



Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey Eskasoni Mi'kmaw Immersion School

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Preface

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Project Abstract

Research has shown comparable skills in the mainstream language for students enrolled in an immersion program. Eskasoni has a complete Mi'kmaw Immersion School. The total language environment has provided other important effects as well as increasing the fluency of the language, it provides increased self-esteem and strengthens identity. This project also indicates that comparable assessment results for immersion students continues beyond immersion into the regular stream.

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Executive Summary

Eskasoni is the largest Mi'kmaq community in the world. Occupation of this region extends back to more than 10,000 years ago. In the 1940's the federal government began a policy of centralization, which involved moving Mi'kmaq families from other reserves to Eskasoni, making Eskasoni the largest Mi'kmaq community in the world.

Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (MK) is the official name for the Mi'kmaq Education Authority, officially created in 1997. Ensuring the survival of the Mi'kmaw language is of vital importance to Mi'kmaw communities. MK provides assistance to communities for Mi'kmaw Language through the services of a Mi'kmaw Language Coordinator and a Mi'kmaw Language Specialist, who work with the Mi'kmaw Advisory Committee made up of Elders, advisors and teachers from various communities.

In the summer of 2013, data was collected by Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey in conjunction with the MK communities to determine the levels of language use in each community. This was a follow-up to the same study done in 1999. The results show the percentage of speakers is declining, and the situation is becoming urgent.

Considering the ominous situation of the language in most Mi'kmaw communities in Nova Scotia, including Eskasoni, it is hard to understand why more parents are not choosing to send their children to the Immersion School. But parents often worry that their children's English abilities will suffer if they do. Research has shown that the contrary happens, students actually have comparable results with their peers in a regular program.

In 2009, researchers from McGill explored the impact of learning through an Indigenous language on students' English and Indigenous language skills by contrasting the Mi'kmaq language immersion program in Eskasoni with the Mi'kmaq as a second language program in the regular school. The results based on formal language tests revealed that students in the immersion program not only had stronger Mi'kmaq language skills compared to students in the second language program, but students within both programs ultimately had the same level of English.

This project then is to investigate if there are other important effects of being in a Mi'kmaw language Immersion School, and to document if this comparability in English literacy and Mathematics continues forward as they transition to a regular English Middle School program.

Qualitative research showed additional effects of the Immersion School are minimal discipline problems, improved self-esteem and pride in being Mi'kmaw, increased academic success, and a desire on the part of the students to use the Mi'kmaw language outside of the school environment by repeating learned conversations in social situations, or by texting in the language with friends from the school.

Moreover, a quantitative assessment of the academic levels of grade 6 students who attended the immersion program showed the continued comparability of reading and maths scores of immersion graduates and regular stream students. The language teaches the students cultural pride, values, customs, and respect, and it builds towards the future of generations to come.

Eskasoni Mi'kmaw Immersion School

Description of the Program

Eskasoni is celebrating its 36th year since taking local control over its education system in 1980. The Eskasoni School Board strives to offer the best education to community children. Under the jurisdiction of the school board is the Ksite'taqnk Daycare, Eskasoni Elementary and Middle School, Eskasoni Immersion School, Chief Allison M. Bernard Memorial High School and Una'maki TEC adult education programs and retention programs.

The school board has sustained a Mi'kmaw language core program, and an immersion program which this school year has expanded to a stand-alone Mi'kmaw immersion school. The main reason for this was so the students attending immersion classes would hear Mi'kmaw at all times in school. It would be used for school announcements, on the playground, in the hallways and encouraged by all teachers in student communication with each other and staff.

Context

We'kwistoqnik', "where the fir trees are plentiful", is the traditional territory of Eskasoni First Nation. The name of Eskasoni is derived from this. One of 5 Mi'kmaq communities in Unama'ki (Cape Breton), 13 in Nova Scotia, Eskasoni is the largest Mi'kmaq community in the world. Occupation of this region extends back to more than 10,000 years ago.

In the 1940's the federal government began a policy of centralization, which involved moving Mi'kmaq families from other reserves to Eskasoni. Prior to centralization the population of Eskasoni was less than 200, now Eskasoni is the highest populated reserve in Nova Scotia, with a registered population of over 4000.

Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (MK) is the official name for the Mi'kmaq Regional Management Organization, officially created in 1997. The MK is about facilitating and assisting the jurisdiction of education for the Mi'kmaw Nation communities it serves. The *Mi'kmaq Education Act*, a self-governing agreement, recognizes the role of the regional management organization to support local band schools in delivering language immersion and other culturally rich programs and activities. However, unlike a school board, Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey serves rather than directs the activities of its members' local schools. Eskasoni is a member community of the Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey.

Ensuring the survival of the Mi'kmaw language is of vital importance to Mi'kmaw communities. MK provides assistance to communities for Mi'kmaw Language through the services of a Mi'kmaw Language Coordinator and a Mi'kmaw Language Specialist, who work with the Mi'kmaw Advisory Committee made up of Elders, advisors and teachers from various communities.

In the summer of 2013, data was collected by Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey in conjunction with the MK communities to determine the levels of language use in each community. This was a follow-up to the same study done in 1999. The percentage of speakers was determined for various age categories for each set of data. While 40% of respondents identified as speakers of the language, the following graphs show that

the larger percentage of speakers is in the 60+ category and it decreases from there with each lower age group.

