

**Revitalisation of indigenous languages in the Canadian school system:
An analysis of some strategies and approaches**

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ABSTRACT. First-Nations languages seem to be more promoted today than they were a few decades ago. This situation is favoured by the country's language policy that appears to be somewhat ambitious for aboriginal languages, many of which have been introduced into the school system with various degrees of success. One of the objectives of this paper is thus to see if the language management in the field, that is, if what is concretely done to promote those languages is tallied with legal-political approaches. To this end, a number of promotion means were critically examined. They include language nest, master-apprentice, head start programs, etc. It would be interesting to note that, although aboriginal languages seem to be more promoted, they are more endangered. The overall objective of this paper is thus to tentatively find out why there is a mismatch between a good language policy and questionable language planning in Canadian schools, as it relates to aboriginal languages.

Keywords: head start, language policy, indigenous languages, revitalisation strategies, language nest, master-apprentice, immersion summer camps

1. INTRODUCTION. This paper, which falls within the general framework of language policy and planning, especially acquisition planning or language in education, is aimed at critically analysing some education programs in indigenous languages in Canada. It is based on the observation that those languages are rather worse off under the pressure of official languages, despite the number of revitalisation strategies and means of promotion put forth since 1972. It can be seen in different population censuses that aboriginal languages keep losing ground to English and French. For example, in 1951, despite the overt policy of cultural and linguistic assimilation that was instituted, 87.4% of aboriginal people spoke an aboriginal language as mother tongue (L1). However the precipitous decline starts ten years later, in 1961 when this proportion lowered to 75.7%, then to 57.1% in 1971, 30% in 1981, 25% in 1996, 24.1% in 2001, 21.5% in 2006 and 15.2% in 2011 (Norris 1998, 2007, Statistics Canada 2008, 2012, Tulloch 2004). This clearly means that the use of aboriginal languages as L1 is steadily declining. The question one is tempted to ask is the following: what could be the inhibiting factors to effective revitalisation of aboriginal languages in Canadian schools? A possible answer might be in the language policy. It might also be in the fact that the numerous revitalisation approaches and promotion means are probably incomplete, inappropriate, unsuitable or simply hard to apply.

2. LANGUAGE POLICY IN RELATION TO CANADIAN INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES.

2.1. LANGUAGE POLICY BEFORE THE CONFEDERATION. From the 16th century, aboriginal languages were going through linguistic transfer to official languages (OL). Canada

underwent internal colonisation that is quite similar to external colonisation in force in Africa or Asia, at least at the linguistic level. “The language of the colonized is restricted in its use and development and has invariably less prestige, frequently even in the minds of its own speakers” (Peñalosa 1981:169).

For the specific case of Canada, colonisers implemented an “ethnicized” and “linguicide” policy which Grant (1996) calls “cultural and linguistic genocide.” Hence the creation of residential schools, one objective of which was to counteract intergenerational transmission of aboriginal languages. Those residential schools, considered to have been a “national shame,” (see Ennamorato 1999, Friesen & Friesen 2002, Grant 1996) started as a system in the 1850s amid the signature of the Act to Encourage the Gradual Civilization of the Indians in 1857. It is under this system that young aboriginals officially started going to residential schools designed for them. This colonial language policy, which Battiste (1986:23) refers to as “cultural and cognitive assimilation,” was clearly aimed at anglicising aboriginal people and homogenising the Canadian linguistic landscape in favour of English or French. It would be interesting to see how it evolved after the Confederation.

2.2. LANGUAGE POLICY BETWEEN THE CONFEDERATION AND 1972. After the Confederation of 1867, political authorities reinforced, for a century, the colonial governmentality. Grant justly writes, “After Confederation, government policies became more intrusive and coercive. Ottawa became impatient at the slow pace of Indian ‘civilization’ and assimilation” (1996:63). The Indian Act was enacted in 1876.¹ This act, according to Burns, is an

instrument of colonisation and domination of aboriginal people: “The Indian Act itself is Eurocentric, ethnocentric, racist, discriminatory, and exclusionary. [...] A close examination of the Act reveals that it exists as a structure of domination, control and oppression” (2001:60). Hence, the number of residential schools increased tenfold around the country; in 1894 the government was funding 45 residential schools, 11 of them in British Columbia. By 1923 there were 71 such schools, and at their peak in the 1930s there were as many as 80 of them in operation (Friesen & Friesen 2002:104). It is noteworthy that, from 1894, it was mandatory for aboriginal children less than 16 years old to go to a residential school. This policy continued until 1972.

