, and conducting interviews while still investigating contact people in other programs in other communities. Because I was only one person conducting this study, the scope of this study can certainly now be added to with further research, and information expanded as programs develop and grow.

DATA COLLECTION

The primary method I used to collect data in this study was through semi-structured interviews. The interview questions, prepared for each stakeholder group prior to the commencement of any data gathering, required separate consideration to reflect the three different groups in the adult immersion programs. The open-ended questions allowed participants to reflect upon each of their own experiences and share their thoughts on Mohawk immersion. Even though the study was structured around an interview process, it also took on an interactive experiential stance whereby my interpretation of shared experiences in immersion programming became significant and essential in the research. Likewise, the experiences described by the participants regarding their immersion language learning provided personal meaning to the data.

Although interviewing proved to be a valuable data-gathering strategy, multiple methods were used to access information which included program

document review, review of classroom videotapes, informal discussion with the Elders, participation in classes and meetings on indigenous language, as well as references to my fieldnotes and to a journal of my own immersion experience. However, in conducting this study I discovered that documentation such as interim reports, program evaluations, and final reports, were virtually non-existent for review. Consequently, I was able to locate written materials on only two of the five adult immersion programs – these being in the form of a final program report and a project proposal. Not surprising though is the fact that the words of the Elders contributed valuable insights and encouragement to the overall study on Mohawk language-learning.

RESPONSES AND FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

In reviewing the responses to the questions answered by the participants in the three stakeholder groups, four main subject areas emerged from the collected data – program information, personal information, personal reflections, and comments.

Coordinators

The questions being asked of coordinators provided feedback that is relevant to designers and developers of adult Mohawk language immersion projects. Program information presented by experienced coordinators included reasons for program initiation, the necessary planning, and those involved with the program development. The program coordinators also shared administrative aspects of the programs that need to be considered such as student enrolment criteria, length of programs, size of class, and the evaluation process.

Personal information received from the coordinators offered a sample of how their professional position and employment environment is balanced with their personal interest in language acquisition and preservation. Three of the five program coordinators grew up with the Mohawk language being spoken in their homes, but only one coordinator was a fluent Mohawk speaker. The four coordinators who did not speak the language became students in the language programs they were coordinating.

A number of recommendations were offered by the coordinators as aspects to consider in the early planning stages of an adult Mohawk language-immersion program. The coordinators expressed the need to first determine what the goal of the language program is – maintenance or fluency–and then decide what teaching methods would be used accordingly. In planning the program, the coordinators remind the designers that adults not only need to learn the language, they also need to be provided with some mechanics of how to pass the language on, for they will quite possibly have an opportunity to teach the language. When staffing the program, it is

advisable to team-teach the sessions and to utilize the skills of those speakers in the communities who have teaching experience. In the classroom, greater concentration is needed on the oral practice as opposed to the written portion of the program; reading can be easily developed later. The coordinators also want to make the planners aware of the different Mohawk dialects of students that will be coming into the classrooms from the different territories. The fact is stressed that although planning and organizing are key factors, it is important to get things going right away. With the language in the state that it is, there is no time to waste on waiting until the right building is available, or the right number of people are enrolled, and so on. The coordinators shared the observation that a comfortable learning environment and healthy food are conducive to adult language learning. In some programs, menu planning and food preparation in the language became part of the curriculum.

Some additional comments of the coordinators include:

> [The language] take it out of the academics, socialize it, make it fun, make it practical.

> In the programs, their notebooks know everything; what they have to do is get it into their head and onto their tongues.

Instructors

The instructors who participated in the adult Mohawk language-immersion programs described their hiring experiences and the evaluation practices of both themselves and their students. The instructors also provided input on the issue of different language levels in the classroom and other difficulties that arose in the delivery of the planned program objectives. Instructor responses provided feedback on the personal interest the instructors have taken in the immersion programs and to what degree their professional qualifications played a role in the effective delivery of the adult programs. Important also to the planning and delivery of the language programs is the residence of the hired instructors should they be from another territory, and the person who is responsible for securing their accommodations should they need to relocate for their employment. Overall, the instructors described some good positive experiences happening in their programs and stressed that the programs are working. The learners are receptive but there have to be more ways of learning established with different experiences and activities; greater use of written materials, visuals, and audio tools.

The speed of adult immersion learning proved to be problematic because adult students need more time than children to practice–therefore, the method of teaching adults has to be looked at closely when developing a language program. The instructors found they were sometimes over-prepared, but even that provided for flexibility in the classroom when it was

needed. In some of the adult language programs there were no "planned objectives," so it became a matter of developing program objectives at the start-up of the session by the instructor instead of that task having already been decided. Thus, the instructors suggest that there be a goal established for the language project, and that the program should be well-prepared beforehand, but flexible, and possess a strong methodology. For those developing language programs, the instructors' general advice is to aim for fluency and to use a communicative oral approach.

