



**OPSBA Position Paper on Second Language Learning
November 26, 2005**

ONTARIO PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARDS' ASSOCIATION

POSITION PAPER

ON

SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

IN

ONTARIO



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INTRODUCTION

In response to concerns from school boards and in support of the work of the Canadian Coalition for Immigrant Children and Youth and the Canadian School Boards Association, the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) has conducted a review of issues affecting Second Language Learning (i.e. acquisition of one of Canada's official languages) in Ontario's public school system. This review considered the language support needs of the following student populations served by Ontario schools:

- Immigrant students whose first language is neither English nor French
- First Nations students
- Students born in Canada whose first language is not English/French
- Students who speak a version of English/French different from the standard English/French used in school

Participants in the review included trustees and senior staff from school boards that are highly representative of the communities where these students attend school. Experts in Second Language Learning were consulted throughout.

BACKGROUND

I IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

Of the 221,352 immigrants granted permanent resident or refugee status in Canada in 2003, a total of 119,741 or 54.1% settled in Ontario.¹ These figures are representative of the pattern of settlement for the past ten years and align with current projections for at least the next three years. Close to 90% of immigrants come to Canada from countries where neither English nor French is a first language.

Within Ontario, the vast majority of immigrants settle in the greater Toronto area which incorporates the Peel, York Region and Toronto District School Boards as well as areas of the Halton and Durham District School Boards. However, several Ontario cities are



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growing centres of settlement - Windsor, Ottawa, Hamilton, Kitchener-Waterloo, London and St. Catharines. Beyond these centres, there is some settlement of immigrants in rural Ontario and, in some respects, there are unique challenges to providing support to families and children who are scattered among many small communities. About 36% of all immigrants to Ontario are children and youth (0-24 years). This means that, collectively, the schools in the centres of settlement will open their doors each year to between 30,000 and 40,000 students who are newcomers to Canada. A majority have no knowledge of either English or French and a sizeable number arrive from countries where, due to war or political unrest, they have had little or no access to formal schooling and have yet to develop literacy skills in their first language as a result of the significant gaps in their education. Many immigrant families must also struggle with the additional hardship of poverty and it takes longer today to rise out of this poverty than was the case for previous generations of immigrants.

It should be noted here that there is a relatively new category of immigrant families known as Government Assisted Refugees (GARS). These are families who would not otherwise qualify as immigrants but are brought to Canada under a permanent program that responds to their desperate circumstances. Of the 2,000 refugees who arrive in Ontario each year, approximately 75% are children and youth who are school-age, have grown up in refugee camps and have never been to school. Their parents are extremely poor, have low levels of education, minimal life-skills suited to the Canadian context, do not speak either English or French and are often illiterate in their first language. Added to this is the fact that protracted stays in refugee camps have resulted in serious medical problems that further impair the ability of these families to adjust to their new life. The school system is not accustomed or resourced to provide the kind of support and communication strategies that the students from these families need. Support for the learners includes reaching out to the families to form learning partnerships, which may involve literacy and settlement support for the parent(s)/guardians.

Nonetheless, the public education system embraces all immigrant students and their families. Schools become the portal through which they learn about their new country. Schools offer the children and young people the key to integration through language and literacy. How do they do it? How are they supported? What still needs to be done? The answers to these questions are the core of this position paper.

Within the broad spectrum of immigrant students and immigrant families, there are distinct groups whose unique needs must also be addressed. These are students who were born in Canada but have a first language other than English/French and students who have immigrated to Canada from countries where the official language is English or French but is different from the standard dialect of the language as used in Canadian



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schools. The range of successful programs and service gaps identified in this paper have strong applicability to these two distinct groups.

In Ontario, the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) data provides insights into the complexity of students' needs in second language learning. The contextual information published by EQAO for Grade 3 and Grade 6 students shows percentages of students in formal ESL programming as well as corresponding percentages for students born outside Canada, length of time in Canada, and the percentage of students from families where the first language is not English. An extract of this information is attached as Appendix 'A' to this paper.

Students Born in Canada whose First Language is neither English nor French

Children in immigrant families are generally raised speaking the first language of their parents and have little exposure to English/French in the home. As a result these children need just as much ESL support as the recent immigrant child at the point of starting school. They may be at fourth year development in their first language but their command of English/French is significantly less developed. The level of funding available to provide resources to these children, who may need them just as much as a child newly arrived in Canada, is sizeably lower than that available to new immigrant children and is based on out-dated census data. The Education Quality and Accountability office, in administering provincial testing, collects statistical information on students where the first language learned at home was other than English. This data, by public school board, is summarized in Appendix 'A'

An additional discrete group that falls into this category are children from communities that voluntarily remain outside the mainstream. A clear example is the Old Colony Mennonite population. The needs of children in these communities are complicated by the fact that children may not be literate in their first language; for example, the language of the home is Low German for which there is no standardized written language but they do not learn to read or write in High German. In addition their families are seasonal workers and spend months at a time outside of Canada. This is also a population that generates little or no funding to address their specific language learning needs.



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Students who Speak a Form of English/French Different from the Standard English/French used in School

Many students immigrate to Canada from countries where English or French is the official language of the country, e.g. Caribbean, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Eritrea, Rwanda. However, the co-existence of English or French with other languages and dialects often means that the form of English/French spoken is markedly different from the language as it is used in Ontario schools. This creates a gap in language acquisition that makes it more difficult for children to achieve in an age-appropriate classroom. The situation is compounded for children who come from environments where they have had less formal schooling than Canadian children of a similar age.

II FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS

While the major focus of OPSBA's review of Second Language Learning issues affecting First Nations Students is Northern Ontario, a number of concerns flow over into other areas of the province. In Northern Ontario, First Nations communities have the highest population growth, the highest percentage of youth, the lowest average incomes, and the lowest educational levels both for the region and for Ontario as a whole.²

This information, gathered from 2001 Census data, indicates that while school boards have an increasing number of First Nations students to serve, these children come to school disadvantaged by poverty and adult education levels at home that are well below the provincial average. For Ontario, 25.6% of the population (20 years of age and over) has less than a high school diploma as their highest level of education. For Northern Ontario this figure is 33%. The figure for First Nations communities in Northern Ontario is 53.2%.³

These factors have a significant impact on school readiness skills, especially literacy. A further challenge is the fact that First Nations children in remote areas of the province enter school speaking only their first language and others, in urban areas, come to school speaking a variety of English that is different from the standard English used in school. Schools are often not prepared or supported to offer instruction in a way that builds upon the literacy, language and culture children bring as they start school. An additional consideration in addressing needs is the complexity of the school systems that First Nations students may attend:

- Reserve operated schools



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- Private schools on reserves
- Reserve based native children attending provincial schools
- Non-reserve based native children attending provincial schools.

This paper explores the deficits of the school system in responding to the needs of First Nations students and suggests approaches that work.

I IMMIGRANT CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Exemplary Programs

Schools adopt a diverse range of approaches to support second language acquisition. Response from school boards participating in OPSBA's consultation process identified programs, initiatives and resources that have proven very effective in supporting students entering the school system with little or no English or French. Depending on the resources available to them, public school boards in Ontario with significant populations of immigrant children and youth, will provide some, though usually not all, of the following supports:

Specialized Staff

A key resource is having staff who are highly trained with Additional Qualification courses in ESL/ELD (English as a Second Language/English Language Development), have had a variety of classroom teaching experience and who have dedicated assignments in this area. This starts with staffing Newcomer Reception centres with assessment personnel who are qualified in accurate assessment and placement of children and youth whose first language is not English or French. Matching a student with a program and resources that address the student's stage of literacy and second language acquisition is a critical first step in setting that student on a path for success in school.

School boards need curriculum coordinators and consultants who can coordinate the delivery of developmentally appropriate programs and provide expertise to support the work of teachers in the classroom with models and resources that best meet the needs of students whether they are integrated in regular classes or are receiving intensive support in ESL/ELD classes.



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While teachers who provide congregated or intensive support ESL/ELD classes need to be specialized in this field with a minimum of a Part One – ESL/ELD qualification, there is also an increasing need for regular classroom teachers to have qualifications and ongoing professional development in the area of ESL/ELD. The integration into regular classrooms of growing numbers of students whose first language is not English or French or whose level of literacy falls behind their peer group, means that the teacher in that classroom has to be skilled in identifying the struggles that some students are experiencing and skilled also in adapting the classroom learning to ensure that students are supported in achieving literacy skills in English or French while maintaining and further developing skills in their additional language(s). Pre-service teacher education programs should have a mandatory unit in ESL/ELD and integrated messages throughout all units to support ALL learners including the ESL/ELD students. A further consideration is expansion of initiatives to support teachers trained in other countries to acquire Ontario teacher certification and to encourage students from under-represented communities to consider a career in teaching.

An area of specialty that is of enormous benefit in meeting student needs is a dual qualification in ESL and Special Education. Because of the gap in language acquisition, it is particularly difficult to identify whether students are also challenged by unaddressed special education needs. Teachers who have qualifications in both areas are much better positioned to identify and provide the support that these students need to acquire the English or French skills that will allow them to participate in learning activities on an equal footing with their peers, and to meet specified expectations.

The additional support of educational assistants, ideally assistants who speak the first language(s) of ESL/ELD students, contributes significantly to the pace at which students can acquire their second language. Educational assistants who are trained to support and assist the ESL teacher and/or the classroom teacher with ESL/ELD learners by working one-on-one or in small groups with students – whether in congregated/intensive support classes or in the regular classroom – provide the intensive literacy and academic support which many students need in their first year(s) in the school system.

Other board staff who contribute significantly to the successful education experience of ESL/ESD students include school administrators, speech and language professionals, psychologists and social workers. Specific training in the issues facing ESL/ESD students would enrich the contribution these staff can make.

Finally, since parental involvement is critical to a student's success, resources are needed to ensure that parents understand how the education system works in general and how their local school and child's teacher, in particular, will work with their child to ensure



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effective integration into the life of the school and timely progress towards expected academic achievement. Supporting parental involvement requires the allocation of community liaison staff, the use of translator and interpreter services in the languages of the community and, particularly in the initial stages, the services of settlement workers. For a number of school boards in larger centres of immigration, the delivery of settlement services at school sites is managed through partnerships with community settlement agencies and the federally funded Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) program. This is a crucial form of support that interprets the education system for newly arrived families and connects them to the broader community. It is a service that needs to be expanded.

Assessment and Placement

Some school boards situated in cities that are key destination points for immigrant families have established Newcomer Reception Centres to welcome families, facilitate school registration for school-age children, complete the assessments in English or French proficiency, literacy and math necessary for making appropriate program placement and providing information/recommendations to support teaching strategies at the home school.

School boards employ a variety of assessment tools to determine the level of English or French proficiency and literacy of the arriving student. However, unlike the firmly established and widely used national Canadian Language Benchmarks for assessment of language skills of adult newcomers, there is no equivalent standard in place for use in the school system.

Targeted Program Support

Reading Recovery programs, which were conceived initially, and are still primarily used, to offer one-on-one intervention for grade one students who are at risk in the area of literacy, have been shown to provide significant benefits for ESL learners. These are used in a number of school boards and have proven very successful not only in building up skills in reading and speaking English but also in enhancing children's self-confidence.

Bilingual programs recognize that academic knowledge and conceptual development transfer from the first language to the second language. When children new to Canada arrive in school with little or no previous schooling, giving them the opportunity to learn concepts in their first language increases their chances of academic success. Postponing academic development in favour of language learning may actually contribute to academic failure. Offering these programs requires staff bilingual in English or French



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and in the key language of the newcomer student population as well as bilingual resources and materials. Despite the additional resources and costs entailed, a number of school boards across Canada offer these programs. Edmonton Public Schools where students are taught in Mandarin, Arabic, German, Hebrew, Spanish and Ukrainian bear out the extensive research that shows students literate in their first language are more adept at acquiring English or French, which in turn improves their overall school performance.⁴ In Ontario, some school boards including York Region DSB and Ottawa-Carleton DSB, have launched pilot projects of bilingual ESL programs.

