

Recognizing Aboriginal English as a Dialect in Curriculum: Advancing Aboriginal Students' Academic Successes

Lorna Fadden, Métis, Ph.D., Department of Linguistics, SFU

Jenna LaFrance, Métis, M.Ed., Director, First Nations Student Centre, SFU

Educators have long been aware of the challenges, but not necessarily the opportunities given to First Nations/Aboriginal students whose maternal language is not the language of the classroom and who endeavor to become bilingual. Although entire fields of study are devoted to English as a Second Language or Dialect (ESL/D) springing from the larger domains of education and applied linguistics, scant application of this knowledge is given to Aboriginal student ESL/D needs. New research examines the challenges stemming from speaking an Aboriginal English Dialect (AED), which differs from the Standard English Dialect (SED).

There is strong evidence to suggest that students of minority backgrounds can become very successful in acquiring more than one dialect, which allows them to maintain and enhance community ties held together by local culture and non-standard dialect use, while participating successfully in the mainstream education system in the standard dialect (Malcolm & Sharifian, 2005; Nero, 2000; White, 2003; Yiakoumetti, 2007). Aboriginal learners, too, who develop the ability to code-switch, to be adept at shifting dialects, will be at a greater advantage academically. This advantage contrasts with the past, and in many cases present, where speaking Aboriginal varieties of English has led to the perception that speakers are grammatically 'less-than' at best, and speech pathological at worst. "Speakers who are not fluent in the standard variety [of English] are at a social disadvantage when confronted with mainstream gate keeping processes, because many people associate nonstandard varieties with low status, low intelligence, and relative incompetence, especially when in used in formal settings (Giles and Powesland 1975, Edwards 1989). These judgments do not depend solely on speakers' use of nonstandard grammar. Lippi-Green (1997) shows that nonstandard pronunciation (i.e. accent) alone can have the same effect.

Indigenous English dialects were recognized one hundred years ago. In the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Report (RCAP 1996), there is a government statement dated 1890 pronouncing that 'the use of English in preference to the Indian dialect must be insisted upon' and 'E.F. Wilson informed the department that at Shingwauk school, "We make a great point of insisting on the boys *talking English*, as, for their advancement in civilization, this is, of all things, the most necessary."

Today, for Indigenous peoples, the insistence that Standard English is the only option for Aboriginal students, is outdated. The dichotomy of living with this unacceptable learning environment is eloquently expressed here:

“And the colonized who has the wonderful good luck to be accepted in a school will not be saved [culturally]. The memory that is assigned him is certainly not that of his people. The history that is taught him is not his own The colonized is saved from illiteracy only to fall into linguistic dualism...” (Battiste 2000 p. 249).

For First Peoples, through the residential schools' practice of forced English language assimilation, learning English was often a violent experience. “Insisted upon” was interpreted in many harsh ways. Children were humiliated, frightened, beaten, denied food, and had their mouths washed with soap (personal communications 1980 -2006).

Today, many more Indigenous peoples are strengthening and developing multilingual skills. They are acquiring their peoples' Indigenous language and continue to teach and learn, an holistic literacy that can include a traditional language, a “First Nations English dialect (FNED)” language (Ball et al 2006), and the reading of the “movements” of every living being and living process, reading with a three-dimensional process (thinking, feeling, listening/talking), and communicating through practically applied art forms and shared and protected cultural practices.

The legacy of the colonialist's “Indian” education policies has for many Aboriginal peoples resulted in a need for language revitalization programs of their traditional language. Alternatively, Aboriginal peoples have developed and continue to pass on to their children, a community-based First Nations English dialect.

Urban Aboriginal children's first English language/literacy development is likely to be in a First Nations English dialect language unless the child was raised in a home where Standard English dialect was spoken. Children's language acquisition always reflects the dialect of family, friends and community (Pinker 1995), unless the children attend regular ESL classes. In these cases, there is a bilingual acquisition of two English language dialects.