2.3. CANADIAN LANGUAGE POLICY AFTER 1972. Most Aboriginal people rejected the government policy documented in the *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy* (Government of Canada 1969) because they did not like the fact that the document recommended the abolition of the special Indian status and that of the reserves as political entities,² as well as the fact that the provinces would no longer take charge of aboriginal communities. The National Indian Brotherhood, that became the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), published *The Indian Control of Indian Education* (ICIE) in 1972. The ICIE played a decisive role in the approach initiated by the aboriginal people to take control of their community schools, especially the band schools that skyrocketed from 53 in 1976 to 329 in 1992 and to 600 in 2001 (Friesen & Friesen 2002). The intent of the ICIE is that “the curriculum be culture-based, methods and styles be Native in orientation, Native language be

used, Native values and identity be developed and reinforced, and the process be based on a distinctively Native philosophy of teaching and learning” (McCaskill 1987:163). Hence, in kindergarten and up to grade 4 or 5, the language of instruction would normally be an aboriginal language. The transition to English or French as L2 would normally be done only after the pupil will have mastered his/her L1.

Aboriginal people could thus design programs for the revitalisation of their languages and cultures. According to McCaskill, the objective of band schools, which he calls CULTURAL SURVIVAL SCHOOLS, “is to promote and preserve Indian language, values, and history in order to survive as a distinct people within the larger Canadian society” (1987:162). At Mi’kmawey school in Nova Scotia for example, Micmac is taught both as a subject and as medium of instruction (Battiste 1987:120).

Although aboriginal schools have been created, the system is still in the hands of the federal government. This poses the question of educative centralism, what Binda calls “the federal government’s discursive policies of colonization, centralization and control” (2001:36). According to Bear Nicholas (2001:16),

The truth is that true Indian-controlled schools in Canada are almost nonexistent. In the first place, it has been enormously difficult for communities to gain even the smallest modicum of control over their own schools, in spite of the fact that federal policy is now ostensibly aimed at devolving responsibilities of education to First Nations.

So, whenever an aboriginal school board has tried to exercise some control over band schools, “they were regularly stymied, either by the jungle of federal or provincial regulations or by the interference of any number of hierarchies, from the chief and council on up to the federal government” (Bear Nicholas 2001:16). It would be interesting to note that in those so-called community schools, the language of instruction in all classes is English, except in Québec, North West Territories and Nunavut where aboriginal languages are also languages of instruction in some schools. Bear Nicholas is right when she writes, “After nearly thirty years of ICIE it is patently clear that assimilation is still the driving force in Native education policy, even on reserves” (2001:17). A Department of Indian and Northern Affairs top-ranked official in Nova Scotia emphatically stated that “language is not a priority in education” (Fettes & Norton 2000:43). It is also good to recall that, although the government accepted the ICIE, it did so after redefining the term CONTROL which becomes DEGREE OF PARTICIPATION. This definition has probably allowed the government to move slowly, delegating programs of administration rather than policy development and real management and financial control (see Longboat 1987:25-27).

It is not necessary to go over the Constitutional Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms of 1982 and the Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988 which all consolidate linguistic diversity and, at the same time, legally empower aboriginal communities to promote their languages and cultures. But, none of these acts has been up to the expectations as far as the revitalisation of aboriginal languages goes, probably because language policy has always had some sort of assimilation undertone.

3. INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN SCHOOL. A number of programs and approaches are designed and developed for the promotion and revitalisation of aboriginal languages through formal and informal education. They will be discussed in the following subsections.

3.1. THE LANGUAGE NEST PROGRAM. The language nest program is an early childhood immersion program which aims at producing a new generation of native speakers of aboriginal languages. Designed in New Zealand under the Maori appellation of Te Kōhanga Reo, its aim is to provide an environment where children will hear only the aboriginal language and will therefore grow up speaking it (see King 2001).

In Canada, the first language nests began in the 1980s with two programs in the Kahnawà:ke Mohawk community and in Adam's lake, BC (First People's Cultural Council (FPCC) 2014). This program normally takes children from zero to five years old because early childhood is a critical time for the acquisition of language. It is practised in a number of aboriginal communities with relative success. This is the case with the Labrador Inuits through the Hopedale Language Nest or the Language Nest at Adam's Lake Band and the Language Nest at Lil'wat Nation, both in BC. The FPCC (2014:5) defines it as a program where children are immersed in their First nations Language. This program

[P]rovides a safe, home-like environment for young children to interact with fluent speakers of the language, often Elders, through meaningful activities.