Some additional comments from the participating instructors include:

> *If we lose our language, we lose who we are.*

> *The language is as much as who we are, as a leaf is part of a tree.*

> *There is no reason whatsoever why our people in our communities can't be bilingual.*

Students

The students provided information on how they heard about their immersion program which may help planners with future program publicity. Also, students strongly suggested that student financial support be considered in future program funding proposals. Like the instructors, if a student's residence is in another community, student housing becomes an issue in which administration may or may not become involved. Information obtained from students pertaining to their occupation and level of language proficiency prior to their registration proved to be helpful to the designers in the preparation of course outlines and classroom environments.

All the students interviewed stated they registered in their immersion programs as a result of a strong personal desire to learn the language and to be able to carry on a conversation. A majority of the students described the language as a necessary element in being a Mohawk person and the language as strengthening their sense of identity. Upon completion of their respective programs, the students were able to reflect upon opportunities and the value of being able to use the Mohawk language in their home communities. Many students expressed a real opportunity in being able to pass the language on to their children and grandchildren by speaking what they know in their homes. Along with learning to speak the language, skills in how to teach the language were also acquired in some of the immersion programs. Some students were able to take the language and continue their academic education while others secured new employment.

Important as well in this study was the feedback obtained from those students not completing their program. They were able to share their reflections of the program and their reasons for early departure to help with an awareness of potential problem areas. Mainly, these students had to withdraw from their language-learning programs because of health prob-

lems, home concerns, and employment/financial issues. In general, all students described their learning experience as having been a positive and fun time. Being in the immersion programs gave students a chance to meet and network with people from other Mohawk communities.

All the students interviewed gladly shared their ideas on how to facilitate language learning in the immersion programs. One dominant suggestion is to increase the length of time of the program to build on skills and learning experiences, and to phase the program into learning levels. Students felt that it was a good idea to establish a method to pre-test the students to decide the separate levels of language fluency. Likewise, students requested a learning evaluation be provided so they could determine where they were in their language learning. Some suggested the use of videotape so their presentations could be reviewed. They mentioned the need for a comfortable environment with adequate facilities where learning could be kept fun and appealing to all the senses. To support their learning, students emphasized the importance of having more resources available–visual and audio aids, and readers. Although students vented their frustrations with language learning, they also conveyed the need to have two teachers in the classroom to encourage more use of the language and facilitate language drills. The students also described the benefits of spending more time together outside of class where they could socialize using the language.

The students interviewed also had suggestions for anyone thinking of enrolling in an adult Mohawk immersion program. They thought it important that new students entering the programs have some prior experience with the language, possibly through night classes. Key elements of the immersion programs are commitment to the program, to the language continuing beyond the classroom, time and patience. Newcomers are reminded to have patience with themselves because language learning can at times be confusing and frustrating. The language immersion programs are intense and focus needs to remain on learning the language, so it becomes important that personal issues, like child care and financial support, be taken care of prior to starting the program. It was also felt important that the new students orient themselves to the different immersion programs available by making visits to the sites, not considering all immersion programs are to be the same. The main advice coming from the students, however, is that the language needs to be practised everyday – whenever and wherever.

The students had additional comments, some of which included:

> *Language is the foundation of the healing of our people. I witnessed it.*

> *You can see the world in a different way with the language. When you try to describe something in Mohawk, you think of it in a whole different way in the language. That's where the culture resides, in the language.*

> *The language makes the picture complete.*

INTERPRETATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Several factors contributing to student retention in adult Mohawk language-immersion programming are encompassed within three areas of responsibility emerging from the findings – outside the classroom, inside the classroom, and the student body. These areas of responsibility can be assigned to each stakeholder group that played a role in the study.

First of all, by placing responsibility for activities outside the classroom with the coordinator, along with others in the community who worked at setting up the program, they become responsible for the establishment of the goal(s) of the program and program planning. Particular aspects of the program to be determined at this stage may include: funding of the program, length of the program, size of the class, curriculum and resource materials, hiring of instructors, student registration, facilities, evaluation and reporting.

The environment of the program not only includes the physical aspects but also the spiritual environment as reflected in the program at Kanatsiohareke. At the same time planners of the programs may want to think about accreditation of their program and the recognition of the language study for students who wish to continue in academic education. It should be noted, however, that if accreditation is being contemplated, the immersion program may have to adhere to outside formal guidelines, policies, and approvals–thereby requiring more time for organizing the program. The environment will also be affected by the class size so maximum enrolment limits should be established prior to program start-up. Results of the study suggests that a maximum of ten to twelve students would allow effective dialogue and language practice within the class, and also remain manageable should there be different language levels amongst the students.

Finding and maintaining financial support for adult immersion programming is by far the biggest challenge in the language-learning endeavour. As Crawford (1996) states, "dependence on federal funding fosters program instability. . . . however, alternative resources are usually lacking" (p. 64). As a result, outside financial support often dictates the length of the program – whether it will operate for two weeks or ten months – and if it is a one-time project or a program running annually.