The “First Nations English dialect” that has developed as a language is of a parallel order and quality of language to “Standard English dialect”. Dialects are not inferior languages, rather, “they have complete grammatical systems and equally valid conventions of language use. Dialects differ from each other in the various domains of language: sound systems, vocabulary, grammar, storytelling, conversational interaction and writing conventions” (Ball et al 2006). There is a need now to offer Aboriginal students, especially in the elementary grades, K-7, an education that acknowledges and validates their First Nations English dialect while continuing to offer them an equal opportunity to learn the standard English dialect in a multi-modal learning environment.

Aboriginal peoples who are living within their nation, community or family have English as a second language (ESL) or as a second dialect (ESD) language learning needs. (Taras 1994; Carrigan 2005; BCTF) Aboriginal English as a second dialect is little researched in Canada, but other countries such as Australia are acknowledging Aboriginal ESD learners as having similar needs to ESL learners. (Zubrick et al) We see opportunities from this research, which will provide literacy teaching and learning for Aboriginal student academic success.

We examine how Indigenous English dialects (IED) affect the academic learning opportunities of Aboriginal students when attending schools where Standard English dialect is used exclusively in the curriculum.

Recommendations for some strategies will be offered to address the crisis need for changes to Aboriginal Education curriculum in order to significantly improve the academic success of Aboriginal students.

This will be facilitated by an exploration of the development and affects of three approaches, English as a Second Language, English Developmental Programs and the use of aural-oral vocabulary.

The linguistic characteristics of Aboriginal dialects of English, which have developed through historical events of the colonization process have been described in the literature (Ball, Bernhardt, & Deby, 2006; Dannenberg, 2002; Leap, 1993; Mulder, 1982) . Sound patterns, word composition, sentence structure, discourse styles and histories, are what make AEDs different from one another and different from the standard variety of English expected in the classroom. Linguistic analyses demonstrate these unique dialects are as linguistically robust as any other regional and social varieties such as Black English in the US, Received Pronunciation in the UK, Singapore English, Jamaican English, and so on.

Research supports the use strategies to address the need for changes to Aboriginal Education curricula in order to significantly improve the academic success of Aboriginal students.

Language related challenges in the classroom result in Aboriginal students' who are often labeled behaviorally difficult. From the first day of school, the Aboriginal student's communicative style is deemed defective and must be corrected. This negative method of acknowledging a young child's personal, family and speech community is an unacceptable educational strategy and may be one of the factors that underlie the high prevalence of Aboriginal children in "behavioural adjustment programs."

Let's begin to move away from accepting a learning environment that doesn't acknowledge that Aboriginal students can acquire a bidialectal language facility.

For an Aboriginal person, language skill development continues to be a dynamic and diverse experience in the 21st century. Our peoples have varying degrees of opportunity to learn three distinct languages or dialects: their Indigenous nation/community language or dialect (ID), an Indigenous English dialect (IED) and the Standard English dialect (SED). *They may know, have access to and need/want to learn to use one or more of these languages or dialects.*

The first is their Nation's/community's traditional language, e.g. BC Traditional First Peoples' Languages

- Babine-Witsuwit'en Beaver
 - Chilcotin Chinook Jargon Coast Tsimshian Comox/Sliamon
 - Cree
 - Dakelh (Carrier) Ditidat (Nitinat)
 - Gitksan
 - Haida Haisla Halkomelem Heiltsuk
 - Kaska Klallam Ktunaxa (Kootenay) Kwakw'ala (Kwakiutl)
 - Lillooet
 - Nicola Nisga'a Nuuchanulth (Nootka) Nuxalk (Bella Coola)
 - Okanagan
 - Pentlatch
 - Saulteau Sechelt Sekani Slave South Tsimshian Secwepmectsin (Shuswap)
- Squamish Straits*
- Tagish Tahltan Thompson Tlingit Tsetsaut

Living within their nation/community, an Aboriginal child could have opportunity to learn their traditional Indigenous language or dialect. These are specific to each nation/community, for example, Nuuchanulth. Haisla, Cree, are included in the fifty-two traditional Aboriginal languages in Canada, as well as many Indigenous language dialects. Indigenous/First Nations/Aboriginal language revitalization programs are ensuring that these languages/dialects continue into the future, as they are essential for transference of worldview knowledge and practices to new generations.