The goal of a language nest is not to 'teach' children the language, but rather to create an environment where language can be acquired naturally, as infants

acquire their first language. It may be useful to think of a language nest as like [sic] 'Granny's house', where children are cared for in a traditional, cultural way *in* the language.

The program started in Labrador in 2001-2002 with three children and, since then, there has been an intake of six children yearly (Canadian Heritage 2003). That is about the same intake in the two BC programs (see McIvor 2006). According to the Labrador Inuit Association, the future of this program is bright because children learn the fundamentals of aboriginal languages and cultures. In addition, parents and teachers report that families of children registered in the program make huge efforts to speak the language to their children or encourage them to speak it (Canadian Heritage 2003).

This program, if widely used, could immensely contribute to the revitalisation of aboriginal languages. For the time being, it is still restricted to few communities. Moreover, it suffers from many ills. The teachers are not fluent speakers of the language they want to preserve. Thus, the program heavily depends on elders, many of whom are not always willing to be part of it because they don't know what is expected from them. Below is a testimony from a BC language nest coordinator:

I didn't speak the language at the time, right. I came in just keeping my mouth shut, running around after kids and doing different things. The Elder we hired really didn't have any idea what to do, so we just said, 'Let's just play with them, let's just do whatever you do with kids but just all speak the language.' Gradually I picked up more language and the Elder got a little more confident,

and that's how it started. Not a lot of planning when it started, more like a divine inspiration more than anything else! (McIvor 2006:11)

The Hopedale Language Nest in Labrador had only two teachers in 2008, which added to the general lack of interest (Canadian Heritage 2003) and caused the Labrador Inuit government to suspend it for one year to figure out how to tackle a poor pickup of the language among older children and how to gather necessary ideas, materials and human resources (CBCnews 2008).

The lack of qualified and fluent teachers paves the way for the predominance of English. Ironically, it is often the elders themselves who bring the most English into the program. "Their use of English can be seen as a natural, empathic response to 'rescue' the little ones struggling in the language" (FPCC 2014:30). Another big challenge is the lack of pedagogic resources. Many nest programs run without any curriculum materials. They are now in the process of creating them. However, they start by trying to translate most mainstream materials with the help of elders who become occasional translators.

Also, some parents fear that there might not be a smooth transition from language nest programs where the only language used is probably an aboriginal language to public schools where the only language of instruction is an official language (OL). In New Zealand, to address the same issue, the Department of Maori Affairs has created two types of primary and secondary schools. The first type is called the Kura Kaupapa Māori with a "policy of total immersion in Māori within a Māori philosophical orientation and curricular framework" (King 2001:122). The second type is bilingual classes and units in mainstream schools in

which former students of Te Kōhanga Reo made up 40% of the students in 1990 (King 2001:122). But in Canada, to better develop this program and extend it to other languages, aboriginal communities might want to reflect on a smooth transition towards OLs. At least, parents should have the choice.

If parents distance themselves from the program, it is partly because of the colonial heritage as their language has always been portrayed as useless. Below is a parent's testimony: "You know, like we had one person put the [language immersion] school down. Saying, 'I want my kid to go be a doctor, and I'm not sending him up there. . . .' I asked them, 'Are you scared of the language?' That's what they're scared of" (McIvor 2006:15).

3.2. THE MASTER-APPRENTICE PROGRAM. According to the FPCC,

The Master-Apprentice Program is a method of learning a language where a fluent speaker of the language (a master) teaches a language learner (an apprentice) through language immersion. [...] The goal of the program is to have apprentices increase their fluency in speaking and understanding their language (in semi-fluent speakers). While reading and writing are valuable skills, an apprentice must be able to speak and understand to become fluent.

This is the focus of the Master-Apprentice Program (FPCC 2012:3).

This program was designed in California in 1992 to counteract the rate of language extinction by transmitting the languages to young adults (Hinton 2001). In Canada, the program pursues the same objectives. There are ten points that might guarantee successful learning: (1) the use

of English is prohibited, (2) the mentor as well as the apprentice must use verbal and non-verbal communication to make themselves understood, (3) they must use full sentences, (4) the language is used for real communication, (5) the focus is on language as well as culture, (6) the learning activities are based on listening and speaking, not on writing, (7) language is taught and learned through activities like picking berries, cooking supper, doing the dishes, the laundry, the shopping, etc., (8) the use of audio and video recording is encouraged to help the apprentice practise, (9) the apprentice should be an active learner, (10) both master and apprentice should be sensitive to each other's needs and feelings (FPCC 2012).

