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Listuguj Education Directorate Increasing Literacy through Language Immersion

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**Listuguj Education Directorate
Increasing Literacy through Language Immersion
September 2014**

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Executive Summary

The Mi'gmaq community of Listuguj is located in the southwestern part of the Gaspé Peninsula (Québec) bordering the province of New Brunswick. Listuguj has a population of 3,786, of which 2,066 Mi'gmaq people live in the community and 1,720 live off reserve. Just over half of the population is under the age of thirty; however, most Mi'gmaq speakers are over the age of fifty.

Formed in 1992, the Listuguj Education Directorate operates a Nursery to Grade 8 School. Students graduating from Alaqsite'w Gitpu School in Listuguj, Quebec then go on to Senior High School in Campbellton, New Brunswick. The school follows the curriculum of New Brunswick, and includes both French and Mi'gmaq Immersion programs in addition to the regular program of study.

The complete Nursery K4 – grade 2 Mi'gmaq Immersion Program was developed in stages. A Kindergarten Mi'gmaq Immersion program was first implemented in 2002. When teaching resources were obtainable, and with parental support, a Grade 1 Mi'gmaq Immersion program was added in 2009, followed by Grade 2 in 2010. Finally, in 2011, with sufficient registrations, a Nursery K4 program was initiated to complete the Nursery to grade 2 Immersion Program.

The success of this Immersion program is due to a core of people at Listuguj Education Directorate who share a long-term vision and commitment to immersion; capable personnel at the community, school, and classroom level; a plan for certification for teachers from the community; strategies for development of curriculum and teaching materials at the community level; and partnerships with other Mi'gmaq communities, universities and other bodies with expertise in developing immersion programs such as McGill and Concordia University Linguistic Departments.

The project reached the planned short term goal of students learning basic reading and writing skills in Mi'gmaq Language, and conversing in Mi'gmaq in the classroom by grade 2. But, unpredictably, students who completed the full immersion program were seen to have greater confidence through improved self-identity, and student achievement.

The grade 2 students were able to demonstrate greater language fluency and improved literacy rates compared to their peers as demonstrated on standardized tests such as the CAT 4 (Canadian Achievement Test), the province of New Brunswick Literacy tests, and the Ontario (OWA) Writing Assessment.

The results of the Immersion Program in Listuguj can be corroborated by similar findings in other Immersion programs in the Atlantic region which include fluency, identity, and student achievement.

Context

A vibrant Mi'gmaq community, Listuguj is located in the southwestern part of the Gaspé Peninsula (Québec). The Appalachian Mountains surround the community, and the Restigouche River runs along the southern border. The province of New Brunswick is just across that river.

Listuguj has a population of 3,786¹ Mi'gmaq people, of which 2,066 live in the community and 1,720 live off-reserve. Just over half of the population is under the age of thirty. The community speaks Mi'gmaq, English, and French; however, most of the fluent Mi'gmaq language speakers are over the age fifty.

The Listuguj Education Directorate (LED) was first formed in December of 1992. Prior to this, education employees were reporting directly to the Chief and Council. The Education Directorate was issued a mandate by Chief and Council to construct and operate a school in Listuguj and to ensure that Mi'gmaq language and culture were interwoven into all aspects of the students' education. As a result of the mandate, the LED systematically began to relocate students back to Listuguj beginning with Nursery and Kindergarten in September of 1993. The Directorate now operates a nursery to grade 8 school. Students graduating from Alaqsite'w Gitpu School in Listuguj, Quebec then go on to Senior High School in Campbellton, New Brunswick. Post-secondary students often attend universities in the Atlantic region. Currently, the LED assists over 500 students – children, youth, and adult learners.

Funded through several sources including Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC), First Nations Education Council (FNEC), and the Listuguj Government, the Listuguj Education Directorate (LED) has 69 employees, the majority of whom work at the Alaqsite'w Gitpu School. The administrative arm of the Directorate employs 13 people, while 4 are employed in the LED's transportation department.

The LED provides coordination and supervision for the following programs:

- Post-Secondary;
- Transportation;
- Breakfast & Noon Day Lunch;
- Ancillary Services;
- Mi'gmaq Language & Culture;
- Alaqsite'w Gitpu School Elementary and Junior High School;
- Provincial Schools;
- Programs from the First Nation Education Council; and
- Transportation services to students attending elementary, middle, and high school in Listuguj and in Campbellton.

