

Indigenous Language Instructors' Certificate

Elders Circles

How Indigenous Knowledge informs and directs the development of an instructors' certificate in Indigenous languages.

Report on findings

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this project was to research how Indigenous Knowledge informs the design and development of Indigenous language certification in Alberta, Canada. A literature review on the subject was conducted and current post secondary Indigenous language instructor programs in Western and Northern Canada were examined. Most importantly, the advice of Elders, as holders and stewards of Indigenous Knowledge, was sought. This project builds upon the work of an informal working group of post secondary institutions within Alberta that has come together to examine, explore and identify needs and resources, and look for ways to integrate programs and services in the development of an Indigenous Language Instructors' Certificate. The working group includes universities and First Nations colleges from throughout the province¹ that were previously working in isolated efforts toward teaching Indigenous languages.

Recognizing that teaching individual and isolated language courses is not sufficient for language revitalization, and that resources were scarce, the working group came together to discover good practices in language teaching contexts that are based on Indigenous Knowledge systems. The information provided in this report is intended to serve as a catalyst for continuing positive change for community language revitalization and maintenance efforts and as a result promote and support the work of the Indigenous Language Instructors' Certificate working group toward the establishment and continuation of long-term partnerships between universities and First Nations colleges.

¹ The ILIC working group consists of the Tsuu T'ina Education Department; Dept. of Modern Languages, University of Lethbridge; Yellowhead Tribal College; Faculty of Native Studies, University of Alberta; Canadian Indigenous Language and Literacy Development Institute, University of Alberta; FNIB Branch, Alberta Education; Blue Quills First Nations College; Maskwachees Cultural College; Red Crow Community College; and Old Sun Community College.

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The recognition and inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge has been identified by the working group as a necessary step in the development of an Indigenous Languages Instructors' Certificate which will truly serve the needs of Indigenous communities, institutions, and Nations in their work toward the reclamation and revitalization of Indigenous Languages. This project sought to contribute to the current literature on the subject as well as to share the wisdom, experience and guidance of Indigenous Knowledge holders toward this goal.

Introduction

Indigenous languages are vital to the cultural survival of Indigenous Peoples. The loss of these languages represents the latest, and some say greatest, threat to the continued existence of many Indigenous Peoples and their cultures.

As we lament the collapse of biological diversity, we pay little heed to a parallel process of loss, the demise of cultural diversity, the erosion of what might be termed the ethnosphere, the full complexity and complement of human potential as brought into being by culture and adaptation since the dawn of consciousness.

...

There is no better measure of this crisis than the loss of languages. Through all of human history, something in the order of ten thousand languages have existed. Today, of the roughly six thousand languages still spoken, fully half are not being taught to children, meaning that effectively, they are already dead, and only three hundred are spoken by more than a million people.

...

More than a cluster of words or a set of grammatical rules, a language is a flash of the human spirit, the filter through which the soul of each particular culture reaches into the material world. (Davis, 2001)

While formal (school based) instruction will be insufficient, in itself, for preventing this loss, it is a necessary part of any strategies to protect, promote, or reinvigorate languages and language acquisition in Indigenous communities and nations. Formal instruction in Indigenous languages requires the development of many tools, processes and institutions. Some of these may be modified from existing methodologies and processes established for the instruction of other languages (Berlin, 2006). However, there are many of these that will need to be developed by Indigenous communities and institutions to better serve the purposes of Indigenous Peoples and Nations (Marlow, 2006). One of the processes currently under development by a consortium of First Nations controlled post secondary and other institutions from throughout the province of Alberta, Canada, is that of Indigenous language instructors' certification. The purpose of this report is to examine how Indigenous Knowledge informs and directs the development of an Indigenous Languages Instructors' Certificate (ILIC).

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In examining this purpose, it was apparent that the investigation of this question would require the participation of the holders of Indigenous Knowledge in our communities.

This necessitated the establishment of a number of Elder's Circles throughout a territory that includes speakers of many languages, including Dené, Cree, Blackfoot, and Nakota among others. These circles are an attempt to share information and seek guidance from Elder's as the holders and stewards of Indigenous Knowledge in these communities.

While these circles are not necessarily an existing structure traditionally in Indigenous cultures, they utilize many traditional structures, processes and procedures which in themselves, informed and guided the process as the project developed.

This report will focus first on a review of the relevant literature to establish some of the context for this work before sharing the findings, themes and recommendations that have arisen and been brought forward in the Elders Circles over the course of the project. It is hoped that this resource will continue to be of use to the universities and First Nations controlled post secondary institutions that have participated as well as all those that are working toward the protection, promotion, reclamation and revitalization of Indigenous languages.

Review of the Literature

The rapid and radical nature of language loss worldwide is well documented (Dorian, 1989; Nettle & Romaine, 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Woolard, 1989; Wurm, 1991). For the last decade or so, linguists and language planners have been paying special

attention to the plight of minority languages, most of which are seriously under threat. A groundbreaking article in the premier linguistics journal *Language*, entitled “The World’s Languages in Crisis” (Krauss, 1992), ushered in renewed interest in and concern for languages on the brink of extinction. In the same year in a major project, “Red Book”: Project on Endangered Languages in the World, UNESCO (1992) set out to document and raised awareness about the state of the world’s endangered languages. Fifteen years on, this concern has only grown larger. UNESCO’s baseline figure in its linguistic assessments is that 60%-70% of all the languages of the world (now estimated to number about 5,000-6,000) are endangered; that is, they no longer have child speakers or learners.