The following two English dialects that Indigenous peoples have opportunity to learn are Indigenous English dialect and the Standard English dialect. Indigenous English dialects are developed from an intersecting between the Indigenous languages of First Nations/Aboriginal nations/communities and the English of trade, commerce and governments from first contact with European explorers, clergy, settlers and government.

The second is the Standard English (SE) of Canada

The Standard English dialect is the language of western government, law and business transactions and is taught in the western school systems through Kindergarten to post-secondary. The standard English dialect is identified as: "a dialect with perceived prestige due to its association with dominant social groups and its institutional support. (Ball et al 2006).

The Standard English dialect is not linguistically more logical, grammatical or expressive than other dialects of the language” (Ball et al 2006).

The third is a First Nations/Aboriginal English dialects (FNED/AED) After contact Native peoples combined their community’s Indigenous language and commerce English dialect into a new First Nations English dialect, developing from Aboriginal people from all nations engaging in the economic activities of their regions. (Knight 1978), until many of these activities were lawfully restricted. The languages that developed from these historical events are English dialects as distinct and as valid as the standard English dialect that is taught as the main language in each governments’ educational systems.

The Importance of Validating First Nations English Dialect: Why?

1. “First Nations English dialects are the current primary language” (Ball et al 2006) across British Columbia

2. Essentially unacknowledged, even though they are as valid as other English dialects.

3. First Nations English dialect languages affect the academic learning of Aboriginal student speakers when attending schools where Standard English dialect is used exclusively in the curriculum.

a. There is a decades long crisis need for changes to Urban Aboriginal Education curriculum in order to significantly improve the academic success of Aboriginal students.

• First Nations English dialects are the language of the majority of urban Aboriginal students attending public schools in Vancouver and other urban centers and [by their families living and working in their communities in small or large urban environments.]

• As such, the use of these dialects has an essential role in the educational success of Aboriginal students.

• A definition of language and how a dialect relates as a language is described here: A language is a system of communication comprised of:

- elements (e.g. sounds, words) and

- rules for combining these elements (i.e. grammar).

A dialect: Sometimes a language is thought of as a group of slightly different systems and in this case the systems are called dialects.

• English includes several dialects...

• Dialects are associated with speakers who share various combinations of geography, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, education, or other social factors. (Ball et al 2006).

Since linguists acknowledge Aboriginal English as a Second Dialect (ESD) parallel to immigrant languages, the need for Aboriginal students to receive English as a Second Language/Dialect classes (ESL/D) is clear. Today, we have an urban education system that still ignores the differences brought to it by Aboriginal students with pronouncements such as, “Why do we have to do anything different for Aboriginal students” (personal communications; principal

1986; teacher 1991; teacher 2005). Unlike new immigrants to Canada, who are now offered English as a Second Language (ESL) programs to learn English, while having their traditional language fully acknowledged and kept intact, urban Aboriginal students, families and workers are still not offered an English as a Second Dialect program, where their English dialect is fully acknowledged and kept intact, while learning the Standard English. Aboriginal students are not being given access to the communication tools for the educational transition process for successful acquisition of reading, writing and speech in the Standard English of the curriculum.

Raising the awareness in the classroom and in the community that Aboriginal Englishes are legitimate and unique dialects, having evolved from pidgins and creoles of years past is an educational imperative if they are to gain full language status they deserve. Offer teachers an opportunity to understand what English as a Second Dialect is and why Aboriginal students can benefit from teaching approaches that encompass second language teaching approaches.

In this work, we described the linguistic properties of Aboriginal English dialects, and we make suggestions and recommendations for their inclusion in a curriculum that promotes and celebrates their use in urban communities, in tandem with standard English so that Aboriginal learners have the opportunity to succeed in two worlds.