The Listuguj Education Directorate is currently working with the Department of Education in New Brunswick (NB) on *“The Enhanced First Nation Education Programs and Service Agreement.”* This agreement outlines the services and programs that are available to First Nation students attending New Brunswick provincial schools. The programs and services outlined in the agreement provided by the

¹ AANDC (2014). *First Nations Community Profiles, Registered Populations*, August 2014 viewed at http://pse5-esd5.ainc-inac.gc.ca/fnp/Main/Search/FNMain.aspx?BAND_NUMBER=51&lang=eng.

² AAEDIRP (2011). *Best Practices and Challenges in Mi'kmaq and Maliseet/Wolastoqi Language Immersion Programs*. Literature review by Joanne Tompkins and Anne Murray Orr with Roseanne Clark, Darcy Pirie, Starr

province are paid for through the tuition payments paid to the province for each and every student attending the NB schools while residing in Listuguj.

Presently, the LED is also working with the Province of New Brunswick, along with First Nation organizations of New Brunswick, such as the First Nations Education Initiative Inc (FNEII), on the Re-Investment Strategy. The Re-Investment Strategy allows for 50% of the tuition paid to the province to be re-invested in First Nation students on the nominal roll attending NB provincial schools. For Listuguj, it also supports two alternative learning centres for elementary and secondary students who are experiencing difficulties in the regular school system.

The mission of the Listuguj Education Directorate is:

- To provide quality education on Mi'gmaq beliefs, values, language, and culture for future generations;
- To nurture the development of each child to the fullest in the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, so as to become respectful, self-sufficient, and self-determined; and
- To support Mi'gmaq values, language, and culture through the school programs and curriculum.

History

The complete Nursery K4-grade 2 Mi'gmaq Immersion Program has been developed in stages. A Kindergarten Mi'gmaq Immersion Program was first implemented in 2002. When teaching resources were obtainable and with parental support, the Grade 1 Mi'gmaq Immersion Program was added in 2009, followed by Grade 2 in 2010. Finally, in 2011, with sufficient registrations, a Nursery K4 Program was initiated to complete the Nursery to Grade 2 Immersion Program.

Development Focus

The Mi'gmaq Immersion Program extends from preschool K4 to the end of grade 2.

Activities Accomplished

To begin immersion programs, the literature² suggests that certain factors need to be in place such as a core of people who share a long-term vision and commitment to immersion; capable personnel at the community, school, and classroom level; a plan for certification for teachers from the community and immersion pedagogy training; strategies for development of curriculum and teaching materials at the community level; and partnerships with other communities, universities, and other bodies with expertise in developing immersion programs.



The following activities were accomplished by the Mi'kmaq Immersion Program between 2002 and 2014:

Immersion Concept and Vision

To undertake this Immersion project, the LED engaged a First Nation consultant to review the immersion concept and determine the necessary resources to ensure the Programs' success for a Kindergarten Immersion.

LED established a Mi'gmaq Language Retention Committee to oversee curriculum development for the immersion program. The committee consisted of the following:

- Director of Education;
- Mi'gmaq Language Consultants;
- Mi'gmaq Language Coordinator;
- Mi'gmaq Language Instructors;
- Education Staff; and
- Community Members.

Staffing

The Alaqsitew Gitpu School was fortunate to have Mi'gmaq speakers among its teaching staff who were willing and very able to teach the Immersion program. They have been supported by language consultants from the LED. It is hoped that, in the future, other members of the community will take advantage of Mi'gmaq courses and the Immersion teaching certificates available through St. Thomas University and St. Francis Xavier University.

² AAEDIRP (2011). *Best Practices and Challenges in Mi'kmaq and Maliseet/Wolastoqi Language Immersion Programs*. Literature review by Joanne Tompkins and Anne Murray Orr with Roseanne Clark, Darcy Pirie, Starr Sock and Sherise Paul-Gould. Atlantic Policy Congress of Chiefs Secretariat, March.

Resources and Materials

To begin to build the Kindergarten Immersion Program in 2001, attention was focused on the methodological and pedagogical framework for immersion education and immersion instructional strategies. The English-based Kindergarten Program in place at the Alaqsite'w Gitpu School was reviewed to ensure that the Immersion students would achieve the same outcomes.