Figure 1. Percentage of Speakers by Category¹

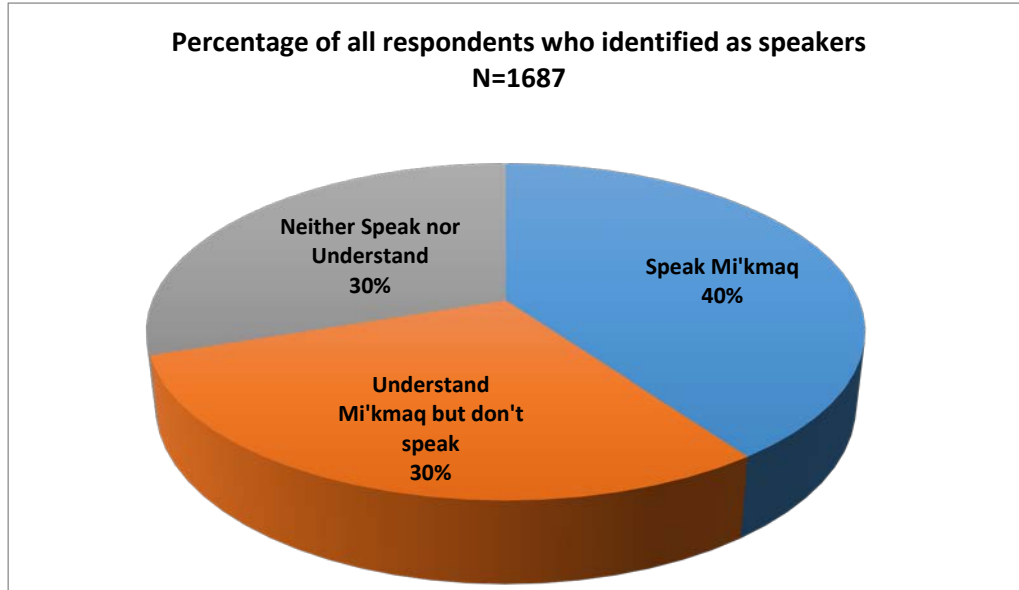
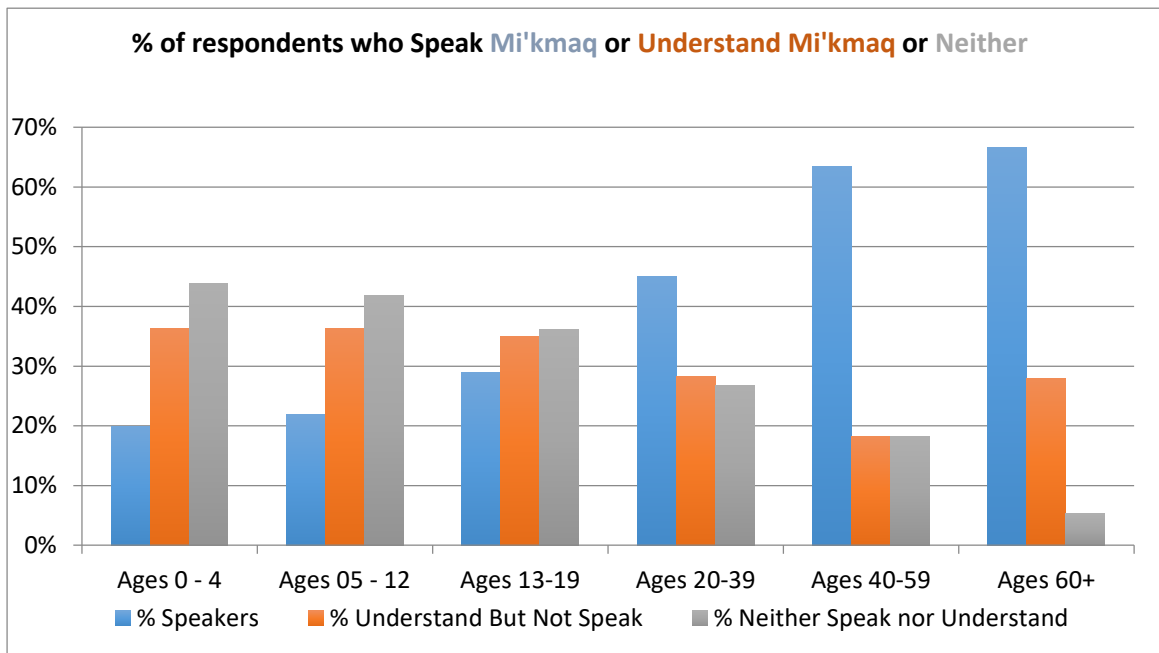


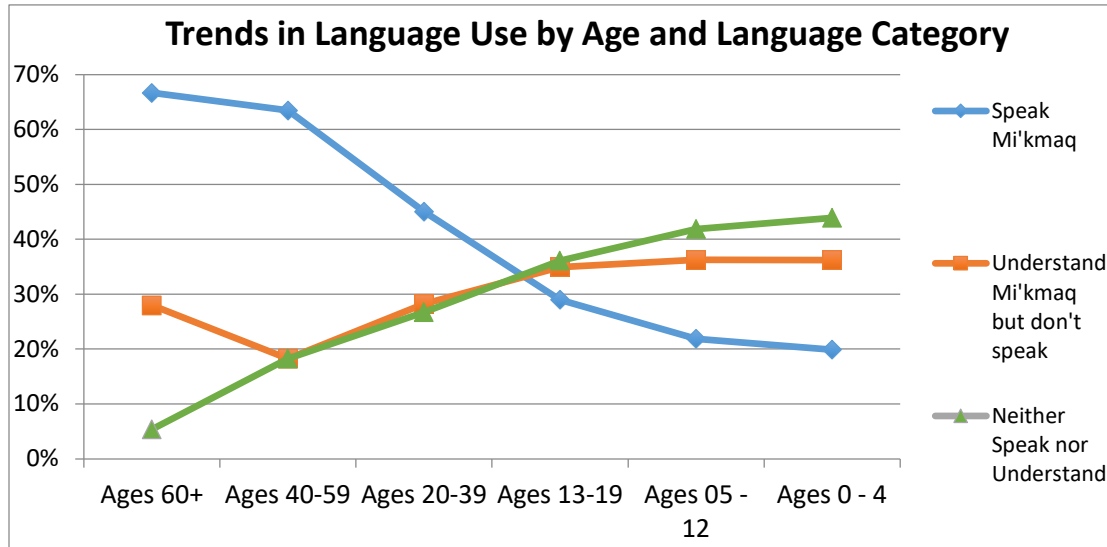
Figure 2. Percentage of Speakers by Age Group²