These language endangerment facts will have huge ramifications for Indigenous peoples and languages worldwide. Ken Hale, a long-time advocate for Indigenous languages, reminded us that “. . . languages embody the intellectual wealth of the people who speak them. Losing any one of them is like dropping a bomb on the Louvre” (Hale 1992 in Duffy, January 11, 2010, Fairbanks Daily News). For Aboriginal people in Canada, language loss has been extensive over the last century. Of some 61 languages (Canadian Heritage, 2005), about half are either close to extinction or endangered. Statistics Canada (2006) and Norris (2006, 2003, 2002, 1998), and colleagues have reported on the declining state of Aboriginal languages in Canada. The most endangered languages are located in British Columbia, of the languages still spoken, almost none are spoken by children at home (Canadian Heritage, 2005. p. 36). Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that these languages could be close to extinction within a generation—about 20 years

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from now. Given this reality, Canada's Aboriginal languages are among the most endangered in the world. At the same time, they are some of the most complex: Their rich sound systems and polysynthetic morphosyntax make them of particular interest to linguists and cognitive scientists studying human language processing. They are indeed a national resource and should be thought of in that way. During a presentation to the 2001 Indigenous Studies Conference, Martin (2002) reflected on Indigenous languages as a resource when she claimed that, ways of knowing are epistemological processes intricately related to the land; ways of being, informed by ways of knowing, refers to the relationship of all life forms; ways of doing, shaped by ways of being, are those Indigenous epistemological and pedagogical methods that reflect worldview (as cited in Sinclair, 2002).

It is the relationship with all life forms that allows us to move in a direction that sustains and nurtures life rather than destroys it. Indigenous knowledge is essential in the 21st century to bring world leaders to a new level of consciousness of co-existing with the environment and all life forms by Indigenous peoples who have learned over the centuries to live in right relationship with all life forms. It is through the Indigenous languages that this view of the interconnectedness of all life forms is expressed. Indeed, Indigenous languages are not only resources (Fettes, 1997), but also essential for the sustainability of human life—life as given by the Great Mystery.

In the realm of eco-theology, Berry (1988) articulated the notion of the essence of perceiving all life forms in relation to the Great Mystery and advised that we be

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conscious of this knowledge at all times. Ecology is the study of the environment, and theology is the study of the divine. Hence, eco-theology begins to connect the environment with the one who created it. Berry (1988), an eco-theologian, and Indigenous authors (e.g., Battiste, 1998; Blue Quills First Nations College, 2003; Ermine, 1995; Martin, 2002; Smith, 1999) have recognized that Indigenous epistemologies are cognizant of these meaningful relationships, are encoded in the Indigenous languages, and are facilitated and nurtured through spiritual ceremonies. It is no longer an outsider looking at the environment or pondering the divine presence; it is now a human life form in relationship with all other life forms, including the giving of life. Indigenous legends reflect this incredible resource, they speak of the people's relationships and responsibilities, and these stories are passed on by Elders through Indigenous languages.

In Indigenous languages, relationships between human beings and other life forms are valued (Cardinal & Armstrong, 1998). A Western Canadian language learner's first exposure to hearing a Cree Elder who was his language mentor, address a rock as *nimosôm* [my grandfather] within the context of ceremony left this individual to him wonder to whom his mentor was speaking. It was only later that the realization of relationships inherent in the Indigenous languages became known in that the Elder was speaking to the rock as his grandfather, the protocol relationship between two spiritual entities, a person and a rock. (Personal interview, Dec 5, 2008). It is through Indigenous languages that we are made conscious of the interconnectedness and relatedness between all life forms; we are specifically related to everything (*e-wâhkôtamahk kahkiyaw kîkwây*). Not only are Indigenous languages a resource for this knowledge, but they are

also essential to turn around the trend of Western Canadian society that tends to dominate and be unaware of our deep spiritual relationships with all life forms.

In the Western and Northern Canadian provinces, the shortage of teachers, curriculum developers, researchers, and community linguists who are prepared to work in Indigenous language education is critical. Although there have been Indigenous teacher-education programs at several of the universities and community-based programs in these provinces since the 1970s, until very recently, with the exception of the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College at the University of Regina, limited attention has been paid to the preparation of bilingual and bi-literate teachers with teaching credentials specifically for Indigenous languages (Ahenakew, Blair, & Fredeen, 1994).

During the 1970s and early 1980s many of the bilingual graduates of these programs taught in provincial, federal, and band-administered schools where the children came to school speaking their mother tongue. At that time many of these bilingual teachers used both their mother tongue and English to assist the children in their English language acquisition through ESL instruction and programming. Indigenous languages were also taught as a subject in some schools (Littlejohn & Fredeen, 1993).