They must agree to spend 10 to 15 hours per week or about 50 hours per month for three years with 300 hours per year for a total of 900 hours (FPCC 2012:3). The apprentice's progress is evaluated after every 100 hours. This program timidly started in Canada in 2001. It is in 2007 that it peaked in BC with 12 teams from 11 BC languages, a second group of 10 teams in 2010, two more in 2011 and five in early 2012 (FPCC 2012:3). Finally, it remains to be seen whether giving primacy to oral production and relegating writing to the background favours balanced learning of a language. Overall, the limits are the same as those of the language nest programs.

3.3. IMMERSION CAMPS. A good number of aboriginal languages offer immersion programs for adults. This is the case of Mohawk in Québec and in Ontario. The objective of such a program is to “provide adult learners with the opportunity to learn to speak the Mohawk language with sufficient fluency to participate in traditional cultural activities in Mohawk”

(Maracle & Richards 2002:127). The group members meet informally in a natural and culturally relevant environment (a house, a supermarket, a restaurant, etc.) and talk (while doing an activity) with the help of a teacher assisted by some Elders. In the inception of this program, the group would not normally work on grammar, but teachers often spend a long time explaining the aboriginal language grammar and speaking English instead of getting the language used in conversations. But the biggest drawback of this program is that learners have different expectations about what an adult immersion course should be. Based on Maracle and Richards' (2002:128) explanations, in the organisers' opinion, it "implied that the classroom language would be Mohawk, with English used only when necessary for communication." But some students "wanted to be in an immersion course, but at the same time they wanted to know in English exactly what they were hearing in Mohawk. They, therefore, kept asking for translations and explanations in English." An explanation for this is that learners get into the program with various fluency levels and the organisers do not always group them according to their fluency in the target language.

3.4. THE HEAD START PROGRAM. The head start program is a bilingual OL/aboriginal language program. This federal initiative, launched in 1995, is offered to children aged zero to six. It was created in the USA in 1964 "to address the needs of preschool children living in poverty" because "children living in poverty can often experience inadequate basic health and low cognitive abilities" (Goulet et al. 2001:142).

In Canada, the program pursues a number of objectives that can be found in the document *Aboriginal Head Start on Reserves Program (AHSRP)* (Government of Canada 2003:3):

The [AHSRP] is designed to prepare young First Nations children for their school years by meeting their emotional, social, health, nutritional and psychological needs. [...] The [AHSRP] retains the six core components including: culture and language, education, health promotion, nutrition, social support, and parental and family involvement.

The linguistic aspect of this program aims for the promotion of minority languages through acquisition. To qualify, the staff must have a good knowledge of the First Nation, its language, culture and traditions (Government of Canada 2001:22). Moreover, the management techniques must be adapted to the culture and the use of an aboriginal language (Government of Canada 2001:25). A few years before, it was specified that the program would emphasize the promotion of cultures and languages, education and health (Government of Canada 1998). The same document underscores that aboriginal children have the right to learn their language and their history, with the help of adults. But, the most important part of the document is entitled “Culture and language” which emphasises that aboriginal children should deepen the knowledge of the language and culture of their community (Government of Canada 1998).

The program has experienced some relative success. For example, in the 2000-2001 report, about 6,500 children were served for a total of 68 projects in 300 communities

(Government of Canada 2003:6). Table 1 below shows the number of children served and the number of centres in which the program is practised (for a federal funding of \$27,000,000).

Region	Number of centres	Number of children served	Number of special needs children served	Number of children on waiting lists
Alberta	53	933	59	270
Atlantic	36	663	32	89
Manitoba	20	659	52	178
Ontario	15	643	30	90
Québec	38	1,443	57	596
Pacific	75	892	100	120
Saskatchewan	77	1,234	47	548
Total	314	6,467	377	1,891

TABLE 1. AHSRP project demographics as reported by regions 2000-2001

The Buffalo Lake Aboriginal Head Start in Caslan, Alberta, can illustrate the importance of this program in urban centres. Activities take place in aboriginal languages or in English or both. Teaching methods and strategies are also culturally based.

This program also has some limits. First, there are too many children that need the program, yet different centres accept only a very insignificant number of them. For example, in just Québec, there are about 600 children on the waiting list. Second, there is not enough infrastructure, didactic material and funding to recruit more children. Third, teachers are not always qualified and, to remedy this lack, principals rely on aboriginal people who are fluent in the community language. Finally, the general problem is that both teachers and learners resort to OL most of the time. So children end up learning about Euro-Canadian culture instead of their own.