¹ (2014) Lunny Borden, Dr. Lisa. *The State of Mi'kmaq Language in Nova Scotia Communities*. St. Francis Xavier University.

² Ibid

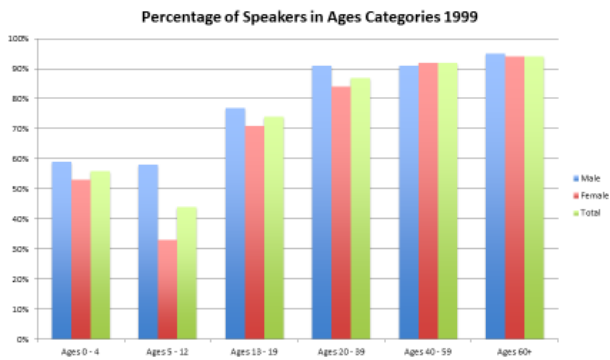
Figure 3: Trends in Language Use by Age³



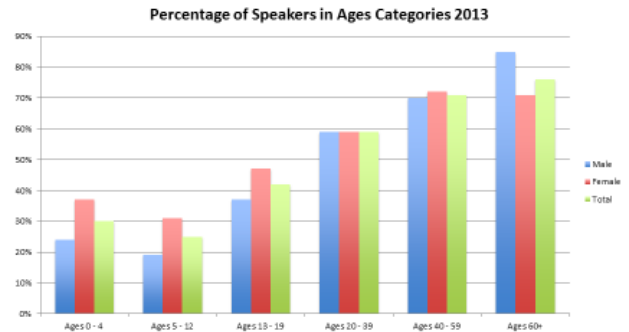
The blue line in the graph shows the percentage of speakers is declining as we go from the oldest respondents to the youngest. At the same time, the green line is increasing indicating an increase in the percentage of non-speakers who do not understand the language moving from the oldest to the youngest respondents. Those who understand but don't speak increases with the younger population presumably due to the efforts of the MK school system. Thus underlies the urgency of the language situation for the Mi'kmaw communities of Nova Scotia.

The same is true of the community of Eskasoni, even though a larger percentage of speakers than some other communities as shown in the following graphs⁴:

Focusing in on Eskasoni 1999



Focus on Eskasoni 2013



³ (2014) Lunny Borden, Dr. Lisa. *The State of Mi'kmaq Language in Nova Scotia Communities*. St. Francis Xavier University.

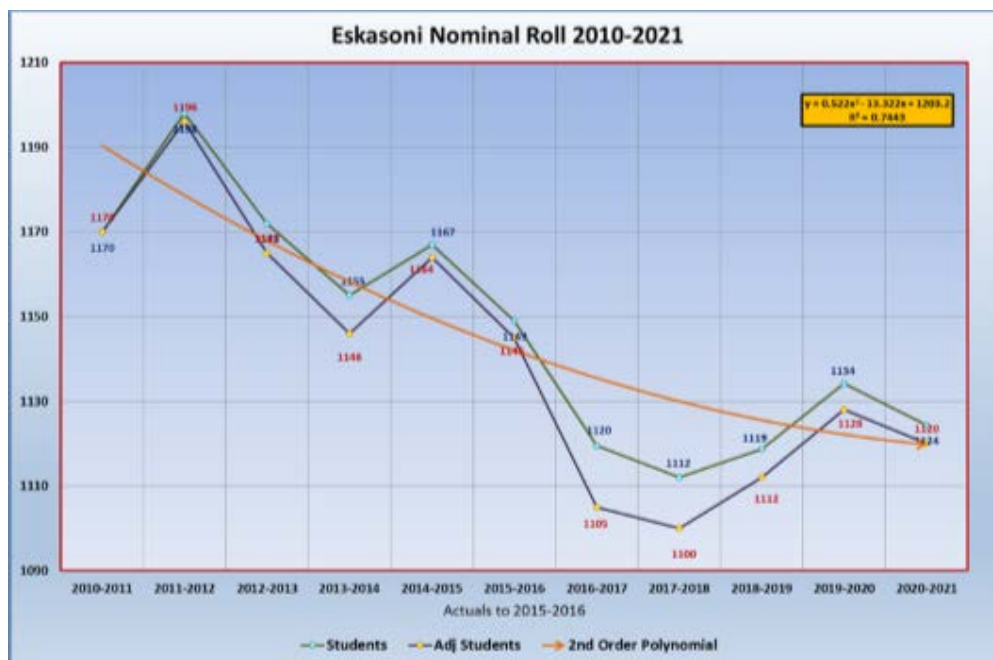
⁴ Courtesy of MK: Dave Peters, Performance Measurement Coordinator and Blair Gould, Mi'kmaw Language Coordinator

Eskasoni is celebrating its 36th year since taking local control over its education system in 1980. The Eskasoni School Board strives to offer the best education to the community children. The school board has sustained a Mi'kmaq language core program, and an immersion program which this school year has expanded to a stand-alone Mi'kmaq immersion school.