During the early to mid 1970s there was an interest in Indigenous language and bilingual program development several bilingual/bicultural programs were initiated following the publication of the National Indian Brotherhood (1972) position paper “Indian Control of Indian Education,” in which the authors acknowledged the importance of these languages

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and petitioned for support for Indigenous languages in schools. Since these early initiatives, although those working directly in the field of language revitalization have been aware of and concerned about the imminent obsolescence of these languages, it took the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (Government of Canada, 1996) to make these concerns heard more widely. Since that time the National Task Force on Aboriginal Languages (2005) also recommended that Elders be included as a major component in the process of Indigenous language revitalization. Elders are the holders and teachers of cultural knowledge (Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 2001; Kirkness, 2003).

The conceptual framework for language planning outlined by Fishman (1991, 1994), Haugen (1985), and Ruiz (1984, 1988, 1990, 1994) has formed a foundation for developing language specialists with obsolescing languages in other parts of the world. This language-planning model outlines essential areas of work. The status-planning component deals with the value and role of language, the existing use of the language, needs assessments, goals for language use, in both the long and short term, policy development, and issues for implementation. The corpus-planning component deals more specifically with the language itself and the details of how to build, rejuvenate, and record the language. The implementation-planning component also includes the curriculum and pedagogy development, and these in particular are the areas most thought of when it comes to instructors and teachers. This model provides a framework for this proposed research. The final component, evaluation, is recursive in deliberating reflexive practises.

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The Alberta Learning Languages Initiative and the requirement that every student from Grades four through eight be taught a second language is rapidly approaching. Beginning in the 2007-2008 school year, learning a second language in addition to English will become a required component of the Grade 4 curriculum. The implementation of second-language learning will be phased in one grade at a time each year until the six-year sequence is fully implemented in 2012-2013. As it currently stands, only about one quarter of Grade four students in Alberta learn a second language. The province estimates that an equivalent of 100 full-time positions in second-language teaching will be needed each year to implement the second-language requirement for provincial schools alone. Because there is already a shortage of Indigenous teachers, this will be an onerous task for Indigenous people in Alberta. Drastic measures will have to be taken to ensure that this policy can be implemented. For those with an Aboriginal heritage, the choice of languages may be the mother tongue, yet those in the best position to teach the language are, unfortunately, often uncertified and inexperienced in instructing languages in a classroom setting. As well as the concern about who will teach the Aboriginal languages, a great deal needs to be done in the areas of research, curriculum, and resource development.

This new language initiative will have serious implications for schools with significant Indigenous student populations; language teacher preparation, curriculum resource development and to establish support as in associations for classroom teachers are areas that will require resources, time and attention. The report “Ensuring Language Learning Opportunities for Indigenous Children” (University of Alberta, 2004) was the result of an

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Alberta-wide symposium that included a variety of local stakeholders—First Nations colleges, public colleges, teachers, Elders, community members, and Alberta Education—and documents the need in this one province alone. Because of the Western Canadian Protocol—legislation to align curricula—any discussions between the local communities and tribal colleges on certification will potentially extend to the other provinces and territories (Western Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education, 2000).

A follow-up colloquium called “Working Together to Support Indigenous Language Education” (University of Alberta 2005) reiterated that need as participants from Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, the NWT, and the Yukon discussed language revitalization efforts, Indigenous languages planning and policy, and the report from the National Task Force on Aboriginal Languages (2005). At this forum there was a great deal of discussion about sharing ideas and resources across provinces, because Indigenous languages do not follow provincial boundaries.

In the past there has been the Western Canadian Protocol framework for inter-provincial networking and collaborations around aligning curriculum but nothing to address intensive language-retention efforts, and to address the need for those involved in innovative practice to share expertise and build a professional cadre of language teachers, program developers, teacher educators, researchers, and policy planners.

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There is an urgent need to recognize these issues and to actively plan programs that will address these specified language development concerns of Indigenous peoples. For this to happen, for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal institutions need to support the work of Indigenous language educators, teacher educators, and linguists and get moving on the research and development for teacher and instructors.

The institutions that grant higher education degrees must take an active role in this process. If Indigenous institutions and mainstream universities are to adequately serve the needs of Indigenous communities, they need to acknowledge and honour Indigenous knowledge and languages and create new spaces and partnerships to encourage and support teachers, researchers, and curriculum developers as they to engage in this specialized field of professional development. Approaching Indigenous languages as a resource encompasses a perspective that Battiste (1998) espoused—that Aboriginal worldview and epistemology need to be reflected in education, do not need to be legitimized under a Western Canadian lens, and are intricately tied to the preservation of language.

