The Atlantic Aboriginal Economic Development
Integrated Research Program, AAEDIRP

Best Practices and Challenges in Mi’kmaq and
Maliseet/Wolastoqi Language Immersion Programs

March 2011

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**Best Practices and Challenges in Mi’kmaq and Maliseet/Wolastoqi Language Immersion Programs** is one of nine research reports on Aboriginal economic development released Atlantic Aboriginal Economic Development Integrated Program, (AAEDIRP) in 2010 - 2011.

The AAEDIRP is a unique research program formed through partnerships between the 38 member communities of the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs (APCFNC), plus the Inuit, 12 Atlantic universities and 4 government funders, both federal and provincial. AAEDIRP funders include Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC), the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) and the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, Nova Scotia. The AAEDIRP conducts research on Aboriginal economic development that is relevant to communities, builds Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal research capacity, conducts workshops on Aboriginal economic development and is developing a database on this topic. **The main purpose of the AAEDIRP is to improve the knowledge base concerning Atlantic Aboriginal economic development in order to improve the lives of the Aboriginal people in the region.**

The APCFNC is a policy research organization that analyzes and develops culturally relevant alternatives to federal policies that impact on the Mi’kmaq, Maliseet, Passamaquoddy and Innu Aboriginal communities and peoples.

*Maliseet Artist Arlene Christmas (Dozay) created the AAEDIRP logo*

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Best Practices and Challenges in Mi’kmaq and Maliseet/Wolastoqi Language Immersion Programs

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Executive Summary

Strong educational attainment goes hand in hand with robust economic development. Tait (1999) analyzed 1996 census data and found that Aboriginal students who complete high school double their chances of being employed compared to Aboriginal students who do not complete high school. Hull (2008) repeated the research 5 years later using census data from 2001 “showing that employment rates are heavily influenced by educational attainment, with employment rates for Aboriginal populations rising with higher levels of education” (Council of Ministers of Education, 2010, p. 28). These findings assert the important connection between schooling and community economic development. The Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat (APC) through its research arm Atlantic Aboriginal Economic Development Integrated Research Program (AAEDIRP) determined the need for research that would point to best practices in Indigenous schooling in order to increase the number of Indigenous students who would graduate from high school as confident lifelong learners ready to engage in community economic development. Early on in the discussion of best practices, language immersion programs in which Mi’kmaq and Wolastoqi Latuwewakon are used as the language of instruction surfaced as promising educational projects to explore. This report details the findings of research into the ways one Mi’kmaw and one Wolastoqi community implemented and cultivated successful immersion programs.

Benefits of immersion

Investing in Indigenous immersion makes linguistic, cultural, and academic sense. By their design immersion programs “incorporate linguistic and cultural knowledge into curriculum in ways that democratize schooling for Indigenous students and

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1 The spelling Mi’kmaq/Mi’kmaw in this documents follows the usage recommended by Sherise Paul-Gould and Starr Sock, the Mi’kmaq researchers who were part of this project.
support the retention of their languages and culture” (McCarty et al., 1997, p. 88). Children who develop confidence in who they are will be more likely to develop competence in school (Aguilera, 2007; Ball & Simpkins, 2004; Cummins, 1996/2001; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). Confident, competent students are more likely to become successful and contributing members of their community. And community building and renewal ensure the continuation of a people. “Ultimately it is through language that we not only preserve what we have but create and re-create that which is to come. And if we can ignite the fire of everyday life back into the language, we will no longer be racing against the clock, but instead trying to outrun the sun: the former quest is finite, the latter eternal” (Fillerup, 2000, p. 33).

**Project objectives**
This project had seven objectives which focused research efforts to document and create awareness about the benefits of Mi’kmaq and Wolastoqi Latuwewakon immersion programs and share knowledge about implementation and development of these programs:

- To document the successes and challenges of the Mi’kmaq and Wolastoqi Latuwewakon immersion programs so they can be shared in our own and other communities;
- To explore the impact of Mi’kmaq and Wolastoqi language immersion programs on students’ fluency, academic achievement, and identities;
- To articulate some of the broader leadership and capacity building processes and community assets which appear to have allowed these immersion programs to thrive;
- To articulate challenges and barriers at the community, provincial, and federal levels that may include legislation, funding arrangements, and policies that may impede implementation of immersion programming;
- To articulate the link between Indigenous youth having a solid grasp of their language and a strong identity to their educational success, future career, lifelong learning, and contribution to their community;
• To provide recommendations for the development of immersion programs in Mi’kmaq and Maliseet communities where they currently do not exist;
• To build the research capacity of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, faculty, and Indigenous graduate students.