ESL/ELD Booster programs provide intensive intervention for newcomer students and support them in second language development, literacy and numeracy skills, and academic skills and knowledge. These are offered by boards for students who may have had gaps in their schooling as a measure to accelerate their successful integration into mainstream programs.

Sheltered courses at the secondary level, for example, ESL Geography, are important for ESL learners as they develop the academic language proficiency required in various content areas. For students who have had interruptions in their schooling or have low literacy skills will need the support of sheltered ELD courses to bridge the gap between their academic skills and the expectations of their age-appropriate grade level.

Self-contained classes for high needs – low literacy students are an important option in supporting newcomers overwhelmed by the unfamiliar language and customs of their new country. The small class size offers learners the intensive support of qualified and knowledgeable ESL teachers during their first year. While this is initially a high cost compared with simply integrating students into the regular classroom, it brings results in terms of accelerating the rate at which the students can progress to full participation in age-appropriate grade levels. For Secondary ESL/ELD students with limited foundational literacy skills, increased time, explicit and focused instruction, and appropriate resources are critical in supporting their academic success.

Other supports

Parent Outreach: A key factor in successful integration of newcomer students is the degree of outreach school boards offer to immigrant families. This can start with a school board “Welcoming Kit” that explains, in the family’s first language, how the school system works and how parents can be involved in their children’s education, including parent/Teacher interviews and curriculum evenings. More proactive initiatives involve formal outreach programs where school boards have Community Liaison staff who organize school-community events in a variety of first languages as part of an ongoing strategy to encourage parental involvement. Some school boards extend this to



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offering family literacy and parenting programs which provide parents with practical involvement with their local school and their children's education.

There are some resources which have been developed as a result of federal funding provided by Citizenship and Immigration Canada. These include print and video resources to help families understand their role in their child's education e.g., the Newcomers' Guides to Elementary and Secondary Schools, the *New Moves* video for secondary school students and a video about library services for newcomers. This is a good beginning and should be strengthened and expanded to include online translator services to meet the growing needs of parents, schools and school districts.

Kits and Dual Language Materials:

Some boards with significant numbers of immigrant children and youth have developed ESL and ELD resource kits that can be shared with teachers as an aid to support students integrated into regular classrooms. Because of the value of reinforcing first language learning as a bridge to acquisition of English or French, some boards have put resources into acquiring dual language materials. These are expensive and not as widely accessible as need would dictate.

School newsletters in the languages of the community are another vehicle for promoting parental involvement among newcomer populations and a number of school boards have allocated resources to provide this service.

The descriptions above represent an outline of programs and resources which school board representatives agree to be effective examples of ways to support immigrant children and youth as well as children born in Canada but whose first language is neither English nor French. These programs and resources should be available in boards which provide service to these student populations.

SYSTEMIC ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED

While school boards in urban centres of immigration are providing a range of programs and services to meet the basic needs of students in their first years in Canada, a great deal more needs to be done to strengthen the degree and pace of integration of these students into the school system.



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Duration of Support for ESL/ELD Students

An obvious area for attention is the gap between the systemic structure that supports the acquisition of a second language and the time and resources actually required to bring a student to academic fluency in their new language. In Ontario, until very recently, there has been a three-year model for funding ESL with decreasing levels of funding for each successive year the student has been in Canada. (The 2004-5 school year saw the inclusion of a fourth year of funding in the grant structure for school boards.) This is common in most provinces in the country. At the school level, active, directed ESL instruction generally lasts for two years. All the evidence shows, however, that it takes up to seven years to acquire the fluency in English which will put immigrant students on a par with their Canadian-born counterparts. This is affirmed in Ontario Ministry of Education Resource Guide: “Most ESL/ELD students are able to use English to communicate in social situations and day-to-day classroom interactions within one to two years. However, students may require *from five to seven years* to develop the ability to understand the academic language used in textbooks and to use English to express the increasingly complex and abstract concepts encountered in the higher grades.”⁵ In the largest school boards, more than 20% of the total student enrolment comprises students still in their first seven years in Canada.

To be successful in school, fluency in the language of instruction has to go far beyond basic social communication skills and must encompass facility with the academic and technical language used in the full range of school subjects. It is clear from the results of Ontario’s standard literacy tests that ESL students are lagging far behind. In 2003, the percentage of all English-language Grade 3 students performing at the provincial standard (Level 3) in Reading was 54% compared with 34% of ESL/ELD students. In Writing the respective numbers were 58% and 42%. In Mathematics the respective numbers were 64% and 50%. The results for Grade 6 ESL/ELD students are even lower.

At the secondary school level, the percentage of ESL/ELD students who passed the Grade 10 Literacy Test (OSSLT) was 50% compared with 82% of English-language students.

While the performance of ESL/ELD students shows significant improvement from the results in the previous two years, these are still sizeable gaps and ESL/ELD students continue to lag substantially behind. These gaps need to be addressed by providing newcomer students with access to intensive ESL support for up to three years and supports in the regular classroom as students are fully integrated. These supports range from ensuring training in ESL for regular classroom teachers to multilingual resources to homework clubs.



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Information Tracking System for ESL/ELD Students

Other systemic gaps that contribute to lack of support for ESL students centre on the absence of a common provincial tracking mechanism that follows students from their entry into the school system to completion of elementary school and/or graduation from high school. Individual school boards have created their own tracking systems to monitor academic progress and determine the resources and programs that will improve outcomes for ESL/ELD students. However, we do not have, either on a provincial or a federal level, collective verifiable information to demonstrate that immigrant children and youth are being effectively served in our schools. Individual studies (e.g. those conducted by University of Calgary professor Hetty Roessingh) show the drop-out rate for ESL/ELD students to be as high as 70% compared with 30% for other students.⁶

National Language Benchmarks for Immigrant Children and Youth

Another systemic concern is the issue of national benchmarks. While these exist for adult newcomers to Canada through the Canadian Language Benchmarks, no such national standards exist for school-age children and youth. The adult system provides:

- Information to learners both on what they have learned and what they have yet to learn
- A clear statement of a person's language ability to administrators, teachers, employers, settlement workers and so on
- A set of reference points for teachers to use when assessing a learner's language abilities
- A common basis for assessment of both learners and institutions offering ESL.⁷

Improvement in the provision of appropriate services to students entering the school system is directly linked to establishing national benchmarks which can be used to assess students' level of literacy and language acquisition. Such benchmarks are key to tracking and confirming the achievement of levels of proficiency as students progress through the school system.