It has become apparent over the last few years that the need for speakers, teachers, Elders, linguists, language planners, and curriculum developers at the college and university levels are essential if these postsecondary programs are to be successful and these languages are to be maintained. Concurrently, community participation and ownership are integral to language maintenance and revitalization, according to Fishman (1991), and the key to success in language revitalization is to achieve “the

intergenerational and demographically concentrated home-family-neighbourhood: the basis of mother tongue transmission” (p 466). Community ownership results from involvement, and it is necessary for sustainability in language restoration movements. The University of California, Los Angeles (2000) Heritage Language Research Priorities Conference report clearly attests to the relationship between community participation and language viability: programs which are legislated but insufficiently resourced are geared for failure and set back the cause of heritage education. Participants emphasized that the voices of the heritage language speakers are essential in policy development. Unless the heritage language community is motivated and supportive of programs, these programs are doomed to failure. (p. 13)

Community support is necessary to the success and satisfaction of Indigenous language teachers in the schools. The Dakar Framework for Action Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments cited in UNESCO (2007, p. 10) suggests the following eight areas for successful student outcomes:

Successful education programmes require: (1) healthy, well nourished and motivated students; (2) well-trained teachers and active learning techniques; (3) adequate facilities and learning materials; (4) a relevant curriculum that can be taught and learned in a local language and builds upon the knowledge and experience of the teachers and learners; (5) an environment that not only encourages learning but is welcoming, gender-sensitive, healthy and safe; (6) a clear definition and accurate assessment of learning outcomes, including knowledge, skills, attitudes and values; (7) participatory governance and management; and (8) respect for and engagement with local communities and cultures.

Community involvement, ownership, and responsibility are contributing factors to school success for children. Additionally, teachers of Indigenous languages suggested that they needed to become familiar with a range of language-teaching

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techniques and methodologies such as those used in immersion programs (Blue Quills First Nations College, 2006, University of Alberta, 2004). Indigenous language educators can learn a great deal from each other as we work together.

This project was part of the continued work of the ILIC working group which will seek to expand these discussions, document the needs, look at recommendations for the development of a certification process in Alberta, align it with Indigenous knowledge systems, and maintain linkages with the neighbouring provinces and territories. This collaborative inquiry between universities and First Nations colleges requires an understanding that two world views, an indigenous worldview and the western Canadian, are operating for the purpose of common outcomes. A collaboration of this sort requires that researchers attend to Smith's (1990) contention:

If we begin from the world as we actually experience it, it is at least possible to see that we are indeed located and that what we know of the other is conditional upon that location. There are and must be different experiences of the world and different bases of experience. We must not do away with them by taking advantage of our privileged speaking to construct a sociological version that we then impose upon them as their reality. We may not rewrite the other's world or impose upon it a conceptual framework that extracts from it what fits with ours. Their reality, their varieties of experience, must be an unconditional datum. It is the place from which inquiry begins. (p. 25)

Methodology

This project builds upon the work of an informal working group of post secondary institutions within Alberta that has come together to examine, explore and identify needs and resources, and look for ways to integrate programs and services in the development of an Indigenous Language Instructors' Certificate. Of the many actions that needed to be undertaken (i.e. curriculum development, accreditation, etc.) it was also recognized

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that the relationship between Indigenous Knowledge and the ILIC needed to be explored and that this relationship would require the guidance of Elders from within the communities that these institutions seek to serve.

Elders Circle Process

As stated previously, Elders Circles are not necessarily an existing structure in many Indigenous cultures. They do, however, represent an attempt to utilize traditional practices and protocols in developing research relationships between researchers, institutions, communities, and Elders toward both the protection and sharing of information. While the specific protocols for each Circle varied in recognition of the diversity that exists among the communities and Nations that were engaged in this project, a basic structure and process was followed throughout each of the gatherings.

The gatherings were conducted as facilitated discussions in small groups of usually less than 20 Elders for a total of approximately 175 participants. All sessions were recorded by digital audio recorder, transcribed and translated into English, as necessary. Research notes were also taken. The researchers assisted in the opening of the meetings according to the traditions and protocols of the hosting community or Nation (i.e. a prayer, song, offering of tobacco, etc.). The facilitators then provided the background on the project and on the work of the participating First Nations post secondary institutions that had been completed to date. The consent of the group was then sought to allow facilitators to take notes and/or record the session.² The research question, “How does Indigenous Knowledge inform the design and development of an Indigenous Languages Instructors’

² See attached consent form, Appendix 1.

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Certificate?”, was put to the group in order to inform them of the information that was being sought but these were not group surveys or specific question and answer periods. The role of the facilitators was to set the stage and context for the meeting and seek clarification when necessary, but, for the most part, once they began, the Elders guided the conversation and directed the flow of information. Each participant was provided the opportunity to speak but none were required to respond. Participants provided their input at their own pace and in their own manner. Each participant was accorded the respect of being able to make statements with the attention of the entire group and once someone began to speak they were not interrupted. While some participants may comment on the statement of a previous speaker, there was no debate, or crosstalk between participants. Individuals brought forward their opinions and viewpoints on the subject and it is the responsibility of the listener, or reader, to incorporate this information and wisdom as they see fit and as such, it is therefore the role of the facilitators of this project to attempt to transmit that wisdom as accurately as possible.

The following Elders Circles were conducted:

- Red Crow Community College Elders Circle, April 2007
- Canadian Indigenous Languages and Literacy Development Institute (CILLDI) Elders Circle, July 2007
- Dené Elders Circle, December 7, 2007
- Blue Quills First Nations College Elders Circle, April 20, 2008
- Old Sun Community College Elders Circle, June 4, 2008
- CILLDI Elders Circle, July 2008
- Treaty 7 Elders Circle, October 8, 2008.