3.5. IMPORTANCE OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION. Bilingual education is a partial immersion program at the primary and secondary levels with the media of instruction being an OL and an aboriginal language. It is offered in such linguistic communities as Chipewyan, Cree, Gwich'in, Dogrib, Slavey, Innu, Inuktitut, Micmac, Mohawk, Naskapi, Ojibwa, Tlingit, etc. It has several advantages: apart from language revitalisation, it enables the students who take it to obtain very good results in intelligence tests, more success in L2 and math, and to be more sensitive to other cultures and more successful in school (Taskforce 2005:94). The immersion program in Mohawk in Kahnawake, Québec, is a good illustration. Not only is it the first immersion program in aboriginal language in Canada (in operation since 1979), but it

is the one which has been the most successful. Hoover and the Kanien'kehaka Raotitiohkwa Cultural Center confirm it when they write:

It has proved so successful that today more than half of the community's students study entirely in Mohawk from nursery school to grade 3, then 60% in Mohawk and 40% in English from grades 4 to 6. The others attend the English-language elementary school in the community, where they receive a half-hour a day instruction in Mohawk. Children at both schools learn French as a third language (1992:271).

Thanks to this type of immersion, the number of L2 Mohawk speakers has considerably increased in Kahnawake. Hoover and the Kanien'kehaka Raotitiohkwa Cultural Center write:

One effect of the Mohawk immersion program is creation of a lost generation of people now in their 20s, 30s and early 40s, who were not given the opportunity to learn to speak Mohawk, and find themselves surrounded by Mohawk speakers. It is not uncommon in Kahnawake to hear people conversing with their grandchildren in Mohawk, then switching to English to speak to their own children (1992:271).

However, bilingual education, like the other types of education discussed above, suffers from the lack of qualified staff, didactic resources and funding, despite the good will of the populations. Also, in spite of the numerous advantages of such a program, it doesn't seem to pick up. In places where it is offered, the intake is very low. For example, at Mi'kmawey school in Nova Scotia, only 35 students from kindergarten to grade 6 were registered in the

bilingual and bicultural program in 1986 (Battiste 1987:121). Many parents choose to put their children in English schools (see Tulloch 2004 for the case of Inuktitut).

3.6. ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES AS L2. The teaching of an aboriginal language as a school subject is more widely used as it is implemented through the Second Language Program. It is offered by local school boards and in band schools. In both cases, it is a mandatory subject taught weekly for 40 to 90 minutes. Its content is chiefly the colours, the numbers, greetings and common expressions used in the community. This program, like the other ones, has problems. Apart from the lack of staff and resources, the content and scope is very limited. It cannot permit a learner to speak fluently. The case of Inuktitut is a clear illustration.

Although it is an OL in Nunavut and NWT, its teaching as a subject is far from satisfactory. According to Tulloch (2004), even if young Inuits take it as a subject up till grade 12, they express serious doubts over the quantity and quality of Inuktitut they learn in class.

3.7. ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES IN HIGHER EDUCATION. In Canada, many postsecondary institutions are specialised in the teaching of, in, or about aboriginal languages and the training of trainers. Two good illustrative cases are the Nunavut Arctic College (NAC) and the First Nations University of Canada (FNUC). Inuktitut occupies a special place at NAC as for all community specialisations, candidates must, among other things, be able to read and write in English and Inuktitut (NAC 2012). For Jewellery, Ironwork or Textile programs, candidates can even be unilingual in Inuktitut (NAC 2012). Many programs are more directly

linked to the language, like that of Language and Culture which offers a postsecondary training on Inuktitut language and culture (NAC 2012). Those who take it are trained as translators and interpreters. To be part of this program, as well as that of Inuit studies, one needs to be fluent in both English and Inuktitut.

FNUC, founded in 1976 as Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, seems to be the only university that devotes the maximum time and efforts to the revitalisation of aboriginal languages. Through the Department of Indian Languages, Literatures & Linguistics, the Department of Indigenous Education, etc., this university promotes languages and cultures of the Prairie. The School of Education, for example, offers various BEd programs for teaching in aboriginal communities. Moreover, the Department of Indian Languages, Literatures and Linguistics offers a BA in Cree linguistic studies, another one in Saulteaux. Such programs are presented thusly:

We have minor, major and honours B.A. programs in both Cree (primarily Plains Cree, though we also accommodate Woods and Swampy dialects of Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba) and Saulteaux (western or Plains Ojibwe). The Cree and Saulteaux programs are actually in the process of being revised to allow for oracy and literacy based concentrations. We also have a minor program in Nakota (Assiniboine) which is undergoing revision to develop a stronger program with cognates for Dakota and Dene (Department Head (DH), personal communication of September 22, 2008).