School-based factors facilitate more successful learning for Aboriginal students. They may have “teachers who teach with a multi-modal approach for the different needs of students by using a variety of teaching methods, thereby giving a student who is struggling with one mode of learning have an opportunity to learn in another mode. (Fleming 1995).

We propose that this could be facilitated by an exploration of the development and possible affects of approaches such as Aboriginal English as a Second Language/Dialect classes, English Developmental Programs and in place of strictly visual vocabulary in curriculum material, the use of aural-oral vocabulary. Students need “teachers who teach with a multi-modal approach,” addressing the unique learning needs of individual students. (Fleming 1995).

Vygotsky’s sociocultural development theory (2003), identifying the affective in learning, and with the “zone of proximal development” concepts, will facilitate understanding of the language transition needs of the Aboriginal students. Vygotsky’s description of social speech development and its importance to children’s development underscores the importance of the school’s positive acknowledgement of the kindergarten student’s First Nations English dialect. Vygotsky describes the connection between language development and behaviour, adding that “private speech is first used externally in interactions with other people and then internalized and used by an individual to master his or her own mental functions... It signals an important development in self-regulation: Starting with regulation of their practical actions, children expand their use of

private speech to regulate a variety of their mental processes. The concept of self-regulation plays a prominent role ... one of the most critical advances in child development at this time...(Ed. Kozulin et al p.160 2003).

Urban BC Aboriginal Education

In the current urban British Columbia (BC) Ministry of Education and Vancouver School District (VSB), school administrators and teachers do not acknowledge the existence of and equal status of Aboriginal students' First Nations English dialect. Instead, Aboriginal students are assessed by the speech pathologists after referrals from teachers for the student's lack of success in learning to be determined as have a learning impairment. Today, some speech pathologists have acted upon their experiences with Aboriginal student and have provided a seminal document researching English as a second dialect related to Aboriginal students. An excerpt from this document, First Nations English Dialects, Exploratory Project Proceedings:

"In cases where children begin school speaking a nonstandard Dialect as there only variety of English, they may encounter problems both because of the differences in grammar and in the expected patterns of language usage" (Ball et al 2006).

And the environment where Aboriginal students are educated, diagnosed, labeled and limited in their opportunities to acquire an academic education:

"Cultural stereotypes negatively portraying other cultures hinder the process of learning and education" (Fixico, 2003).

The consequences of this lack of recognition create a deficiency of learning opportunities for Aboriginal students not as is commonly determined, a deficiency in the student. Through the continuing lack of ESL/ESD classes or standard English development programs to "transition to the standard English" of the school curriculum, Aboriginal students are continuing not to have their essential academic skills developed.

In the 2002-03 school year, 49,000 students within the British Columbia school system self-identified as Aboriginals. They made up 8.2 percent of the total student count, up from 5.9 percent in 1995-96. Three quarters of these Aboriginal students lived off-reserve, while one quarter were registered Indians living on-reserve but attending off-reserve schools in the provincial school system. Although on-reserve numbers have remained fairly stable, the off-reserve numbers have grown rapidly – a 57 percent increase over the preceding seven years. www.sfu.ca/mpp/pdf_news/800-04%20creating.choices-10may.pdf

Although moderate gains have been made in the academic success rate of Aboriginal students in BC School districts, the reality for nearly one half of Aboriginal students is that they do not successfully receive a basic academic education in reading, writing and numeracy in the Kindergarten to Grade 4 years which lay the academic, self-esteem and confidence foundation for their higher education. One factor in this statistic is possibly their English as a Second Dialect is not being recognized as an academic need. The standard English that

the curriculum is written in and that the teachers speak is still a second language to some and a second dialect to the majority of Aboriginal students. When students struggle with their studies and the lack of recognition and success produces frustration, developing at times into diagnosed behavioral issues, parents are called in. However, the parents also speak a non-standard English. Parents and children sit in the school meeting and are judged to be sub-standard. All Aboriginal student, parents/caregivers and school support workers of Aboriginal students have experience the unequal power relationship at parent/teacher and other parent/school meetings were Aboriginal parents have their self-esteem and powerlessness compounded in these meetings. (personal and personal communications 1950-2006). Their ability to problem-solve this lack of success issue in their children is untenable, because they are also seen by the school system as being defective and needing fixing.