The Eskasoni School Board is under the umbrella of the Eskasoni Band Council. The school board has twelve members, each appointed by a Band Councillor. The chairperson is appointed to represent Chief and council, and in turn, it is his duty to report back the activities of the school board to council chambers. The chief of the Eskasoni band is also an ex-officio member of the board.

Under the jurisdiction of the school board is the Ksite'taqnk Daycare, Eskasoni Elementary and Middle School, Eskasoni Immersion School, Chief Allison M. Bernard Memorial High School and Una'maki TEC adult education programs and retention programs. There are just over 1060 students enrolled in the community schools.

Figure 4: Nominal Roll Current and Projected Enrollment for Eskasoni 2010-2021⁵



Brief History of the Project

“ta'n tell l'nulti'ek etek tli'sitminen” – *Our culture is in the Language.*

The community of Eskasoni marked a milestone for Mi'kmaw Education this September when it opened the doors to the first ever Mi'kmaw Immersion School. In order to get to such an important event, it took years of research and preparation behind the scenes. It began with a dream and through the hard work and dedication of many passionate community members, it has finally become a reality.

⁵ MKSIS (2016) courtesy of Dave Peters, Performance Measurement Coordinator, MK, July 2016.

In the early 2000's, the idea was put forward to offer an immersion class to a small group of students. Once this program was put in place, interest began to grow throughout the community and more and more parents wanted their children involved. The program began to extend from one small class of immersion students to include students from K-4 through to grade 4. Due to this increasing interest in the program, staff and language specialists began to discuss the idea of having a separate school for their immersion students.

The main reason for this request was so the students attending immersion classes would hear Mi'kmaq at all times in school. It would be used for school announcements, on the playground, in the hallways and encouraged by all teachers in student communication with each other and staff. Finally in the spring of 2015, it was announced that the school would open its doors in September.

Considering the ominous situation of the language in most Mi'kmaq communities in Nova Scotia, and that Eskasoni is one of the Mi'kmaq communities in Una'maki (Cape Breton) Nova Scotia where the language is spoken among the adult population, it is hard to understand why more parents are not choosing to send their children to the Immersion School. However, when there is a choice of enrolling one's child in an immersion program, where children spend the majority of their school day learning in an Indigenous language, parents often worry that their children's English abilities will suffer. This is a common concern among many Indigenous communities across Canada.

Nevertheless, McCarty (2002) described a Navajo language program in which, by fourth grade, students educated entirely in Navajo performed just as well on tests of English as comparable students at the same school who were educated in English only. Wright, Taylor, & Macarthur (2000) found that students educated entirely in Inuktitut not only developed strong Inuktitut skills, but also showed steady improvement in English and French.

Not only does the research show comparable skills in the mainstream language, but Wright and Taylor (1995) found that Indigenous students educated in their heritage language actually showed increased self- and collective-esteem. This is consistent with other research showing that understanding one's cultural identity is important for psychological well-being (Usborne & Taylor, 2010), and that language learning is an excellent tool for connecting with one's Indigenous cultural identity through education (Battiste, 2002).

In 2009, researchers from McGill explored the impact of learning through an Indigenous language on students' English and Indigenous language skills by contrasting the Mi'kmaq language immersion program in Eskasoni with the Mi'kmaq as a second language program in the regular school. The results based on formal language tests revealed that students in the immersion program not only had stronger Mi'kmaq language skills compared to students in the second language program, but students within both programs ultimately had the same level of English.⁶

The following two graphs are taken from that report.

⁶ Usborne E., Peck J., Smith, D.L. & Taylor, D.M. (2011). *Learning through an Aboriginal Language: The Impact on Students' English and Aboriginal Language Skills*. Canadian Journal of Education, 34, 4 (2011): 200-215.