The next step was to review the English and French core programs at Alaqsite'w Gitpu School to ensure that there were realistic expectations of students who complete the Kindergarten Mi'gmaq Language Immersion Program. The language consultants conducted an exhaustive inventory of existing resources and materials and catalogued them according to grade level. They converted resource materials between writing systems as the writing systems for Mi'kmaq vary between regions.

Immersion Program Support

To support the idea of immersion within the community, the LED developed literature to answer most of the frequently asked questions regarding language immersions programs. This was initially distributed to potential kindergarten parents.

Curriculum support was provided at LED by Mi'gmaq language consultants. Teachers gave their time in the summer to do curriculum adaptation for additional program materials. In addition, the LED developed literature to promote the use of the Mi'gmaq language in the home environment.

The Kindergarten Language Immersion Program was further supported by a Mi'gmaq Language Summer Camp in 2003. This provided a continuation of language curriculum through a variety of activities aimed at increasing the number of opportunities to use the language.

Over a period of 4 weeks, the Summer Camp was held for students who had completed the Mi'gmaq Language Immersion Kindergarten Program at the Alaqsite'w Gitpu School. During this time, the students were exposed to more of the Mi'gmaq language in a play-based environment, and they participated in field trips intended to enhance their Mi'gmaq language skills in a varied environment, which included:

- Nature Walks;
- Visiting Elders;
- Showing children how to clean salmon;
- Songs;
- Rhymes; and
- Role-playing.



Community Resources

Further support for the Immersion Program was received from community resources, which included:

- Ongoing consultation with Elders;
- Tlisultinej (Language Focus Group), which brings together fluent Mi'gmaq speakers on a monthly or bi-monthly basis (the group reviews words and phrases that are being used to instruct Listuguj students and community members);
- Access to Mi'gmaq OnLine;
- Access to Mi'gmaq Language Dictionary; and
- Community members who are language speakers.

On August 6, 2013 a one-day Mi'gmaq Language Summer Workshop took place in Listuguj through the LED and the McGill University Linguistics Department. This workshop was intended to increase motivation and support for those learning the language, as well as inform community members about existing language-learning resources. It also created an inter-generational dialogue between community members to talk about their sentiments about the language. Members from around Listuguj – elders, summer students, adults, and Mi'gmaq immersion children – attended. There were also two guest speakers, Bernard Jerome and Jaime Battiste from Gesgapegiag and Eskasoni, respectively. There were about 70-80 people who attended.

A second Mi'gmaq Language Summer Workshop was organized in Listuguj in August 2014. Guest speakers were Starr Paul of Eskasoni and Diane Mitchell of Listuguj, who spoke on the importance of learning the Mi'gmaq language and programs that help support language learning. This second Summer Workshop was organized by high school graduate and post-secondary students attending Mi'gmaq classes.

Collaborations

The LED has collaborated in the following to support Mi'gmaq Language teaching:

- The Mi'gmaq Research Partnership is a partnership between the McGill University Linguistics Department, Concordia University Linguistics Department, and the Listuguj Mi'gmaq Nation Community. The collaboration is a collective effort to bring Mi'gmaq speakers, teachers, and linguists together to develop a deeper understanding of the grammar of the language, teaching material, and to facilitate the learning, speaking, and promotion of Mi'gmaq.
- The Mi'gmaq/Mi'kmaq Online Dictionary was developed by LED with collaboration from Unama'ki (Cape Breton/Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey).

Materials or Tools Developed

The tools and materials that were developed included:

- Nursery, Kindergarten, Grade 1, and Grade 2 Mi'gmaq Immersion curriculum;
- Mi'gmaq resource materials; and
- Mi'gmaq/Mi'kmaq online dictionary.