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Elders, as recognized and identified by their community and/or First Nation post secondary institution, were invited to participate in the project and provide their expertise, wisdom and experience. For example, Red Crow Community College utilizes a process through which Elders are designated as Eminent Scholars within their college and these individuals were approached to participate and to identify others in the community that may hold information and knowledge on this particular subject matter. At the community level, individuals are recognised as Elders through their actions and words. Some may be recognised due to their authority to ‘carry’ or conduct particular ceremonies, due to their particular cultural or traditional knowledge, or due to their knowledge or command of their language, environmental knowledge, or history. Regardless, these individuals are recognized and identified by others in the community due not only to the knowledge they possess but also their willingness and ability to share and provide that knowledge to others in the community. To participate in Circles such as this, researchers must utilize existing relationships with others in the community to be pointed in the right direction to find Elders with the appropriate knowledge to participate. In this particular case, participants were found through the guidance of faculty members of the partner institutions and educators and administrators from the communities concerned. It is important to note that it would be exceedingly rare for an individual to self identify as an Elder or to ‘volunteer’ to participate in research.

While some of the individuals identified were language advocates and/or educators, it is important to note that these were not gatherings of ‘experts’ in languages or language instruction. These individuals were identified as Elders and as such have a special place

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in Indigenous cultures for their role as historians, holders, and stewards of Indigenous Knowledge, and as such, were generally fluent speakers of their particular Indigenous language.

Findings

As would be expected when discussing complex issues with a number of individuals possessing keen, subtle and sophisticated intellects; the development of an Indigenous Languages Instructors' Certificate (ILIC) was expected to serve a number of purposes simultaneously. While many Elders recognized the need for an ILIC, and supported its' development, there were some caveats as well as direct recommendations regarding the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge in the development, processes, and goals of the ILIC. Certification was seen as a valid goal but not as an end point in education. That is to say, individual instructor certification was not seen as the completion of the process, it was only one of many ongoing and iterative processes that would all be working toward the production of fluent, healthy and strong individuals, communities and Nations. The issues and goals identified by the Elders Circles were examined and analyzed during and after each session. Salient points were identified through either their repetition within the sessions or through the level of agreement or consensus expressed for particular ideas. As much as possible, these points of consensus were reiterated to the group to ensure that the information was being understood by the researchers and that they did represent the intent and priorities of the individuals that participated in that particular session. The following themes were identified in the analysis of the data from all of the sessions. Inclusion in this list of themes indicates that the particular theme was repeated both

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within and across a number of the Circles. While some of them were repeated across all sessions, they were not subjected to formal quantitative analysis due to the relatively small number of participants. They are also not presented in any hierarchical order because they were neither discussed nor recommended in that manner within the sessions. Each of these themes is presented as being considered as integral to the development of an ILIC that is truly informed by Indigenous Knowledge.

Specificity – While there are many lessons to be learned from examining how other groups have gone, or are going, through this process, the development of certification of Indigenous languages must be specific to Indigenous languages and include the Indigenous Knowledge of the specific group in question. “If we develop something and then apply it the same to everyone, then we will be no better off than what the government has done to us.” (Blue Quills Elders Circle). These differences will be based upon many facets of the diversities that exist between and among the many language groups being considered here and may include such issues as gender specific language use and ceremonial protocols, among others. “There are protocols in language for people of our sacred society” (CILLDI Elders Circle). To be successful, an ILIC must reflect this diversity and possess both the flexibility and specificity to incorporate this diversity in its delivery.

Cultural fluency – “It is not just the language; it is the culture that needs to be practiced as well” (Dené Elders Circle). Knowledge of cultural practices (ceremonies, songs, traditional skills, etc.) needs to be a requirement of certification. Language without

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context loses its meaning and learning vocabulary, syntax, and structure of a language outside of culture lessens the likelihood of creating fluent speakers. “Traditional way is not in a classroom at a certain time, it is all the time through immersion in the language and culture.” (Old Sun Elders Circle). “Pisim askapewisay. Start with the Cree creation story, like the stone buffalo boy spirit power has four elements. One has to be part of the traditional life.” (CILLDI Elders Circle). An ILIC should both support the inclusion of cultural and traditional knowledge in instruction as well as supporting the transmission of that knowledge upon completion. “Telling traditional stories needs to be part of the program. We need to use these words everyday or we will lose them.” (Dené Elders Circle)

Land – There was unanimous recognition throughout each Circle that land and pedagogies that reflect, respect, and utilize the land, both as subject and tool of instruction, must be included in the certification process. For example, vocabulary needs to reflect the environment of the learner in order to promote ease of acquisition. The land including geography, ecosystems, species, climate, and history of a particular community or Nation will have specific definitions and cultural meanings expressed in Indigenous languages, and as a result, in many Indigenous traditions, the land is not solely viewed as a location. The land is seen as the source of language and a true connection to the land is only reflected in the use of the Indigenous languages from that particular territory. A true connection to the land would be recognized as having the ability to identify, utilize and live in balance with the many resources and characteristics of a particular territory. The land is not seen as something that you merely live on, it is a part of you and you as an