Figure 5. Total *Mi'kmaq* Language Scores at Eskasoni⁷

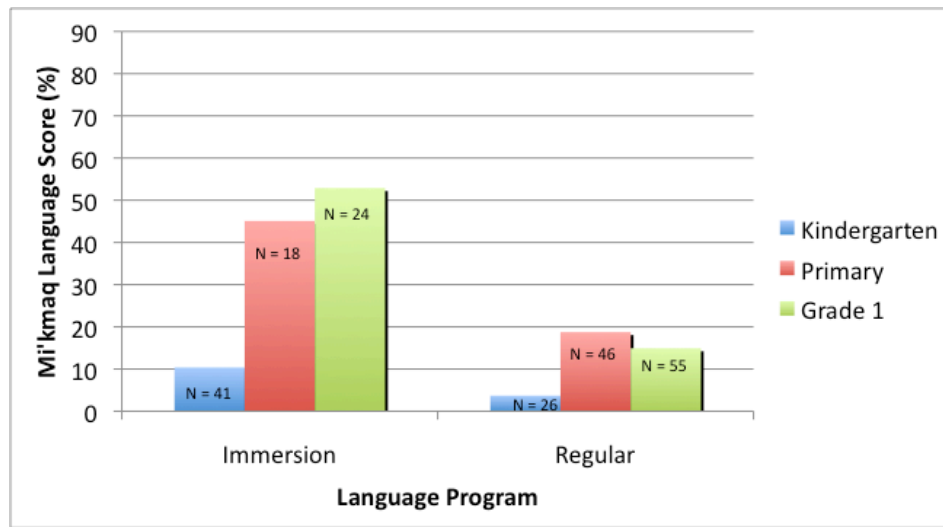
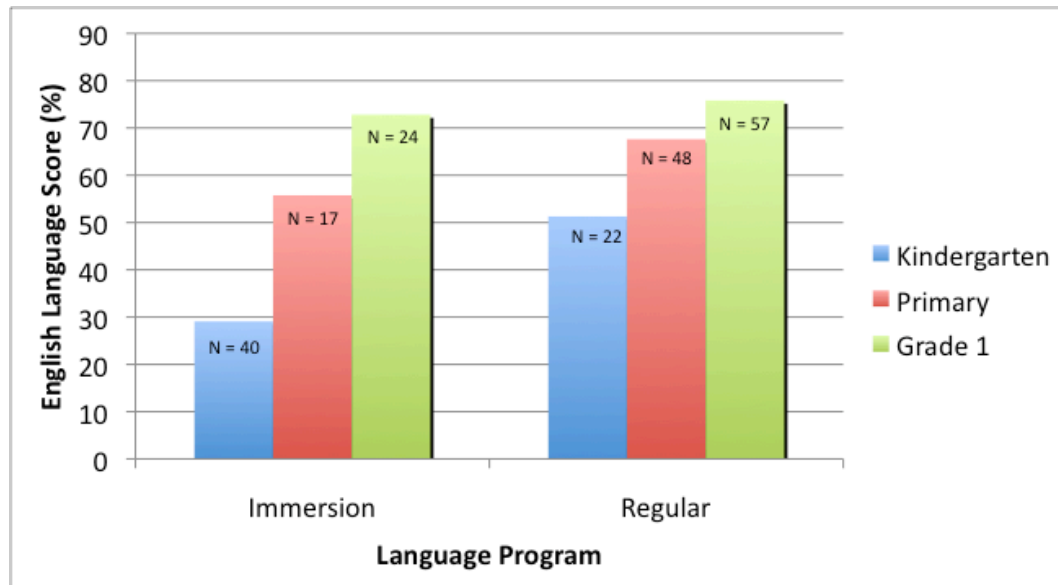


Figure 6. Total *English* Language Scores⁸



Overall, students in the *Mi'kmaq* immersion program appear to not only be learning more *Mi'kmaq* than students in the *Mi'kmaq* as a second language program, but they are also doing just as well in English. This project then is to investigate if there are other important effects of being in a *Mi'kmaw* language Immersion School, and to document if this comparability in English literacy and Mathematics continues forward as they transition to a regular English Middle School program.

⁷ Osborne E. & Smith, D.L (2009). *Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (MK) Longitudinal Research Project: Results from the 2009 Testing in Mi'kmaq and English, Fall 2009.*

⁸ Osborne E. & Smith, D.L (2009). *Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (MK) Longitudinal Research Project: Results from the 2009 Testing in Mi'kmaq and English, Fall 2009.*

Logic Model Used for the Project

The logic model is attached in Appendix A and illustrates the breakdown of planned resources, strategies, and intended results including short, intermediate and long-term outcomes.

The long term outcome of the Immersion program is to have students who are academically successful in both languages. However to achieve complete fluency in a language, researchers suggest that children need at least 5-6 years of schooling in indigenous or minority language and literacy before transferring to education in the national or official language with well-trained teachers of the official language as a second language⁹. Therefore one of the intermediate outcomes of the program (especially from parents' perspective) is to have the Immersion School continue to the end of Middle School.

The short-term outcomes are stepping stones to reach the intermediate and long-term goals. These include having a parent committee in place, students being able to converse in Mi'kmaw inside and outside the school, academic success, being able to assess language proficiency, and ensuring that receiving teachers are trained in Second Language teaching.

The resources and activities are planned to help achieve these outcomes. The activities provide performance indicators that can be used to measure the project's progress in achieving planned outcomes.

Performance Indicator and Measures

The project uses two forms of investigation: qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative data was collected through a literature review, interviews of the Mi'kmaw Language Specialist at MK, the staff of the Immersion School and some parents of students in the school. Quantitative measures of academic success were obtained from the Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey Student Information System courtesy of the Performance Measurement Coordinator.

Evaluation

The Mi'kmaw Immersion School is located in the old TEC Adult Education building and it accommodates over 120 students from K4 - Grade 4. They have a small gym, music classes, a kitchen, their own busses, their own playground and complete immersion in all subjects. As well, the Ta'n L'nuey Etl-mawlukwatumk (TLE) Mi'kmaw Language Resource Center is housed in the same building to provide teachers with the language resources they need. In September it is hoped to have a school website, as well as a parent committee in place. In the near future, there will be an expansion of the building and a new playground will be in place.

⁹ Furniss, E. (2014). *Perspectives on Policy and Practice, Indigenous Language and Education*. On-line version, Education a Child Foundation. Viewed at: <http://educateachild.org/sites/default/files/attachments/Indigenous-Language-and-Education-Online-Version-2.pdf>

All staff speak Mi'kmaw, including the gym teacher, guidance counsellor, receptionist, IT technician and janitor. The gym teacher teaches them archery as well as cultural dances, singing and drumming in addition to gym classes. All teachers are certified but some teachers are certified in Mi'kmaw pedagogy. There are Elders that come into the school to the classrooms to talk about various things with the students. Teaching is a team approach, with a planning meeting every Monday. The teachers are supported by the TLE Curriculum Center which prepares materials according to the teachers' needs, translates and prints levelled books for the students to read. The TLE would like to have more technical staff to produce visual arts and videos to compete with TV and video games.