Individual school boards have adopted and adapted assessment systems to enable them to determine appropriate grade placement of students as newcomer families arrive at the Board's Reception Centre or at the local school. In so doing they have worked to align the assessment tools with the Ontario Ministry of Education ESL/ESD Resource Guide. However, school boards find it necessary to expend time and resources to refine their assessment tools in the best interests of providing students with accurate placements and offering teachers necessary supports.



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A national approach to standards and assessment would relieve school boards individually of the requirement to adapt and modify assessment toolkits. A common approach would help provide equity in service to children and minimize setbacks for students transferring from one jurisdiction to another.

OPSBA'S findings with regard to both exemplary programs and the gaps in support for immigrant children and youth are not unique. They reflect the results that have been well documented by other organizations and individuals, most notably the Canadian Coalition for Immigrant Children and Youth, the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, People for Education and the work of Atkinson Foundation Fellow and journalist, Andrew Duffy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association recommends that:

- 1. Federal government funding of initial language assessment be extended, as part of the settlement process, to school-aged children of immigrant families to ensure assessment not only of the level of proficiency in English or French but also first language literacy to support the development of an academic assessment profile;**
- 2. The Federal government fund, as part of the settlement process, the resources necessary to support the integration of newcomer children and their families into the school system, including such initiatives as first language services in school board Reception Centres, translation and interpretation services to promote parent engagement in their children's education, settlement worker services, and community programs to promote school readiness and to accelerate the pace at which newcomer students catch up to their peers;**
- 3. The Federal government support the integration of immigrant children and their families by funding dual language materials for use in newcomer Reception centres and in schools;**
- 4. A national Language Benchmarks program with exemplars for school-age immigrant children and youth, funded by the Federal government, be established to provide standards for measuring acquisition of proficiency in English or French;**



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- 5. The provincial funding formula for ESL/ELD recognize the five to seven year period involved in achieving academic proficiency in English and that eligibility for such funding extend equally to children born in Canada but whose first language is neither English nor French and to children whose education is interrupted because, for example, their parents are seasonal migrant workers;**
- 6. A provincial tracking system be established to follow newcomer children and youth from their entry into the school system through to high school graduation;**
- 7. All Ontario teacher pre-service education programs include a specific component, and integrated beliefs and understandings in all other components, on how to address the needs of ESL/ELD students;**
- 8. Ongoing professional development in ESL/ELD issues be mandatory for all Ontario educators involved in the education of ESL/ELD students.**



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II FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS

First Nations children enter the public school system from different places and at different stages in their schooling. Their families may live on a reserve that does not have a school and the children, starting in Kindergarten, will attend the nearest public school under a tuition agreement. There are families that live off-reserve in towns or cities and they will also send their children to the nearest public school. Children may start their schooling at an on-reserve school and later transfer to a public school.

Whatever the circumstances, public schools are concerned about their capacity to ensure that First Nations children succeed in the school system on a par with non-First Nations children. Many First Nations students have learned to speak English in an environment where, for many speakers, English is a second language. Their version of English is different from the standard dialect of English used in Canadian public schools. Children who acquire the standard Canadian English dialect at home as a mother tongue are often seen as having more advanced development of language skills in early childhood and at school entry and have an easier transition into school. Children who do not acquire the standard dialect as a mother tongue can be perceived as having delayed or poor language skills, language impairments or even developmental delays. This perception is compounded by cultural norms that may value listening and observing over talking and asking questions.⁸ The challenge for schools is to recognize these variations as differences rather than deficits and provide programming that supports the transition to success with academic English, and builds on the literacy, language and culture that First Nations children bring to school.

While school boards have implemented a number of programs and initiatives that have proven effective, First Nations children continue to lag behind in terms of mainstream academic achievement. The differences in achievement levels have strong links to facility in the use of the standard form of English that is the language of instruction in schools. Other than through Tuition Agreements, there is no federal funding that is dedicated to serving the needs of First Nations children in the Ontario public school system. It is important to note that the federal funding provided by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada to native communities to cover all their education costs falls far short of what is required to purchase needed services for First Nations students attending provincially funded schools. Provincial funding has traditionally supported Native as a Second Language (NSL) programs and has recently provided some funds for special projects aimed at improving high school graduation rates for First Nations students; however, there is no specific funding that is directed at meeting the unique language development needs of First Nations children entering the public school system, whether that point of entry is kindergarten or any other grade level up to and including secondary school. This deficit was highlighted in both Dr. Rozanski's *Report of the Education*



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Equality Task Force (2002) and Dr. Downey's Report on Strengthening Education in Rural and Northern Ontario (2003).

SUCCESSFUL INITIATIVES

Oral Language Programs

Facility in oral language is a strong foundation for the development of literacy. First Nations children arriving in the public school system frequently do not have exposure to the mainstream dialect of English which is the language of instruction in schools. This has led the Keewatin-Patricia District School Board to implement Oral Language Programs as a pilot project in Kindergarten and Grade 1 in a number of schools. The program components are language of social interaction, language of literacy, and language and thinking. While there is a focus on supporting reading development, all areas are promoted and have a role in the development of speaking, listening and writing.

The program requires allocation of a Special Assignment Teacher and specific training for classroom teachers. Preliminary results indicate that teachers see students making strong gains in oral expression and self-confidence. Quantitative measures bear this out with students achieving or surpassing levels of oral expression expected for their chronological age.