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individual or member of a community are a part of it. This connection is viewed as fundamental to the languages, ceremonies and cultures of many Indigenous Peoples. “Iniskim are the ones who find us and are transferred in special ceremony, if we lose these the land no longer knows us and we no longer know the land” (CILLDI Elders Circle). There was also recognition of the fact that the utility of our languages would also be reinforced if they were used as the language of instruction in all courses and topic areas especially with respect to the land and the individual, community, and cultural connections to it. Not simply as instruction in the language as a subject but as using the language to impart other ‘topics’ or ‘classes’ such as ecology, science, biology, climatology, history, etc. Some Elders referred to ‘bush skills’ when referencing such subjects as these. That is, the ability to inhabit a location fully (without technological intervention) and to survive and thrive there requires many skills and much knowledge, including, but not restricted to, identification of sources of food, medicines, and water, as well as the skills to acquire, utilize, and protect them for future use. “Kids don’t know how to do things to take care of them selves anymore. Lots of them would be lost without their phones or gadgets. We aren’t connected to the land anymore. We need to teach how to connect to the land as part of teaching our language.” (Blue Quills Elders Circle).

Position and Value – A major goal that was recognized by many Elders was that if we are to teach our children that our languages have value and utility, we must value those educators that have made the choice to teach our languages. “Our instructors need to be treated as professionally as others. . . they need to be paid the same, have the same

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breaks, classroom space, preparation time, all of that. We can't say that our language is important and then not even give our teachers their own classroom. What kind of message does that send to the kids?" (Dené Elders Circle). A recognized certification process was seen as a potentially useful tool for assisting in recognizing and valuing Indigenous language instructors and instruction both from within our own communities and institutions but also from external institutions and funding bodies. "Our teachers are not compensated or valued as a real subject. They don't get the same pay because the school board doesn't see them as real teachers." (Old Sun Elders Circle). The role of Elders and Indigenous Knowledge in the development and delivery of an ILIC will also assist in re-establishing their valued position in the education of our children in all areas. "Words are based on the values and teachings of the culture. If these are devalued then the language is damaged." (Dené Elders Circle).

Control – The control of the certification process was seen as a vital expression of the sovereignty and rights of Indigenous Peoples and must be held and exercised by our communities and nations. Indigenous Peoples need to express and exercise our sovereign rights over our languages. "A group or council of our Elders should assist with overseeing the certification. It would need to have representation from all of the languages. The Elders would be the ones that could tell if someone is fluent but also if they know the culture." (Treaty 7 Elders Circle). There was also concern expressed that if Indigenous Peoples do not say who is or is not a fluent speaker and therefore a certified instructor then someone or something else will. "Other people can't be allowed to tell us who is a certified teacher of our language. I met a woman that had a degree in our

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language from a university. She couldn't talk to me when I tried to speak to her, but if the school board in the city is looking for an instructor, that is the kind of person that would probably get the job." (Old Sun Elders Circle). "Eminent scholars (Elders) should be the ones to certify Blackfoot language teachers. . ." (Red Crow Elders Circle). "We have the authority to certify our teachers of our languages, not schools (external post secondary institutions) that don't use our languages to teach." (Blue Quills Elders Circle).

Community focus – An ILIC must support and encourage the development of skills that allow instructors to work together with many people in our communities. Many participants identified the reliance on, primarily external, 'experts' or individuals with specific skills that make them 'needed' in a particular context or setting with 'special' knowledge about dealing with or solving a particular problem was not a sustainable or long term method for dealing with community issues. Many of the Elders referred to traditional Indigenous models of community organization and mobilization which tend to reinforce the fulfilment of particular roles or needs by individuals within the community without creating exclusive areas of expertise and therefore a reliance on a small subgroup to fulfill a particular role. "How do we work together to continue the use of our language and how do we strengthen it? There are lots of examples of programs not working because the one person that knows how to do it leaves. We can't make the instructors the only ones that teach our language." (Dené Elders Circle). The development and recognition of skills to engage and utilize the resources in individuals and in communities was an area that was recognized as a need in the development of Indigenous language

instructors and in their certification. For example the ability to assess needs and map resources within communities was seen as a valuable skill to instil or enhance in potential instructors. “My wife is a teacher. From a western perspective she didn’t have any resources but when she valued who she is, she has lots of resources.” (CILLDI Elders Circle).³ This quote reveals the opinion that the resources or strengths of a community may be viewed to be lacking or as having little or no value, when viewed from an external perspective. The teacher referred to in this quote may not have had specific training in linguistics or language acquisition theory, textbooks may have been non-existent and there may not have been funding available to build a language centre but through looking at the situation from a different perspective, resources were available. There was also much support for the concept of freeing the instruction of language from the confines of the classroom. “We need to support the families, especially the young parents. Sometimes when we only look at the kids in school, we overlook the fact that a lot of the parents need help to learn the language too.” (Blue Quills Elders Circle).