Logic Model

Inputs: Resources Human & Financial

- Teachers
- Education budget
- Curriculum developers
- Students
- Parents
- Administration
- Classrooms
- Mi'gmaq Language Specialists

Strategies / Major Activities

- Teacher recruitment
- Teacher training
- Promotion with parents
- Curriculum development and translation
- Collaborate with mainstream teachers to align program
- Increase levels of immersion each year from K5 to grade 1 to grade 2

Outputs and/or Performance Indicators

- Mi'gmaq Language used continuously in classroom between students at end of grade 2
- K4-2 Mi'gmaq curriculum
- Literacy Tests
- Student success

Short Term Outcomes

- Students learn basic reading and writing skills in Mi'gmaq Language
- Students able to converse in Mi'gmaq language
- Improvement of student's self-identity and self-confidence
- Increased literacy levels through exposure to another language

Intermediate Outcomes

- Increased prominence of Mi'gmaq Language in the school
- Creation of a solid base on which to build other language activities
- Increased student identity and confidence
- Increased student success

Ultimate Goal/ Impact

- Students converse in Mi'gmaq
- Preservation and enhancement of Mi'gmaq Language

Additional Measures of Success

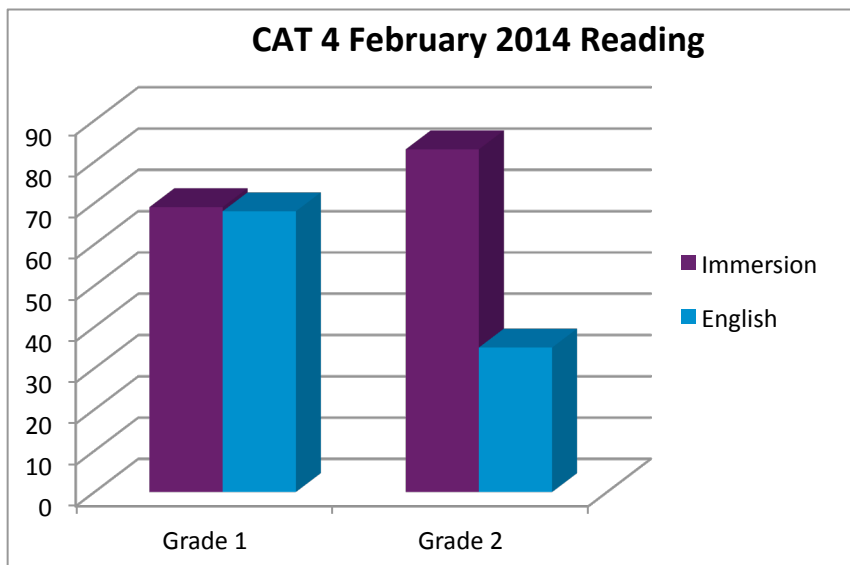
The additional measures of success that were established by the community included:

- Students meet academic requirements for each grade level of the Immersion Program.
- Increased use of Mi'gmaq language in the home and community at large.
- Increased awareness and knowledge of Mi'gmaq culture among our younger generations.

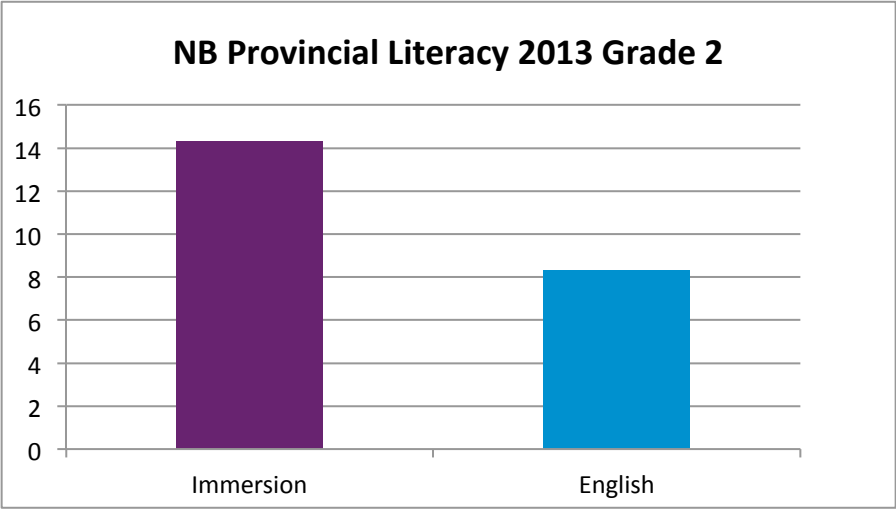
Project Outcomes

The project reached the planned short-term goal of students learning basic reading and writing skills in Mi'gmaq Language, and conversing in Mi'gmaq in the classroom by grade 2. But, unpredictably, students who completed the full immersion program were seen to have greater confidence through improved self-identity and student achievement.