Full-time Kindergarten

In comparison with non-First Nations children, a higher percentage of First Nations children come from low-income families and have had less access to resources that promote school readiness. Research indicates that full-time kindergarten programs offer a strategy to close the gap, providing First Nations children with the range of activities and blocks of learning time that help provide the base for building literacy in the mainstream English used in schools. Given the very low levels of high school graduation among First Nations adults referred to earlier in this paper, offering more concentrated support to children in the early years is particularly critical. Full-time kindergarten is one example of vital and necessary early intervention strategies.

School-Community Partnerships

A key factor that supports success in school for First Nations children is the development of strong, respectful partnerships between schools and the First Nations community organizations. A number of school boards work closely with community Friendship Centres and, through Aboriginal Advisors and Native Advisory Committees, promote First Nations involvement in local education program development to build a foundation that is supportive for First Nations children participating in the public education system.



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Collaboration

A large proportion of First Nations children enrolled in the public school system live in Northern Ontario where many school boards are small and have unique pressures in delivery of educational services due to distances between schools. The small size of boards also means there is a lack of centralized staff that can assist schools in delivering specialized services. Collaboration among boards in terms of resources and effective language programs that support school success for First Nations children is particularly critical. Organizations such as Northern Ontario Education Leaders (NOEL) and the Northern Aboriginal Education Circle (NAEC) have had success in supporting the development of effective programs and sharing best practices. These levels of collaboration require further support and development.

ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED

Training and Professional Development

Priscilla George, an expert in aboriginal literacy has noted: “Many students learn to speak English from English as a second language speakers. These are people with whom First Nations students interact in the majority of their life, that is, people who are removed from the academic system. The non-standard and standard version of English have different grammatical construction. The variance causes problems, not only in testing, but also in general class work. A teacher who is not aware of this difference may perceive the student to be speaking “broken English”. The students may be partially graded on their ideas but they are primarily graded on the way in which they present their ideas. That is, not recognized or validated in standardized tests.”⁹

There is a need for those who work at all levels in school boards where First Nations students are enrolled to receive specific training and professional development that provides orientation to the heritage languages including awareness of the vastly different structure of these languages, language socialization and cultures of First Nations students. These are factors that influence how children experience the school system and the stress they sustain when adults are unaware of the conversational styles and expectations surrounding their use of English in their community. For example, when First Nations children are asked questions in school, they may, in keeping with interactional norms in their community, have responses that take the form of hesitation or silence and these may be misinterpreted as lack of comprehension, inability to respond correctly, lack of attention or even insolence. Another area at risk for misinterpretation is where language assessments for vocabulary are based on words familiar to speakers of the standard dialect, but not to First Nations children living in rural or remote communities.¹⁰



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An obvious strategy for creating a positive school climate in schools where there are significant numbers of First Nations children, is to include and increase the presence of First Nations teachers among the staff. The Federal government, the Ontario Ministry of Education and the institutions responsible for teacher preparation need to be more collaborative and more proactive in making teacher certification a realizable goal for First Nations youth. This could include supporting “future teachers” initiatives that actively encourage and mentor students in the early years of high school to consider teaching as a career.

Assessment

As noted immediately above, there are obstacles to timely and accurate assessment of First Nations children so as to ensure adequate and sensitive support for their transition to facility in the form of English used in school. Resources need to be allocated to developing assessment approaches that are culturally-attuned – in other words, use methods and exemplars that are relevant to the experience of First Nations students – and to training educators in the effective use of such assessment approaches.

Parental and Community Involvement

It is well documented that a child’s success in school is directly related to how much the parents are involved in the child’s education and in the life of the school. Strong home-school links are highly supportive of language development. The value of parental involvement is a key tenet of First Nations culture and is highlighted in every report and document on First Nations education issued in the last thirty years. The 1988 report “Tradition and Education” issued by the Assembly of First Nations notes however that there has been scant development in parental involvement particularly in provincial schools attended by First Nations students. The Report recommends enhancing parental involvement through parent-school workshops to jointly identify parental involvement activities and through training of parents in a variety of areas: to serve as resource people in curriculum development; to perform as partners in strategic education planning; to enhance parenting skills; to act as language and culture instructors in the schools.¹¹

The culture of the school plays an important role in fostering parental participation. Many First Nations parents feel that their culture and values are not respected and those whose own education level is not high may have concerns about the contribution they can make or they are discouraged because their own experience with schooling was extremely negative. School staff, on the other hand, may feel they lack the cross-cultural training that would equip them to solicit meaningful input and open up effective two-way communication.



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Because the role of parents in their children's education is the strongest determining factor in children's opportunities throughout life, it is critical that the relationship between parents and schools be nurtured. This relationship is important throughout the child's school career but it is particularly vital to connect with parents of younger students to build a foundation that will endure as the children progress through the grades. In addition to the direct teacher-parent links that are vital at the local school level, more work needs to be done in building partnerships with First Nations organizations in the community and in increasing First Nations involvement on school boards, particularly in the area of developing program initiatives to meet the needs of First Nations students.

Resources to widely disseminate programs that work

It has been noted that organizations such as Northern Ontario Education Leaders (NOEL) and the Northern Aboriginal Education Circle (NAEC) currently support the development and dissemination of effective programs and practices. They also have a role in promoting community and parental engagement in the education of First Nations students in the public school system. The contribution of such organizations should be supported and adequately resourced. In other areas of Ontario public school boards have implemented programming to improve student achievement for First Nations students. There have been similar successes in on-reserve schools. Opportunities for all First Nations students would be enhanced by promoting consortia among school boards to pool their resources to develop tools and programs that individual boards, on their own, cannot develop. A further support for sharing resources would flow from establishing liaison bodies in other Ontario regions similar to NOEL and NAEC in Northern Ontario, as well as expanding the website of the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat to include a "best practices" site specific to education of First Nations students.

Relationship between federal and provincial jurisdictions

The provincial government in its initiative "Ontario's New Approach to Aboriginal Affairs" highlights the intent to work "with Aboriginal peoples, school boards and the federal government to provide accessible, high-quality education, including postsecondary education and training for Aboriginal children and youth."¹² This will be essential to close the student achievement gap between First Nations students and other students in the province. Literacy is a foundational skill for achievement in all aspects of the curriculum; First Nations students entering the provincial school system from federally-funded schools are disadvantaged as a result of systemic issues related to inadequate resources in the federal funding formula. They need strong, intensive and culturally-sensitive support to close a two- and sometimes three-year gap and participate



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confidently and successfully in age-appropriate classrooms. This is the shorter-term solution. A more comprehensive solution lies in the work that has to be done through a partnership of First Nations communities, federal government and provincial government to improve the learning environment, establish equivalency of standards and provide necessary resources to First Nations students living on-reserve.