Methodology
This is a mixed methods study, with the majority of the research being qualitative in nature, as well as a quantitative section. The two research sites for this study, schools in Eskasoni and Tobique, were chosen because they are the sites where immersion programs in Mi’kmaq and Wolastoqi exist. Because the immersion program in Eskasoni is 10 years old and extends from Kindergarten to Grade 3 and the program in Tobique is in its third year and is offered to Kindergarten 4 and Kindergarten 5 classes, the data from each site is unique to its context. Therefore, acknowledging that the two immersion programs are at different stages of development, this study does not compare the two sites. Instead, analysis focuses on the strengths and challenges of each program. From the data on best practices gathered in immersion classrooms, two substantial documents have been developed: *L’nui’sultinej: Eskasoni Mi’kmaq Immersion Program Description*, and *Tobique Wolastoqi Immersion Program Description*.

Studying the impacts of immersion on former immersion students involved two kinds of data collection and analysis, one quantitative and one qualitative. Firstly, to address academic achievement, data was collected on reading scores of Grade 7 students in Eskasoni and analyzed to determine performance levels of students who had completed the K-3 Immersion program as compared to students who had been in the English stream. This quantitative data analysis provides an important indication of academic achievement. Teachers, Elders, parents, and former immersion students were interviewed for their perspectives on the impact of the immersion program. These interviews provided rich data from a variety of viewpoints. This report provides a detailed analysis of these data. As well, it
addresses the links between successful immersion education, lifelong learning, career aspirations, and on-going contributions to their community.

Focus groups and interviews were used to gather the data for the third and fourth objectives, which involved identifying the broader conditions that allowed the immersion programs to develop and to identify those people whose leadership and advocacy helped create and sustain the Mi’kmaq and Wolastoqi Latuwewakon immersion programs, as well as the challenges and barriers encountered along the way.

Articulating the link between Indigenous youth having a solid grasp of their language and a strong identity, and their educational success, future career, lifelong learning, and contribution to their community, is a vital one for this project. Using the interview data, we looked for themes that illustrate the critical relationships between language, identity, and students’ future employment and other career goals (and those of their parents and teachers), as well as themes that support the Immersion program as a successful model in creating lifelong learners.

In the conclusion of this study the findings of the research team were synthesized to develop recommendations for the development of immersion programs in Mi’kmaq and Wolastoqi communities where they currently do not exist. Finally this report addresses the objective of building the research capacity of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers, faculty, and Indigenous graduate students.

**Findings**
The strengths and best practices of the immersion programs at the two research sites are detailed in the two booklets developed which show the kinds of curriculum happening each day in the classrooms. The rich teaching and learning activities, the use of culture and everyday teaching moments, and relational ways of interacting provide evidence of the sound pedagogy that is developing in these programs. The
Eskasoni booklet, completed in an earlier project, is available upon request. The Tobique booklet is attached in Appendix A.

The findings related to the impacts of immersion on former immersion students showed clear benefits to participating in the program, even to students who are up to five years out of the program. The benefits can be seen in the areas of academic achievement, identity, and language fluency. Significantly, the English reading abilities of former immersion students appear to be higher overall than those of their non-immersion peers (See Figure 2).

In analysing the leadership and assets that enabled these communities to begin immersion programs, as well as their challenges, this study revealed that certain factors need to be in place such as a core of people who share a long-term vision and commitment to immersion; capable personnel at the community, school, and classroom level; a plan for certification for teachers from the community and immersion pedagogy training; strategies for development of curriculum and teaching materials at the community level; and partnerships with other communities, universities and bodies such as Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey.

In terms of the impact of immersion programs on community economic development, a number of promising indicators emerge from this report. High self-esteem, intellectual curiosity, strong work ethic, and awareness and pride in ancestral language and culture surface as qualities found in former immersion students. These qualities are foundations for success as lifelong learners, as engaged community members and citizens, and as accomplished professionals.

**Recommendations**

Based on the analysis of the data gathered in this study and the findings of the literature review, the following recommendations have been developed for communities wishing to begin Indigenous immersion programs as well as for communities with existing programs. They are grouped into sub-categories of...
leadership, planning priorities, resource development, both human and material, research, issues beyond the school, and future directions for existing programs

**Leadership**

1. **Just do it!** Once you have some committed community members pushing for immersion, start the program. Do not wait until everything is in place to begin, as you may never be 100% ready. Typically, Indigenous immersion programs have been started by a small group of people with a passion and a will to keep the ancestral language alive.