“Speakers who are not fluent in the standard variety [of English] are at a social disadvantage when confronted with mainstream gate keeping processes, because many people associate nonstandard varieties with low status, low intelligence, and relative incompetence, especially when in used in formal settings (Giles and Powesland 1975, Edwards 1989). These judgments do not depend solely on speakers’ use of nonstandard grammar. Lippi-Green (1997) shows that nonstandard pronunciation (i.e. accent) alone can have the same effect. Thus, if a person does not use the standard variety well, this can affect their ability to succeed (or even participate) in mainstream domains such as education....” (Ball et al 2006).

Standard English is the language of the urban setting and Aboriginal students in the public school system, along with their families, need to be given an equitable opportunity to learn SE through English as a second dialect classes. Without the ability to communicate in standard English, statistics show that this is having a devastating impact on their lives, their families’ ability to gain employment that will move them above the poverty line, and their community’s and nation’s opportunity to build self-government successfully. This in no way diminishes the need for students to learn their traditional language and their communities specific practices.

Although the statistics for Aboriginal student achievement is documented for reading, writing and numeracy, the focus here is to address reading and writing i.e. literacy – English as a second language/dialect. Aboriginal students can gain confidence and competency during their K-4 instruction in reading and writing the language of the mainstream education system, that is, standard English, without sacrificing their traditional language or their English language dialect. They will be able to achieve academic success in the remainder of their grades 5-12 and avoid the drastic numbers of dropouts in Grade 8.

The quotes that follow about the crisis in Aboriginal education state the problem from a general deficit model of Aboriginal children and youths' failure to be successful in the public school system in BC and each specific school district. It is important to note that Aboriginal children and youth are not the failures here; it is the failure of the BC Ministry of Education and each school board and school district personnel to take the responsibility to provide Aboriginal students with the education they need to reverse Aboriginal students' "failure rate".

"In British Columbia, the failure rates for Aboriginal students on the grades 4, 7, and 10 provincial reading tests during the last four school years have always exceeded 40% and reached a high—on the 2002 sitting of the Grade 10 test—of 51%. Their failure rate on every one of the Grade 4 and Grade 7 exams was more than double that of their non-Aboriginal classmates. Their performance on the Grade 10 tests was not appreciably better" (Cowley and Easton 2004).

Conservatively, approximately 25,000 BC Aboriginal students and over 1000 Vancouver School District students are not receiving an adequate education in the present system with the current curriculum. These figures do not include the Aboriginal students who drop out.

"BC stats show that Aboriginal graduation rates are lower than what the VSB quoted. Although Aboriginal graduation rates are low, the BC stats do not show the larger picture" (Unidentified , GVUAS Minutes, September 9, 2005).

and

"Aboriginal students in Grade 8 have a 28% dropout rate, but 2005 had an increase of Aboriginal graduates. (Jeff Smith GVUAS Minutes, September 9, 2005).

The Vancouver School District is responsible for providing an education to approximately 2,000 Aboriginal students. Jeff Smith, Administrator for Aboriginal Education, Vancouver School Board, gave a PowerPoint presentation at The Urban Aboriginal Education Colloquium (May 27, 2005 Simon Fraser University at Harbour Centre). Jeff Smith's presentation included the following information:

"A review of the data from the Educational Development Inventory (EDI) indicates that there are a high proportion of Aboriginal students entering Kindergarten who are at risk of literacy failure. Results from FSA Literacy indicate that a large number of our intermediate Aboriginal students struggle with reading comprehension. In 2004, 32% in Grade 4, and 35% in Grade 7 did not meet expectations. At the secondary level, we are concerned with the low participation rates of Aboriginal students in English 12. Fewer than 40% wrote the Provincial Examination in 2002."