Mechanisms to identify needs and provide resources

First Nations students who do not live on-reserve and attend public schools in the province are not eligible for any additional focused support to ensure they have a successful start in school. As indicated elsewhere in this paper many of these students have to make a transition to the standard dialect of English used as the language of instruction in schools. A significant issue in addressing this need is the lack of a mechanism for self-identification as First Nations students. There are concerns with putting this mechanism in place. These include fears about children being labeled for life and fears of marginalization.

In British Columbia, there is specific provincial education funding for “students of aboriginal ancestry.” Under this policy, eligible students are defined as “a school-age student who has self-identified as being of Aboriginal Ancestry (First Nations, status and non status; Métis; and Inuit).” The policy specifies that identification must be made on a voluntary basis.¹³ The resulting funding is used to provide culturally appropriate educational programs and services to support the success of First Nations students. In Ontario, the Keewatin-Patricia District School Board, where the student population is approximately 30% First Nations, has worked with its First Nations communities to introduce a self-identification program as a measure towards developing supportive programming for students.

Later Literacy

The strategies that are successful for young First Nations children entering the public school system are generally not transferable to programming for intermediate and high school students. It is noted, however, that the Oral Language program used by the Keewatin-Patricia DSB as a foundation for early literacy, was used with some success with older students.

A key concern that must be addressed is the degree to which mainstream traditional institutions do not meet the needs of First Nations youth. They can be regarded as intimidating and alienating. An alternative high school setting located in a Friendship



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Centre, for example, and a program with strong cultural links is a positive option for some, though not all, First Nations young people and is more likely to engage them in their education and create a climate for successful learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association recommends that:

- 1. The federal government provide adequate resources to fund programs which will facilitate the building of strong relationships between First Nations communities and public school boards with a view to increasing First Nations involvement on school boards and developing effective parental engagement initiatives;**
- 2. Both the federal and provincial government support and fund the work of organizations and consortia charged with the development and dissemination of programs and initiatives directed at success in literacy for First Nations students;**
- 3. Representatives of First Nations communities, school boards, federal government and provincial ministry of education work together to federal-provincial jurisdiction to improve the learning environment and the programs and resources available to students living on-reserve and promote a seamless transition for children moving to provincially-funded schools;**
- 4. The provincial government allocate specific funding to address the language acquisition needs of First Nations students enrolled in provincial public schools;**
- 5. Student registration procedures include a section that permits self-identification as a person of First Nations ancestry, such information to be provided strictly on a voluntary basis;**
- 6. Offering a full-time kindergarten program be approved as an early intervention program option to provide for the language acquisition needs of First Nations students entering provincial public schools;**
- 7. Appropriate Professional Development programs be developed that will promote knowledge of and sensitivity to the cultural and linguistic heritage of First Nations students;**



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- 8. The Ministry of Education and the Ontario College of Teachers provide pathways to Ontario Teacher Certification to promote and increase the number of First Nations teachers in public schools;**

FUNDING FOR SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

While issues of funding Second Language Learning have formed a necessary part of describing the challenges of providing effective levels of services for the student populations that are the focus of this position paper, it will be useful to address them specifically.

Provincial Funding

The Ontario Government provides ESL/ELD funding for students newly arrived in Canada from:

- (a) countries where English is not the first language of the majority of the population and
- (b) countries in which a majority of the population speaks a variety of English sufficiently different from the English used as the language of instruction in schools of the board that it is appropriate to offer an ESL or ELD program to pupils from those countries.

Under 2005-2006 Legislative Grants, funding is available for a maximum of four years, with the level of funding decreasing in each year so that students in their fourth year in the country generate 25% of the funding of students in their first year in the country. The funding mechanism does not recognize the mobility of immigrant families in their first months in Canada and that the process of settling in may take them from a temporary home in one school district to a more established residence in a different school district.

Compared to the funding in place for new immigrant children, there is a dramatically lower level of funding available for children who were born in Canada, raised in home environments where English or French is not the family's first language, and who are entering the school system after the age of four. To compound the inadequacy of this funding, it is generated on the basis of outdated census data. Furthermore, ESL/ELD grants do not recognize anomalies such as:

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- children of seasonal migrant workers who on their first entry into the school system are eligible for funding but lose months and even years of funding eligibility as their families move out of Canada for substantial periods of time
- children of families who also lose extended periods of funding eligibility as their families leave the country for periods of several months to return to their country of origin for religious, family or business reasons
- children of families who originally settled in a French-speaking region and after a period of time move to an English-speaking region and require the same level of ESL/ELD support they would require if they had just arrived in Canada

As noted elsewhere in this paper, expert opinion indicates that the period of time required to achieve academic fluency in English is between five and seven years. In addition to the gaps described above, this is an aspect of the provincial funding formula which needs to be addressed.

A further important pressure on funding, in general, is the fact that benchmarks which set the level of funding in each area have not been updated for a number of years. Over that time, boards have had to balance their budgets even though specific lines have exceeded the funding levels allocated to them in legislative grants, e.g. teacher salaries have increased to keep pace with inflation and significant cost areas such as energy and transportation have soared. The balancing act has forced boards to reallocate funds from discretionary budget lines consequently postponing maintenance projects and/or reducing service levels in some areas. While some boards have managed to do this without affecting the dollars generated for ESL/ELD services, others have had to reduce expenditures in this area to maintain other essential services. The funding mechanisms for school boards should support boards in investing necessary resources in vital ESL/ELD supports. The ways in which resources can be provided to students requiring ESL/ELD support are varied and shift with the needs of the student populations arriving in the province's schools. This is an argument against taking an over-prescriptive approach to ESL/ELD funding, an argument for retaining one of the few budget lines that allow for local decision-making to meet local needs and an argument for ensuring that other budget lines keep pace with inflation.