Commitment – The situation in many communities is dire with respect to language retention and use, and anyone taking on the responsibility of becoming an instructor is to be commended. That being said, making this choice requires a greater level of commitment than that of other areas of instruction. “We need to support our instructors and thank them for trying to help our community by saving our language. There needs to be a commitment to using or teaching the language outside of the school too though. If you can’t give back the language to your own kids, you shouldn’t be out there trying to

³ Western perspective in this sense refers to the canon of philosophical, cultural, and religious thought generally identified with the societies of European origin and/or European colonies.

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fix anything else.” (Dené Elders Circle). A particular view that was shared by many of the participants was that carriers of our languages and those that seek to transmit our languages have a special role in our communities and included in that role are the responsibility to our communities outside of the classroom. “Our instructors need to advocate for the language all the time. They need to help the leadership to use the language; they need to help make sure that the band, programs, and schools use the language; they need to help businesses to use the language. If they don’t get the chance to use the language outside of school, then kids won’t see the need.” (Treaty 7 Elders Circle).

Elders as a resource – Elders need to be recognized and utilized not only for their knowledge of traditional or cultural information. Their wisdom and skills need to be incorporated into all aspects of the process: the instruction of the instructors, the certification of instructors, as well as in the classroom once they start working in the community. “. . . it would be important that teachers work with Elders to teach . . . protocols about how to approach people about ceremonies, storytelling, bush skills, . . . these are all things that you need Elders for to teach properly.” (Dené Elders Circle). “We need to recognize that Elders have different strengths and knowledge. Some carry ceremonies or have medicines or have stories. They are not just there to help you pronounce words properly.” (Blue Quills Elders Circle). “Our Elders are valuable sources of this knowledge and our kids need to know about their history, especially the Treaties.” (Treaty 7 Elders Circle).

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Utility – Our languages need to be recognized and used for day to day interactions in order to be seen as useful. For language to continue living, it must be used in real life. Instruction that removes or separates language from the life or experience of students will not be successful. “Survival skills need to be taught as well with the language. Lots of our youth don’t know how to take care of themselves in the bush. We don’t know what the future is going to be like so we need to teach them how to fend for themselves and do it in our language. That will make it have a better chance that they will use it.” (Dené Elders Circle) “We need to focus on young kids and young parents so that they can both try to use the language at home. If we only teach the kids and the parents don’t know how to speak then it will be harder for the kids. They need to use it everyday as much as they can, not just for a little while during one class.” (Dené Elders Circle)

Immersion – A number of Elders stressed the need to provide training in immersion settings and to support immersion programs. “Enendowgud. There is an order to teaching a language that starts with your ears. First is hearing it and second is listening. Eventually you can say it.” (CILLDI Elders Circle). Use of Indigenous languages in all parts of their education was seen as the best means of increasing fluency rather than only in specific classes or only in certain aspects of a student’s day. This was recognition of immersion as being a necessary part of teaching, preserving, and reclaiming Indigenous languages. “They have to know the language not necessarily reading and writing they have to know how to speak the language it’s just like ok for you when you learned English did you learn to read and write English before you talked English? Of course not, but that’s what’s almost happening now.” (Red Crow Elders Circle). Immersion also

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was seen as a way to counteract the perception that many youth have about only using Indigenous languages in particular instances (i.e. ceremonies). “We have to get back in the habit of using our culture and language every day and all day long. Schools try to teach all day, or parts of the day, but then the parents don’t use it at home.” (Old Sun Elders Circle).

History, Culture, and Values – Although this could be included under Cultural Fluency, these issues were mentioned a number of times and warranted a separate theme. “Neh Kuz u - Everything you see around in nature is alive. Our language is an expression of how we love.” (CILLDI Elders Circle). “Our history needs to be told and taught to children. Our Elders are valuable sources of this knowledge and our kids need to know about their history, especially the Treaties. You can’t properly understand and tell our history unless you know our language.” (Treaty 7 Elders Circle). Currently, most students receive little to no exposure to the history of their particular area, community or nation within their educational experience. “Words are based on the values and teachings of the culture. If these are devalued then the language is damaged. . . Learning and understanding our culture and history is important.” (Old Sun Elders Circle). The inclusion of these concepts from an Indigenous perspective was seen as a necessary part of language instruction and, as such, necessary in the development of an Indigenous Language Instructors’ Certificate.