These statements put the onus for success or failure in the school system, not on the Aboriginal student. At a 2005 University of British Columbia (UBC) Health and Human Service Aboriginal Student Recruitment Committee meeting, Tim Michel, Aboriginal Coordinator, UBC Faculty of Science stated that in 2004, not one Aboriginal student graduated with Math 12. This statistic is shocking in that

the VSB did not graduate one Aboriginal student who was academically ready to apply and be accepted into any college or university science program or most health and human service programs.

The Vancouver School District's Aboriginal Education "Learning Framework for all of us" states,

- People learn when they feel respected, belong and are connected to the learning environment
- They have a voice in determining the learning they find relevant
- They engage in educational experiences that supports deep reciprocal relationships

Aboriginal students are not mentioned and therefore initiate the following questions: How does the VSB facilitate [students] to feel respected, belong and connected to the learning environment? How does the VSB implement "They [students I presume] have a voice in determining the learning they find relevant? How does the VSB ensure they [students I presume] engage in education...?"

Many of the strategies that the VSB list on their website are literacy-focused programs, which reflect a substantial awareness of the need for increased literacy competency. However, there is no mention of English as a Second Dialect, nor is there any reference to the affective connection to learning.

The following will be focused on the Aboriginal student's specific needs as determined by respected professionals both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.

Without the initial and positive acknowledgement and validation of an Aboriginal student's FNED language, a valuable and essential component of self-esteem is immediately denied. From the first day of school, the Aboriginal student is deemed to have a way of communicating that is defective and must be corrected. This negative method of acknowledging a young child's family and community language is an unacceptable educational strategy and may be one of the factors that lie at the root of the shocking statistics of the high prevalence of Aboriginal children in "behavioural adjustment programs". Vygotsky's brilliant Sociocultural Development Theory, identifying the affective in learning, and with the "zone of proximal development" concepts will facilitate understanding of the needs of the Aboriginal students. Vygotsky's description of the development of social speech and its importance in children's development underscores the importance of the school's positive acknowledgement of the Kindergarten student's First Nations English dialect: Vygotsky writes of the preschool child's speech development::

Children start using private speech to accompany their practical actions. At this point, it is closely intertwined with social speech, which is directed to other people... Later private speech becomes exclusively self-directed and changes its function to organize children's own behaviour. At the same time, the syntax of private speech changes ... From complete sentences typical for social speech, a child's utterances change into abbreviated phrases and single words unsuited for the purposes of communication to other people but sufficient for communicating to oneself.

(Ed. Kozulin et al p.160 2003)

This passage demonstrates the complexity of the development of a child's language skill –thinking and speaking. It therefore, emphasizes the destruction in the literacy development of Aboriginal students when they start Kindergarten and their ESD speech does not match the teachers, other students if there are no other Aboriginal students, and is not acknowledged as valid but denounced as not correct. Vygotsky describes the connection between language development and behaviour:

.Vygotsky uses these two metamorphoses of private speech to illustrate what he believed to be the universal path of the acquisition of cultural tools: they are first used externally in interactions with other people and then internalized and used by an individual to master his or her own mental functions. The onset of private speech marks an important point in the development of children's thinking: the beginning of verbal thought. At the same time it signals an important development in self-regulation: Starting with regulation of their practical actions, children expand their use of private speech to use it to regulate a variety of their mental processes.

... The concept of self-regulation plays a prominent role ... one of the most critical advances in child development at this time...

(Ed. Kozulin et al p.160 2003)

Could this be one of the sources of the behaviour "problems" of which Aboriginal student are diagnosed with at their schools? By being denied the validation and use of their first language of ESD and not given a transition to a new language their verbal development that they have developed is not longer allowed and they have no other language with which to regulate their actions with.

In addition to this internal and external literacy crisis the Aboriginal student is experiencing, the feelings related to this crisis are not acknowledged either which further compounds the challenging learning processes that they are getting no assistance with. Vygotsky also determined that the first five months of school was critical to the child's transition this new environment and was developed during interactions with the teacher and other students. When the Aboriginal student is speaking an ESD and the teacher and possibly the other students who may get their cue for appropriate behaviour to not communicate with them than the transitional process becomes aborted.