Federal Funding

Under the *Constitution Act*, the federal government has primary jurisdiction over Immigration and the provinces have jurisdiction over education. An important exception to this separation of responsibilities is First Nations education which is funded through the federal government.



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In May, 2005 the federal government announced that it had achieved agreement in a number of areas related to a new Immigration Agreement with Ontario that “will see the Government of Canada invest additional resources for settlement services and enhanced language training in Ontario, recognizing both Ontario’s high share of immigrant arrivals and addressing its low share of current immigration funding.”¹⁴ As previously stated, more than half of immigrants to Canada settle in Ontario. The settlement and integration of immigrant children and their families is, to a great extent, managed through the school system. It is to be hoped that a significant portion of the additional resources the federal government plans to invest in settlement services and enhanced language training will be directed at the school system to support the many areas which are not direct classroom instruction and, therefore, outside federal jurisdiction, but are nonetheless critical to ensuring success in school for students in their first years in Canada. Andrew Duffy in his Atkinson Foundation Fellowship series of articles notes: “With the influx of ESL students come demands for translation services so that parents can be informed of school events; bilingual tutors to help ESL students in their first language; cultural liaison workers to bridge cultural and religious divides; and new classroom materials comprehensible to those who have not grown up in Canada.”¹⁵ The examples he quotes are an indication of the range of essential supports that fall outside the traditional picture of classroom instruction.

With regard to education funding for First Nations students on-reserve, such funding flows directly from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) to the First Nations Band and is based on a Band-Operated Funding Formula. First Nations leaders in Ontario have grave concerns related to the inadequacy of this formula when compared with Ontario provincial education funding and this is currently being addressed through the Manifesto on First Nations Education issued by the Chiefs of Ontario. As has been outlined in this paper, many First Nations students attend provincial schools. Programs that promote their academic success in the public school system should be supported by the federal government. In the case of First Nations students attending provincial schools under Tuition Agreements between their local band and the district school board, INAC should ensure that funds are available to bands for special initiatives that can form part of Tuition Agreements, particularly in the areas of language and literacy. It is also suggested that the federal government support the initiatives of the Ontario government aimed at closing the student achievement gap between First Nations students and other students in the province.

Recommendations on how both the provincial and federal governments must support the language development needs of both First Nations and Immigrant Children are Youth are included in the relevant sections of this paper and in the summary of recommendations.



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CONCLUSION

A primary function of education is to prepare young people to be knowledgeable, skilled and contributing members of Canadian society. A rich and unique characteristic of Canadian society is the renewed and growing strength of its First Nations peoples and the welcome accorded to the many nations around the world who embrace Canada as a new home.

This paper is about providing the kind of education system that recognizes and provides for the language learning needs of children growing up in a successful pluralistic society. That education system is one that promotes school readiness, encourages parental engagement in children's schooling, and has school staff who are respectful of the first language children bring to school and are qualified to support second language learning, equipped with resources and programs that are second to none.



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SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association recommends that:

- 1. Federal government funding of initial language assessment be extended, as part of the settlement process, to school-aged children of immigrant families to ensure assessment not only of the level of proficiency in English or French but also first language literacy to support the development of an academic assessment profile;**
- 2. The Federal government fund, as part of the settlement process, the resources necessary to support the integration of newcomer children and their families into the school system, including such initiatives as first language services in school board Reception Centres, translation and interpretation services to promote parent engagement in their children's education, community programs to promote school readiness and to accelerate the pace at which newcomer students catch up to their peers;**
- 3. The Federal government support the integration of immigrant children and their families by funding dual language materials for use in newcomer Reception centres and in schools;**
- 4. A national Language Benchmarks program with exemplars for school-age immigrant children and youth, funded by the Federal government, be established to provide standards for measuring acquisition of proficiency in English or French;**
- 5. The provincial funding formula for ESL/ELD recognize the five to seven year period involved in achieving academic proficiency in English and that eligibility for such funding extend equally to children born in Canada but whose first language is neither English nor French and to children whose education is interrupted because, for example, their parents are seasonal migrant workers;**
- 6. A provincial tracking system be established to follow newcomer children and youth from their entry into the school system through to high school graduation;**
- 7. All Ontario teacher pre-service education programs include a specific component, and integrated beliefs and understandings in all other components, on how to address the needs of ESL/ELD students;**



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- 8. Ongoing professional development in ESL/ELD issues be mandatory for all Ontario educators involved in the education of ESL/ELD students;**

- 9. The federal government provide adequate resources to fund programs which will facilitate the building of strong relationships between First Nations communities and public school boards with a view to increasing First Nations involvement on school boards and developing effective parental engagement initiatives;**

- 10. Both the federal and provincial government support and fund the work of organizations and consortia charged with the development and dissemination of programs and initiatives directed at success in literacy for First Nations students;**

- 11. Representatives of First Nations communities, school boards, federal government and provincial ministry of education work together to Federal-provincial jurisdiction to improve the learning environment and the programs and resources available to students living on-reserve and promote a seamless transition for children moving to provincially-funded schools.**

- 12. The provincial government allocate specific funding to address the language acquisition needs of First Nations students enrolled in provincial public schools;**

- 13. Student registration procedures include a section that permits self-identification as a person of First Nations ancestry, such information to be provided strictly on a voluntary basis;**

- 14. Offering a full-time kindergarten program be approved as an early intervention program option to provide for the language acquisition needs of First Nations students entering provincial public schools;**

- 15. Appropriate Professional Development programs be developed that will promote knowledge of and sensitivity to the cultural and linguistic heritage of First Nations students;**

- 16. The Ministry of Education and the Ontario College of Teachers provide pathways to Ontario Teacher Certification to promote and increase the number of First Nations Teachers in public schools.**



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APPENDIX 'A'