Secondly, along with the responsibilities of the coordinators in program development, the instructors have the responsibility of teaching in the program. To seek instructors for the program, the administration should determine carefully the qualifications that are necessary to deliver the program they have planned. Hiring practices need to be established that are fair and consistent; and complete with written contracts to outline a mutual understanding of the undertaking between the employer and the instructor.

In fairness to the instructor, the contract may prove to be beneficial should more work be required in the delivery of the program than they understood or are capable of doing.

Instructing in an adult immersion program is exhausting work because the instruction pace is slower and more repetition is required for adult than younger students (Maracle, 2001). Because of the nature of the work with the students, it is strongly recommended that team-teaching be utilized in the immersion programs in order to keep the language active throughout the day and minimize the use of English. Due to the uniqueness of each immersion program, time and attention has to be paid to the development of relevant learning aids and materials the instructors are to use. To help alleviate the difficulties caused by different language levels in the classroom, it is suggested that pre-testing of students be completed to ensure they enter a program that will be supportive and beneficial to their learning.

The third area of responsibility lies with the students themselves. Their retention in the program depends upon their preparation before entering, as well as their commitment and patience with themselves once in the program. The program the student is entering needs to be investigated before they seek admission. If immersion programs are long-term, it would be advisable for administration to establish admissions criteria and interview each student so they understand the time and dedication necessary for learning the language. In spite of the fact that language programs are at times frustrating and exhausting for the student, they are also fun and satisfying; an essential stepping stone towards language acquisition and self-confidence. Students participating in programs away from their homes may find it necessary to visit the program site to find themselves a place to live while in the immersion program. Although they prepare themselves beforehand to be actively involved with the program and their own language learning, some students will run into unforeseen personal crisis and family issues that make student withdrawals from the program unavoidable.

SUMMARY

Some questions may still remain unanswered for those who are seriously contemplating the development of an adult Mohawk language-immersion program. However, the results of this study do provide concrete insights into program activities and retention. During the course of the research, the question of whether or not these programs were 'successful' was never put forward. From the standpoint of a language-learner, I believe that the running of an immersion program and being able to participate is a success in itself. However, whether the programs undertaken were deemed successful by the organizers in relation to their goals and objectives is an area where further research would have to be pursued.

Elders Tom Porter and Ada Doreen both emphatically repeat, "The language tells us who we are." Due to the critical state of our language, it becomes very important that quick and drastic actions be taken immediately in the Mohawk communities to revive, revitalize and re-instate the use of the language in our political and social environment and, most importantly, to re-establish the inter-generational use of the language in our homes. Can one person make a difference? My answer to this question is "yes," pursuant to the words of Bilger (1994) – "a single committed speaker can save a language; a million indifferent ones can let it die" (p. 20). The survival of our language, however, is dependent upon the work of the community as a whole, and the collaborative work of the Mohawk Nation as a whole.

It is up to the membership of each territory to decide for themselves the most feasible route to take in developing an adult language-immersion program for their community. Every community is at different stages of language loss and at different levels of recovery; therefore, their goals are different and their needs are different. How plans develop, what level of language exists, the support that exists in the community – all are aspects that will have to be determined by those initiating a language program. Tom Porter warns us saying, "Don't be too quick to discard anything until you have examined it totally because that might be the key piece for your program." And Ada Doreen stresses the importance of learning the language by starting with the basics; namely, the phonics if the written form of the language is to be learned. Information from the different viewpoints of the three stakeholder groups in the study provided key information as to what works in language immersion programming, and what they would like to see take place in future program developments.

From this study I am unable to conclude that any one program is best; they are in fact Mohawk programs in which Mohawks are helping Mohawks. The dedication that the Mohawk Elders, like Tom Porter and Ada Doreen, have to the Mohawk language is inspirational and points to the importance of continuing language-learning in any forum available to help build strong Mohawk-speaking communities.

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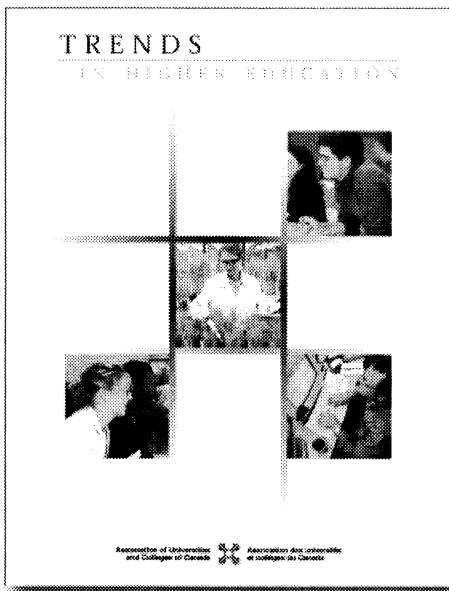
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