"When the school system negates the memories of learning language and culture that Aboriginal children bring to class, the child feelings about who they are as learners can be an overwhelming obstacle to overcome" (Lee 2005).

The Ministry of Education began compiling Aboriginal student statistics in 1998. As part of this initiative, it:

"also began monitoring the performance of students in Special Education programs, and found that Aboriginal students were over represented in severe behaviour categories. Further probing revealed that in some districts students spent little time in severe

behaviour programs (a year or less) and many returned to the regular program and graduated. In other districts, students remained in severe behaviour programs until they disappeared from the system without completing their high school program. This finding led to a project that examined district identification and intervention practices for Aboriginal students” (Anderson 2005).

These statistics are an invaluable resource for researchers, school administrators and parents. However, the improvement of the Aboriginal student statistics is so minimal and any gains, when compared with the rest of the student body, still reveal educational success to be nowhere near equity with other students. The Aboriginal student is still being under-served academically. Something is obviously missing from the Aboriginal Education programs.

VSB Urban Aboriginal Student

What do we know about the Aboriginal student in Vancouver? “With 80% of Aboriginal children living in poverty, they are subject to extraordinary family risk factors: social isolation, special needs children, inadequate or unsafe housing, high rates of unemployment and increased health risks.” (Smith 2005) They desperately require an education system that can acknowledge their need for the self-esteem that comes with positive acknowledgement of their Aboriginal cultures and success in the school system.

The population of Aboriginal students is growing and statistics predict that it will continue to grow in the next ten years. (Siggner 2005) The Aboriginal urban population will continue to grow for two reasons: reserve community housing is not now, nor probably in the future, will it be able to accommodate all their members, and the Aboriginal birth rate is continuing to grow. Growing Aboriginal families will be drawn to urban areas for housing, education and employment. It follows that the urban school district Aboriginal student population will also continue to increase. Although reserve communities are now exclusively responsible for the education systems, urban Aboriginal parents and caregivers have little opportunity to have any control over the education of their children.

Even with culturally-specific support budget, the population of Vancouver Aboriginal elementary, intermediate and secondary students is not having its academic learning needs met. Without this basic academic foundation, the students’ further experiences in the school system will be unsuccessful (Cowley and Easton 2004). Without basic academic success in elementary grades, Aboriginal students continue a personally fruitless struggle to achieve success in later grades and by Grade 8, eighty percent (80 %), of the forty percent who have not dropped out, Aboriginal students are housed within segregated alternative programs.

The parents/caregivers in partnership with school personnel, school boards, and the BC Ministry of Education are responsible for ensuring that these students are

learning what they need to know to successfully continue on to Grades 5-12 and to graduate with an academic graduation certificate. This is the minimum requirement for accessing employment and reversing the high poverty rate among Aboriginal peoples.

"The aboriginal population is the fastest growing segment of Canada's workforce. More than half of this population is under 25. About 400,000 Aboriginal young people are poised to enter the job market over the next 20 years... Young teenagers who began high school with weaker literacy skills were more likely to drop out before they reached Grade 12... There's more... A major contributor to economic growth consists of the literacy skills of a country's population, broadly defined to include prose, document and quantitative literacy." (Coffey 2006, Panel Discussion)

A Proposed Solution to Address the Challenges
Curriculum is inclusive of teachers, teaching/learning materials, and learning environments.

The three approaches for improving the learning of standard English with Aboriginal students *will be facilitated by an exploration of the development and affects of these:*

- 1. English as a Second Language/Dialect,*
- 2. English Developmental Programs and*
- 3. Replacing of strictly visual vocabulary in curriculum material with aural-oral vocabulary*

Each of the three approaches could be components of a very effective Aboriginal English language curriculum utilizing the 4Rs of Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity and Responsibility in the development of the learning relationships for Aboriginal students.