Contextual Information for Students Participating in 2004-05 Gr. 3 EQAO Testing

District School Board	ESL/ELD Learners	Students born outside Canada	Students in Canada 3 years or more	First language of home other than English
Algoma	< 1%	2%	1%	2%
Avon-Maitland	1%	3%	1%	4%
Bluewater	< 1%	2%	1%	2%
Niagara	2%	6%	4%	6%
Ontario North East	< 1%	3%	2%	4%
Durham	1%	6%	4%	7%
Grand Erie	1%	3%	2%	5%
Greater Essex County	1%	14%	9%	22%
Halton	1%	10%	6%	10%
Hamilton-Wentworth	5%	12%	8%	18%
Hastings & Prince Edward County	1%	2%	2%	2%
Kawartha Pine Ridge	< 1%	2%	1%	2%
Keewatin-Patricia	< 1%	2%	1%	4%
Lakehead	< 1%	3%	2%	3%
Lambton Kent	1%	4%	2%	4%
Limestone	< 1%	4%	2%	3%
Near North	1%	3%	2%	3%
Ottawa-Carleton	12%	15%	10%	28%
Peel	29%	23%	14%	45%
Rainbow	< 1%	2%	1%	2%
Rainy River	0%	3%	0%	1%
Renfrew County	< 1%	1%	1%	1%
Simcoe County	1%	4%	2%	4%
Superior-Greenstone	0%	7%	6%	2%
Thames Valley	6%	6%	4%	10%
Toronto	8%	25%	15%	46%
Trillium Lakelands	< 1%	2%	1%	2%
Upper Canada	1%	3%	2%	5%
Upper Grand	4%	7%	4%	9%
Waterloo Region	9%	11%	7%	19%
York Region	11%	16%	11%	35%



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APPENDIX 'A' (cont'd.)

Contextual Information for Students Participating in 2004-05 Gr. 6 EQAO Testing

District School Board	ESL/ELD Learners	Students born outside Canada	Students in Canada 3 years or more	First language of home other than English
Algoma	< 1%	2%	1%	2%
Avon-Maitland	< 1%	2%	2%	4%
Bluewater	< 1%	2%	2%	2%
Niagara	2%	7%	5%	7%
Ontario North East	< 1%	2%	2%	4%
Durham	1%	6%	5%	7%
Grand Erie	1%	3%	2%	5%
Greater Essex County	1%	14%	10%	20%
Halton	1%	9%	7%	11%
Hamilton-Wentworth	4%	13%	9%	18%
Hastings & Prince Edward County	1%	2%	1%	2%
Kawartha Otonabee Ridge	< 1%	2%	2%	2%
Keewatin-Patricia	< 1%	2%	1%	2%
Lakehead	< 1%	1%	1%	2%
Lambton-Kent	1%	3%	2%	3%
Limestone	1%	4%	2%	4%
Near North	1%	2%	2%	3%
Ottawa-Carleton	6%	16%	12%	26%
Peel	12%	26%	18%	38%
Rainbow	< 1%	2%	1%	4%
Rainy River	0%	3%	1%	< 1%
Renfrew County	< 1%	2%	2%	3%
Simcoe County	1%	4%	2%	4%
Superior-Greenstone	1%	0%	0%	1%
Thames Valley	2%	7%	5%	10%
Toronto	7%	29%	19%	43%
Trillium Lakelands	1%	2%	1%	2%
Upper Canada	1%	3%	3%	5%
Upper Grand	2%	6%	5%	9%
Waterloo Region	5%	11%	8%	18%
York Region	6%	20%	16%	34%



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Appendix 'B'

SECOND LANGAUAGE LEARNING FOCUS GROUP

Name	Position	School Board
Luigia Ayotte	Superintendent	Durham DSB
Judith Bishop	Trustee	Hamilton Wentworth DSB
Peter Cecile	Teacher Consultant	Greater Essex DSB
Margaret Dempsey	Principal	Ottawa-Carleton DSB
Gerri Gershon	Trustee President	Toronto DSB Canadian School Boards Association
Eleanor Good	ESL Coordinator	Thames Valley DSB
Al Greyson	Superintendent	Halton DSB
Lise Haman	Superintendent	Lakehead DSB
Bill Johnston	Trustee	Grand Erie DSB
Gerald Kleist	Trustee	Keewatin-Patricia DSB
Kathleen Meighan	Superintendent	Toronto DSB
Stan Nemiroff	Trustee	Toronto DSB
Joyce Palubiski	Trustee	Waterloo Region DSB
Charles Reid	Superintendent	Hamilton Wentworth DSB
Colleen Schenk	Trustee	Avon-Maitland DSB
Lyn Sharratt	Superintendent	York Region DSB
Chuck Waterman	Superintendent	Peel DSB

Brian Cain	Director of Finance	OPSBA
Susan Cook	Policy Associate	OPSBA
John McKnight	Finance Associate	OPSBA
Jeff Sprang	Director of Communications	OPSBA
Dave Walpole	Director of Program Policy	OPSBA

Other Consultees

Peter Dorfman	Provincial Coordinator	Settlement Workers in Schools
Jack McMaster	Director of Education	Rainy River DSB
Claudine VanEvery-Albert	Native Trustee Tewatatis Education Consultant	Grand Erie DSB Six Nations of the Grand River
Janet Wilkinson	Director of Education	Keewatin-Patricia DSB



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Note 3 Dr. Chris Southcott, Op.Cit.

Note 4 “The Bilingual Classroom”, Toronto Star Article, Andrew Duffy, September 30, 2004 (Atkinson Fellowship study “Class Struggles),

Note 5 Ontario Ministry of Education ESL/ESD Resource Guide,
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/curricul/esl18.pdf>

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Note 8 First Nations English Dialects: Implications for Supporting First Nations Children’s Development, Ball, J. & Bernhardt, B. (University of Victoria)

Note 9 First Nations Literacy in Ontario, Priscilla George, Manifesto on First Nation Education in Ontario, 2005

Note 10 First Nations English Dialects: Implications for Supporting First Nations Children’s Development, Ball, J. & Bernhardt, B. (University of Victoria)

Note 11 Engaging First Nations Parents in Education: An Examination of Best Practices, Lise Chabot, Manifesto on First Nation Education in Ontario, 2005

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