Conclusion

As identified throughout the Elders Circles and in the findings shared above, Indigenous Knowledge informs the development of an ILIC in a number of ways. The Elders that participated in this process provided their expertise, experience, and wisdom to the project and pointed out many of the ways that this could and, more importantly, should be done. Certification was seen as a useful weapon in the battle to save Indigenous languages but it was not the only one. The focus of this report, as is the case in research, was based upon the question that was developed, “How does Indigenous Knowledge inform and direct the development of an instructors’ certificate in Indigenous languages?” The Elders that participated in these Circles displayed exceptional patience as they attempted to explain that the limits of the question would prevent the finding of suitable answers. The focus of any instructor certification is the creation of individuals with a particular set of skills and abilities to deal with a particular area of educational focus. Because the overwhelming majority of formal education within the province is school based, any certification process must respond to this system and environment. This perspective brings with it a number of assumptions that are illustrated in the form and content of the research question. Having to formulate and conduct research into this question reveals that the ability to work with Indigenous Knowledge does not exist within the current system. This lack of ability necessitated the narrowing of focus of the question to one aspect of language revitalization and reclamation, that is, the certification of instructors. In their responses, stories, anecdotes, jokes, and sharing, they provided a far fuller and richer discussion of the loss of Indigenous languages and the way forward for their reclamation and revitalization. In their view, Indigenous Knowledge is intrinsic

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to Indigenous Languages and vice versa. Those actions which support one will support the other. Those actions that devalue one will devalue the other. Within the larger scope of their responses, a number of specific ideas and recommendations were also shared as to how an ILIC can support the use, protection, and transmission of Indigenous Knowledge within and throughout Indigenous communities.

As well as responding to the research question in a much richer, fuller and wide ranging manner, they displayed further skill, subtlety, and sophistication through providing guidance on many of the ways in which the development of an ILIC can support the use, protection, and transmission of Indigenous Knowledge. Not least of which is through the support for the reclamation of the central position and value of Indigenous languages in communities, schools, and homes. This centrality needs also be recognized as an opportunity to utilize an ILIC as one tool to re-establish and invoke sovereignty and control over one of the most important facets of cultures and societies. The diversity of Indigenous languages⁴ and cultures was recognized in the recommendations that an ILIC be developed with the flexibility to respond to this diversity. Indigenous Knowledge is specific to the land and the People from which it originates. To truly respect that specificity, an ILIC must be tailored to respect each and every language, and dialect, to which it hopes to provide certification.

In many cases, the responses of the Elders seemed to go beyond those issues which are 'usually' dealt with in the certification of instructors of any sort. This is in part a

⁴ Within the province of Alberta there are nine language groups Blackfoot, Cree, Dene Sutine, Dene Tha, Tsuut'ina), Michif, Anishnabe (Ojibwe), Dakota and Nakota.

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reflection of the reframing of the question by the Elders but it is also recognition of the severe consequences of the loss of Indigenous languages to Indigenous Peoples as well as a blunt and accurate assessment of the current situation in many communities. As indicated in the responses from many of the Elders Circles participants, instructors of Indigenous languages will face expectations that are not faced by other instructors. By committing to take on the education of students in indigenous languages, they have taken on a responsibility not generally associated with language instruction. “Our instructors need to advocate for the language all the time. They need to help the leadership to use the language; they need to help make sure that the band, programs, and schools use the language; they need to help businesses to use the language. If they don’t get the chance to use the language outside of school, then kids won’t see the need.” (Treaty 7 Elders Circle). By agreeing to provide their views on how these instructors are to be trained and certified, these Elders have committed to providing future instructors with skills and tools best suited to help them fulfill that responsibility. The instructor’s role is vital in the revitalization of our languages and the development of an ILIC which promotes cultural fluency; repositions and re-values Indigenous Knowledge; respects and integrates the land in pedagogy; and respects Elders as an integral and universal part of language education is a necessary step in the provision of the requisite tools for them to complete their duties and fulfill their responsibilities. While that may seem a tall order, as the Elders have continued to point out, our children deserve nothing less.

“When we speak our language they (the children) light up. There is such a longing.”

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Appendix 1

Research Consent Form

I, _____ (print name), hereby consent to participate in the research aspect of the Indigenous Language Instructors' Certification. I will potentially be asked to be observed, interviewed, photographed, videotaped, and/or audio taped during and after my attendance at Indigenous Language Instructors' Certification

I understand that:

- ◆ I am not obligated to participate in the research aspect of the Indigenous Language Instructors' Certification program.
- ◆ I can withdraw from the research at any time without penalty and that pertinent data already gathered will be withdrawn from the research project.
- ◆ All information gathered will be treated confidentially.
- ◆ If I am identifiable in any of the data, specifically photographs and videotapes, and I am willing to have that data used, I will sign the appropriate consent at the bottom of this form.
- ◆ Any information that identifies me will be destroyed within five years of completion of this research project.
- ◆ I can request a copy of research findings by contacting the Blue Quills First Nations College Language Team.

I also understand that the results of this research will be used for conference presentations, teaching materials (i.e. videos in various media formats), written articles, brochures, media, and posted on relevant websites. All such uses will be in compliance with the standards of the Research Ethics Policy from Blue Quills First Nations College.

Please check **ONE** of the blanks below:

_____ I am willing to participate in **all** aspects of the research projects including observation, interviews, audiotapes, copies of my assignments, photographs and videotapes. I understand that my anonymity cannot be protected in visual data such as photographs and videotapes.

_____ I am willing to participate in only those aspects of the research project where my anonymity can be maintained, specifically: observations, interviews, audiotapes, and copies of my assignments. Video cameras will be situated as to exclude me, and any footage that shows visual images of me will be excluded from the data.

_____ I am **NOT** willing to participate in any aspect of the research project.

(Signature)

(Date)