The first approach/method is English as a Second Language/Dialect. An English as a second dialect is developed:

"When speakers in a regional or social community share a similar representation of a language... dialect of the language. [Linguistically,] Dialect variations may be phonological [the system or pattern of speech sounds used in a particular language], semantic [the meaning or the differences between meanings of words], or syntactical [rules or pattern of grammar and sentence structure]" (English as a Second Language/Dialect 1986).

The second approach/method is the Standard English Development program (AED programs with contextual features addressing social, historical and political with parent involvement during development.) Teacher training is essential. When developing Aboriginal programs for English as a Second Dialect students, it would be useful to frame the programs with the following. The guiding

principles of successful Standard English development programs (Ball et al 2006) are:

1. Language is an integral part of one's culture
2. Language difference does not imply language deficit
3. The unique history and culture of each child must be recognized and respected
4. Teaching methodology must accommodate the language of that child
5. Acceptance and appreciation of one's home language enhances the acquisition of other languages
6. Students are empowered by the acquisition of languages outside their native culture.

The third approach is one where the visually related metaphorical vocabulary is replaced by aural-oral related metaphorical vocabulary. (Hibbitts 1994) expresses the concept in legal discourse adapted from his paper:

“a reconfiguration of contemporary [education] discourse represented by the apparent shift from more visually evocative metaphors for [teaching and learning] practice... towards a greater number of aural-oral evocative figures of speech ... “

Examples of the vocabulary that would represent this approach are ones that evoke listening and hearing rather than words that evoke the visual: I “hear” the argument instead of “see”...; storytelling instead of reading, the need for finding ones “voice” instead of finding a viewpoint. May be useful to explore how the visually evocative vocabulary can be replaced by the aurally-orally evocative vocabulary in curriculum to reflect a three dimensionally communicative world rather than visually evocative one dimensional print based world.

Although the following is from an excerpt for tertiary learning environments, the methods for presentation, learning and teaching are necessary for Aboriginal student learning at all levels. Authentic student-focused teaching takes into account that students have different ways for optimum learning. Students and teachers benefit when teaching methods are varied.

“... questionnaire ... identifies the preferences of students for [teaching styles]... provides a focus for developing strategies that are tailored for individuals. ... helps overcome the predisposition of many educators to treat all students in a similar way. ... motivate teachers to move from preferred mode of teaching to using others. ... reach more students because of a better match between teacher and learner styles..” (Fleming 1995).

There is a program that isn't ESD but does address the literacy needs of students at the Kindergarten level and then provides programs to address any students that are at risk of literacy failure. Although the program is not culturally specific, it may have some value if its success statistics can be sustained. The program exists in Surrey School Board SD 36 and is called Kindergarten ELPATS. Their Surrey Schools Keeping Learners at the Centre report states, “The Kindergarten

Phonemic Awareness initiative was expanded to 75 schools. It will have been introduced in 85 schools by the end of this year, with full implementation in 2006/2007. Results on the district Early Literacy Phonemic Awareness Test Surrey (ELPATS) have been very promising with 31% of students identified as being "at risk" of having reading difficulties on the pre-test being reduced to 9% by the end of the year.

Conclusion

There are research opportunities for inquiry into the relationship between traditional First Nations languages and First Nations English dialects. They both are communication systems that reflect the values and experiences of peoples who have had a highly spiritual, intellectually, physically healthful sustaining relationship with complex, dynamic social structures for transmitting learning and administering the political affairs to strengthen the community and their land relationship extending for thousands of years.

More research is also needed in the development of Cultural Safety programs for education environment and the relationship of ESD programs

More research is also needed in the relationship between the affective and learning and the relationship of ESD programs. In Mahn and Joh-Steiner's "The Gift of Confidence: A Vygotskian View of Emotions, they reemphasize and refer to the writing of L.S. Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist who wrote about the importance of the affective factors and the caring nature needed in learning. He wrote about the relationship between affect and thought.

As in the words of Elder Catherine Adams, Kwakiutl, born 1903, Smiths Inlet, BC, "What good is education without love?", (Garnier 1990),

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