The staff have always noticed that in the Immersion program the students conduct themselves differently, but even more so now they are in their own school, they have found their identity as Mi'kmaw people. The school has been able to provide cultural teachings, drumming and singing, the students have developed more pride in themselves and self-esteem as Mi'kmaw people. They have learned some old traditional dances, and are always taught through the Mi'kmaw language.

When the students start in Kindergarten, there are only about 1% who actually speak, some understand Mi'kmaw but don't speak it, but by grade 4 they all understand and speak. The school may have 1 or 2 repeaters every year, and 1 or 2 students who are tested for special needs, and who sometimes go back to the English language school.

The school follows the Nova Scotia curriculum so for Science and Maths, terms are sometimes presented in English for two reasons: first because there is difficulty in translating concepts that are foreign to the language, and secondly, the students will have an easier time to transition if they know key maths terms in English. The computer teacher teaches in Mi'kmaw, and the "apple" computer is translated as an "apple".

One of the observations made by the Principal and the majority of the staff that were interviewed is that the school has hardly any discipline problems. The children in immersion have always been better-behaved than those in the regular elementary school, but even more so now. The classrooms are self-contained.

The primary teachers are teaching conversational Mi'kmaw language using structured play, a pilot project from MK which provided the school with the materials needed such as I-pads, dress-up costumes, puppets, blocks, play center materials, etc. Learning through Play is a new initiative for primary grades in the province of Nova Scotia. The primary teachers observe that they see more language development in the students now that the school is on its own. The teachers are empowering each other and the students to speak the language. Other students become teachers in the class as well. Please see videos of primary students learning to converse in Mi'kmaw.

There is a lot of repetition, but it works, building conversational pieces each month as sequenced learning. Children bank the conversational words until they are able to carry on a complete conversation in different social situations. Students have taken the conversations they were taught outside the school to different situations such as a birthday party.

In grade 1, there is also a focus on values and shared responsibilities as well as enhanced communication using stories, flashcards, reading books, word walls, activity centers, and carpet time. Verbs and blends

are taught, days of the week, calendar months, as well as singing Mi'kmaw songs, and doing the alphabet with exercises.

The upper grades also use a communicative approach, integrating maths and other subjects into the "kojua" a Mi'kmaw social dance. The classes do share and guided reading. Readers are assigned a grade level by the TLE Curriculum Center. Some students are fluent speakers and are grouped with students who are not fluent. Some students are supported at home where the language is reinforced, others are not, even though the parents may understand Mi'kmaw. Students are successful academically as shown on reading and maths assessments. By grade 4, students start to have a lesson in English using materials from grade one.

The guidance counsellor sees students by need or reference. She does sessions on good touch, bad touch, and safety concerns. She works with parents on attendance. For guidance, materials on particular needs such as the ASD spectrum are in English and have to be translated into Mi'kmaw for use with parents.

When parents were asked why they send their children to the Immersion School, they talk about losing the language, and the importance of having their children speak Mi'kmaw. One parent already had older children who had graduated from immersion and are doing very well in High School and postsecondary.

The parents talked about how their children are able to use the language outside, how they text to each other in the language, and how much the students enjoy learning the traditional songs and dances. Some students have friends that speak English so they don't use the language as much outside the home. One parent talked about having her child use Mi'kmaw words that she had not used before or had forgotten. Another parent talked about the effect that the drum group had on her son's self-confidence. The parents would like to have the school continue beyond grade 4.

Some of the important other effects of the Immersion School are minimal discipline problems, improved self-esteem and pride in being Mi'kmaw, increased academic success, and a desire on the part of the students to use the Mi'kmaw language outside of the school environment by repeating learned conversations in social situations, or by texting in the language with friends from the school.

In the next section, an assessment of the academic levels of grade 6 students who attended the immersion program is provided to show the continued comparability of reading and maths scores of immersion graduates and regular stream students.

Outcomes: Most Significant Accomplishments and Lessons Learned

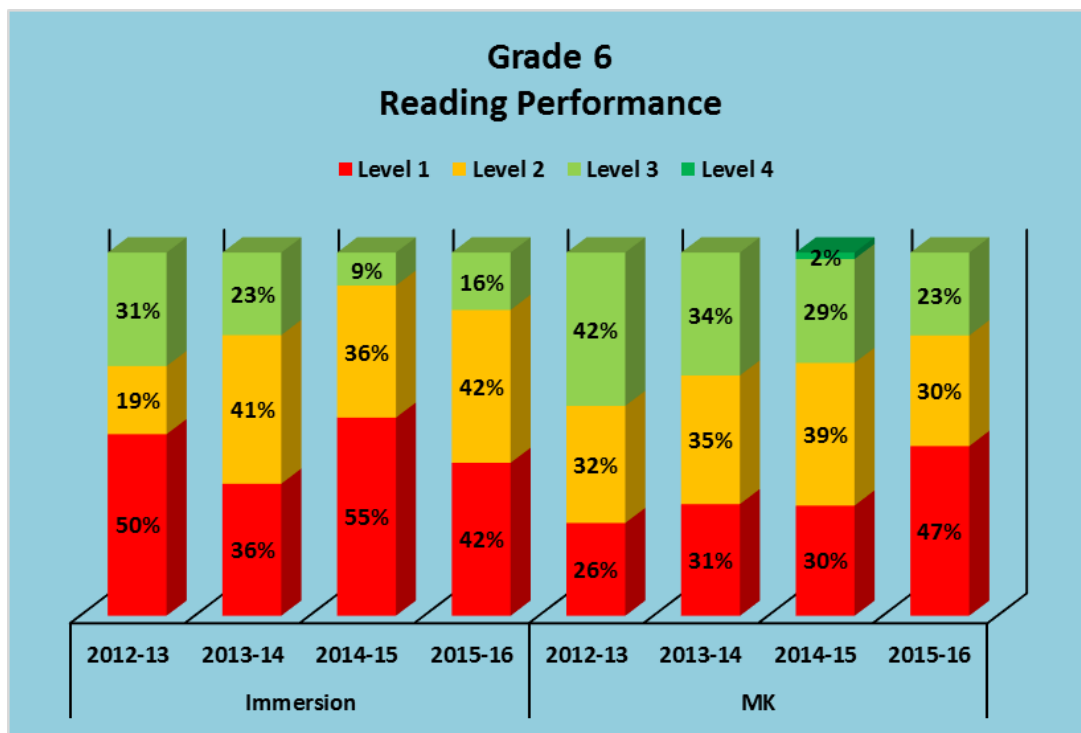
Assessment results are based on percentages of students who reach levels 1 – 4 in reading and mathematics testing. The levels are described in the following table¹⁰:

¹⁰ Adapted from: MK (2015). Annual Report 2014-2015, page 32

Performance	Reading	Mathematics
Level 1 (Red)	Students reading grade level text at Level 1 can find information that is clearly stated in the text.	Students at Level 1 can generally solve problems when they are simple and clearly stated or where the method to solve the problem is suggested to them.
Level 2 (Yellow)	Students reading grade level text at Level 2 can use information from the text to form a conclusion.	Students at Level 2 can generally solve problems similar to problems they have seen before.
Level 3 (Green)	Students reading grade level text at Level 3 can understand how different parts of the text fit together.	Students at Level 3 can generally solve problems that involve several steps and may solve problems they have not seen before.
Level 4 (Dark Green)	Students reading grade level text at Level 4 can analyze and evaluate information from the text.	Students at Level 4 can solve new and complex problems. They can apply number operations (+, -, x, ÷) with ease

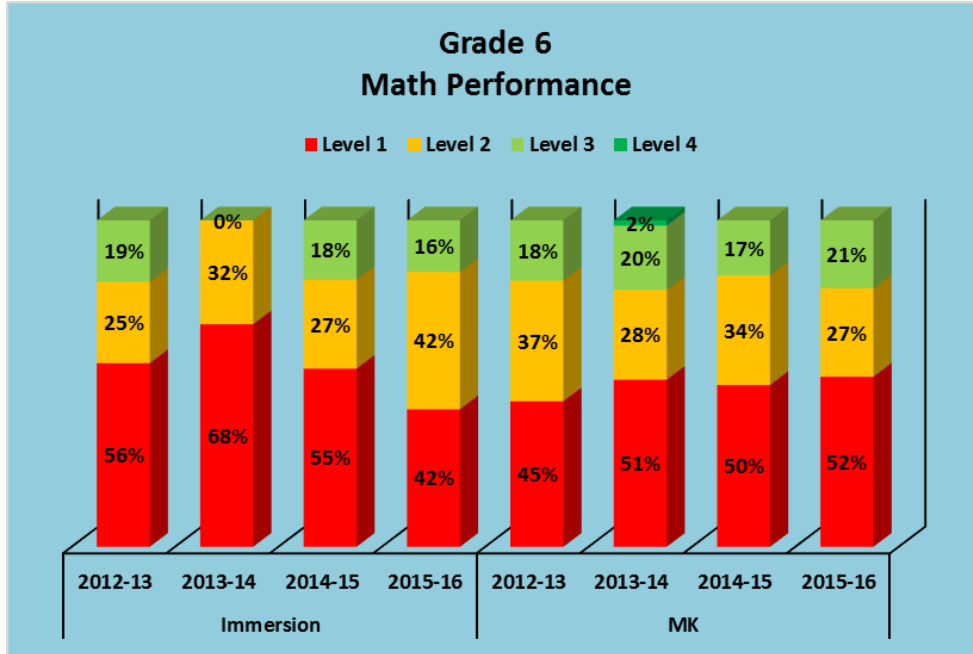
Figure 7 shows the percentage of students who achieve at reading levels 1 – 4. It can be seen that in 2015-2016, the percentages of Immersion students now in regular grade 6 at reading levels 1 – 3 were comparable with all students in MK. A similar picture for 2015-2016 is shown in Figure 8 for Mathematics with students at par with all regular MK students.

Figure 7: Grade 6 Immersion Reading Performance Levels in Comparison with MK¹¹



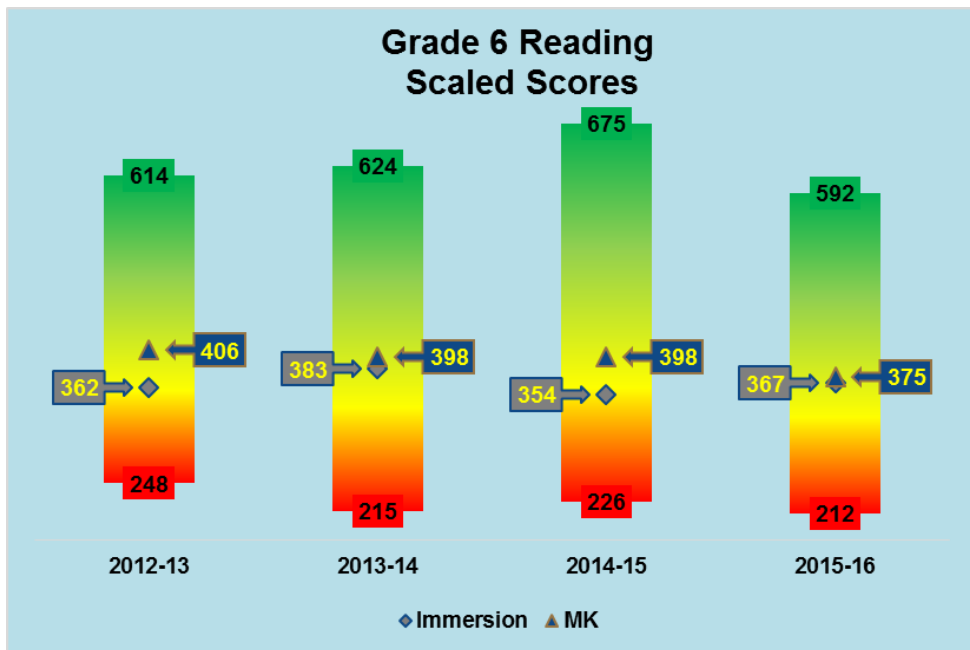
¹¹ MKSIS (2016) Courtesy of Dave Peters, Performance Measurement Coordinator, MK.