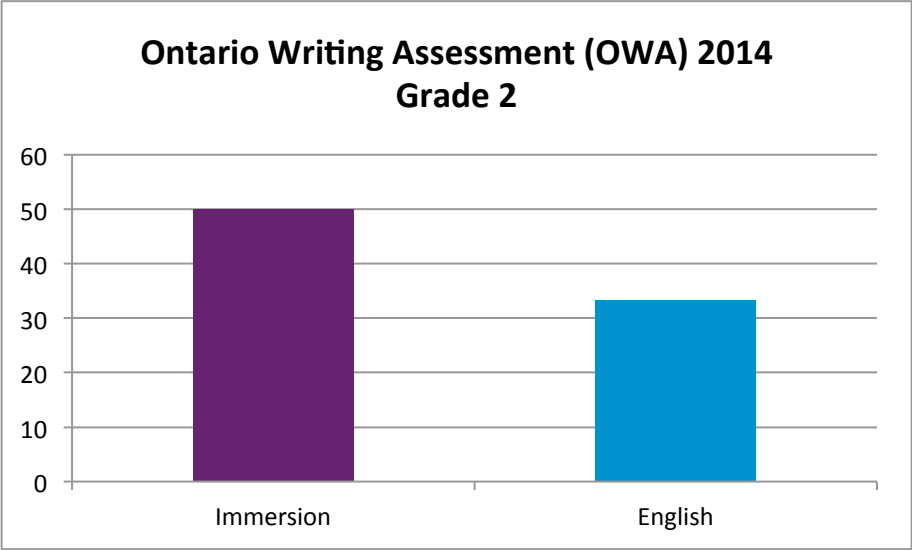
The grade 2 students were also able to demonstrate greater language fluency and improved literacy rates compared to their peers as demonstrated on standardized tests such as the CAT 4 (Canadian Achievement Test), the province of New Brunswick Literacy tests, and the Ontario (OWA) Writing Assessment. These students have received 30 minutes per day of English Language Arts in grades 1 and 2 of the Immersion Program compared to 240 minutes per day for English stream students.



The Canadian Achievement Test is a testing system that assesses the essential learning outcomes of the following basic skill areas: reading, language, spelling, and mathematics. The CAT 4 scores represent the aggregated Mean National Percentile for each grade level.



The provincial literacy scores for 2012-2013 indicated that 6% of the Immersion students scored higher in reading comprehension than the English stream students.



The OWA writing scores are aggregated and indicate the percentage of level 2 writing skills achieved by the class at the time of the test in February 2014.

The results of the Immersion Program in Listuguj can be corroborated by similar findings in the Eskasoni Mi'gmaq Nation Elementary and Middle School Immersion Program and the Tobique Maliseet Nation Immersion Program. These two schools found very powerful values of fluency, identity, and student achievement linked with their immersion programs. According to the conference presentation at

Carleton University in 2013, speaking with the kids and their teachers universally yielded themes of confidence, leadership, communicative ability, authentic language, and academic achievement³.

Significant Accomplishments

The most significant accomplishments for the Mi'gmaq Language Immersion program include:

- Increased prominence of Mi'gmaq Language in the school;
- Creation of a solid base on which to build other language activities;
- Increased student identity and confidence;
- Increased levels of language literacy; and
- Increased student success.

Next Steps

The next steps to be undertaken by the Listuguj Education Directorate include:

- Continue developing curriculum and resource materials to support the language instructors
- Develop early age language programs (at Head Start and Mawol'tijig Mi'ju'ajjig Day Care Center);
- Develop After School Language Program;
- Develop Adult Mi'gmaq Immersion Program;
- Develop Mi'gmaq Language Interactive CD;
- Transfer language materials to digital formats; and
- Seek funding to continue the Mi'gmaq Summer Camp program.



³ Carleton (2013). "Foundation for Endangered Language Conference 2013", Carleton University. Presentation: *An Inquiry into Two Aboriginal Language Immersion Programs*. Joanne Tompkins, Anne Murray-Orr, Sherise Paul-Gould, Starr Sock/Paul, Roseanne Clark & Darcy Pirie (St Francis Xavier University; Eskasoni Elementary and Middle School, Eskasoni First Nation; Tobique First Nation).