However, it should be noted that the programs in Cree and Saulteaux are offered to aboriginal people who might not have good oral competence in those languages. So English is generally the language of instruction. The DH confirmed this when he said:

As of right now, our classes are taught primarily in English as the language of instruction, though of course our language-based courses contain a great deal of content in Cree, Saulteaux, etc. Some of our upper year courses (and hopefully more in the new programs) are taught by fluent speakers who - given a class of fluent speakers - will conduct at least a portion of the class in the language, rather than English. However, I would have to honestly say we are still some way from offering our courses completely in Cree, Saulteaux, etc. It's a target to shoot for ... (personal communication, September 22, 2008).³

Moreover, professors themselves are not always fluent in the target language. The DH is honest when he reveals:

For the most part, our language instructors are fluent speakers, though we have sometimes out of necessity (the unavailability of fluent speakers) employed instructors with less than full fluency for intro classes with non-fluent students. We try to avoid that. However, certain courses in our program do not require fluency and are in fact taught almost exclusively in English (except for examples in the target language). These are mostly linguistic structure courses, such as the ones I mostly teach. I am by no means fluent, nor would I be able

to conduct an entire course in Cree even if I tried (personal communication, September 24, 2008).

Also, there is little or no synergy between those universities and different community associations. For example, at FNUC, the Cree Language Retention Committee and the Cree Language Commission are not sufficiently involved in the Cree programs. The DH confirms: “It is in part a sad truth that we suffer from the ‘ivory tower’ syndrome in that we do not necessarily have a lot of links to the community at this point - other than the links forged by individual faculty with their own communities” (personal communication, September 24, 2008). Such a collaboration should be reinforced and even instituted so that professionals could discuss their experiences, and that linguistic and cultural associations which directly work on language retention in the field could be involved in the design and implementation of programs.

4. CONCLUSION AND PROSPECTS. For a better revitalisation of aboriginal languages in school, it might be a better idea to adopt a bottom-up approach exclusively. It is only a linguistic community that can save its language with means they can mobilise by themselves. In this case, the State would just perform the role of a regulator by creating a legislative framework for the promotion and revitalisation of those languages, which already appears to be the case. Language laws, even good ones, are often tinged with governmentality. Foucault (1991) reminds us that laws are generally multiform tactics of the government when he underscores, “Within the perspective of government, law is not what is important: [...] it is not through

laws that the aims of government are to be reached” (1991:96). One would not be wrong to believe that language laws are aimed more at consolidating the unity of a country, without any genuine desire for the preservation of everyone’s languages.

So, to substantially better the situation of aboriginal languages, many of which are moribund, each linguistic community would normally be leading all language planning initiatives in the field, without expecting any decisive help from anybody. To achieve this, a lot of upstream work must be done: self-organization, self-motivation of parents and youth who might be suffering from negative attitudes they themselves have towards their languages, financial autonomy, primacy of the training of teachers without whom no serious revitalisation strategy can take place in a school, the primacy of pedagogic resources, etc. So a lot needs to be done prior to opening schools or creating education programs.

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¹ The Indian Act, which determines the status of an Indian and defines his/her rights and duties, stipulates that the federal government handles the protection, health and education of Aboriginal people. This act gives the federal government the power to be the sole owner of the land. Although the Indian Act was deeply revised in 1951, its spirit remains fundamentally the same: colonise, control and assimilate Aboriginal people. Hence Ennamorato denounces it as being a “paternalistic anachronism and a national embarrassment to Canada” (1999:53).

² Indian reserves, after all, allowed aboriginal communities, notably the parents, to preserve their languages and cultures.

³ When asked about the quantity of the target language students might have in a course, Wolvengrey wrote: “Our students range from fully fluent to having no knowledge of the language whatsoever. With fluent speakers, we have tended to concentrate on building literacy skills. Non-fluent speakers are taught the spoken language to a degree, though written materials also tend to end up predominating in the upper classes. We are hoping to address this with the current changes to our programs meant to promote more oracy skills by adding upper level conversation/public speaking courses, as well as classes in transcription, translation and interpretation. This will give non-speakers more exposure to and more opportunity to learn the spoken language, and allow fluent speakers to use and develop the skills they already have” (personal communication, September 24, 2008).