Figure 8: Grade 6 Immersion Maths Performance Levels in Comparison with MK¹²



The Scaled Reading and Maths Scores for 2015-2016 for Grade 6 show students who were in immersion to the end of grade 4 are at par with their peers in all MK schools.

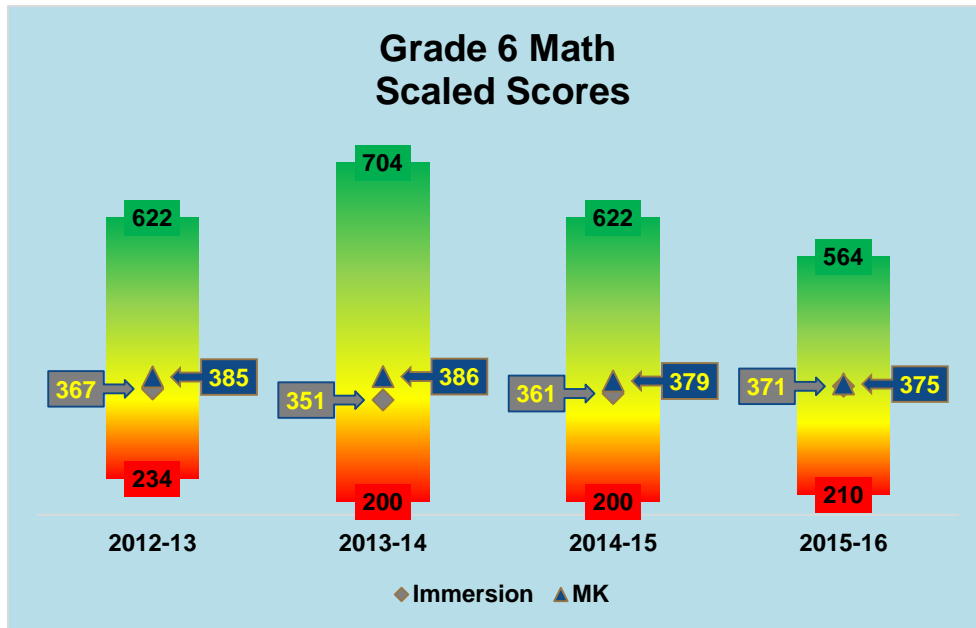
Figure 9: Grade 6 Scaled Reading Scores¹³



¹² Ibid

¹³ MKSIS (2016) Courtesy of Dave Peters, Performance Measurement Coordinator, MK.

Figure 10: Grade 6 Scaled Mathematics Scores¹⁴



In summary, students in the Eskasoni Mi'kmaw Immersion School do as well in Reading and Maths as their peers in the regular stream, and this academic success continues after they complete the immersion. Moreover, there are other effects in addition to a desire to communicate in the language outside of the school, the language teaches them cultural pride, values, customs, and respect, and it builds towards the future of generations to come.

Next Steps for the Project

- Development of a Parent Committee for the school
- Increase in the amount of technology available to teachers such as Smart Boards, more visual arts and videos
- Master's Program in Mi'kmaw Pedagogy.
- Extension of school to include a Middle School
- Continued renovations of the school building to house more classes and a cafeteria
- Training in teaching second language for those teachers transitioning or receiving immersion students

¹⁴ Ibid

Appendix I: Logic Model

LOGIC MODEL



Inputs: Resources Human & Financial	Strategies / Major Activities	Outputs Performance Indicators	or Short Term Outcomes Objectives	or Inter-mediate Outcomes Objectives	or Ultimate Goal/ Impact
Mi'kmaw Immersion School Teachers School staff School Budget School Board Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ TLE Curriculum Center support for curriculum educational materials in Mi'kmaw ▪ Teachers trained in Mi'kmaw pedagogy ▪ Parents support students by speaking Mi'kmaw at home ▪ Successful pilot of language proficiency tool ▪ Renovation of school building ▪ Work towards a Parent Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Comparable results with regular stream students in maths and reading ▪ Students converse in Mi'kmaw in class ▪ Parental support at home ▪ Results of language proficiency testing ▪ Evidence of Mi'kmaw spoken outside school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students academically successful ▪ Students converse in Mi'kmaw in and outside the school ▪ Middle and High School teachers trained in second language teaching for transition of Mi'kmaw students ▪ Supportive Parent Committee in place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Complete elementary and middle school Mi'kmaw Immersion ▪ Students fluent in spoken Mi'kmaw by the end of grade 6 	Students can speak, read and write in English and Mi'kmaw.

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