2. **Leadership is key.** AFN has provided strong recent support for Aboriginal immersion. Capitalize on leadership at the federal and provincial levels as a means to cultivate community support. Lobby at these levels for stable and adequate funding to support Indigenous immersion programming in the same way these bodies support French immersion.

3. **Garner community and school board support.** Leaders who invest time and energy in educating community members and school board members about Aboriginal immersion are invaluable. They garner support for the immersion from decision makers such as the education director, and encourage parents to enroll their children in the program. They also support and lobby for funding at the band council or school board level to send teachers for Indigenous immersion training.

4. **Garner the support of the school administration.** The immersion program will require commitment by school administrators in terms of both moral support and funding decisions that enable this new program to flourish. Items such as materials, resource support for students with special learning needs, teacher aides, and preparation time need to be considered.
5. **Keep focused on the purposes of the immersion program**, which are to create a stronger pool of fluent speakers of the language and to make speaking the language an avenue for career success and citizenship within the community.
Planning priorities

6. **Make a plan to support education of as many qualified teachers** from the community as possible, preferably speakers. This is the foundation upon which the immersion program will be built and continued over time.

7. **Develop a university partnership to put this plan of certifying teachers into action.** The Canadian Deans of Education (2010) have committed to prioritizing support for Indigenous teacher education and therefore universities will be open to such a partnership.

8. **Make plans for Indigenous immersion teacher training** for qualified teachers. The success of the current immersion training programs at St. Francis Xavier University (StFX) and St. Thomas University is evident.

Resource development: Human and material

9. **Develop an Aboriginal immersion approach that focuses on language use for communicative purposes,** rather than emphasizing phonetic methods that de-contextualize the language. It is vital to ensure the students remain enthusiastic about the program.

10. **Create a centre for development of curriculum materials.** These will often have to be created at the local level. This is a big task for any Aboriginal immersion program and teachers will require a great deal of support in developing books, posters, multi-media materials, subject-specific textbooks, and worksheet resources.

11. **Draw on the community assets** such as Elders and community members who can read and write the language and who hold traditional knowledge.
12. **Create regular opportunities for professional development** for immersion teachers and supporters. Forums such as the biennial L’nui’sultinej Mi’kmaq Language Conference are important for teachers and supporters to share ideas and re-energize.

13. **Create Language Advisory teams** made up of community members who can provide ideas for curriculum development in language and culture and support to sustain enthusiasm for the program.

14. **Draw on the resources developed by other communities** with immersion programs. These resources can sometimes be used as they are, and often can be adapted to provide templates for creating a community's own resources. Contacts with current immersion teachers can be very helpful.

15. **Arrange for visits to community with existing immersion programs.** Seeing the successes of immersion programs firsthand empowers leaders to begin that journey in their own communities.

**Research**

16. **Access current research** on successes of Indigenous immersion programs in Atlantic Canada and beyond to garner community support. Parents and others who are new to immersion may be skeptical of its success, and this research can change their minds.

17. **Make current research available online.** Research from this study will be accessible through a link on the First Nations Help Desk website. Future research should be added to this online reference site.

18. **Begin gathering data** on the immersion program as soon as the program starts in your community. This data will enable leaders to garner more community support. Gather data such as attendance data, anecdotal
comments, achievement test results, and progress reports to document the program’s success.

_Beyond the school_

19. **Create opportunities for language use outside the school.** Students need to hear the language outside of school, in a variety of contexts. For example, make Mi'kmaq/Wolastoqi Lutuwewakon the language of community workplaces and community events. Develop programming for community radio and television stations in the ancestral language.

20. **Develop adult language classes.** To support their children in immersion, parents and others are motivated to learn the language. Adult classes that focus on oral language are needed.

21. **Provide opportunities to showcase students speaking the language** such as Christmas concerts, Elder teas, and other community events. Recognize that this will help overcome some of the resistance to immersion in the community.

_Future directions for existing programs_

22. **Develop a plan for replacing trailblazers** who taught in the first years of immersion programs. This requires continuing to recruit younger speakers of the language into the teaching profession and providing them with immersion training.

23. **Expand the current immersion programs.** All research participants called for expansion of the immersion programs downward into pre-school and upward into higher grades.

24. **In expanding current immersion programs, aim to develop a dual track bilingual system.** When immersion stops too early, many of the important
gains in fluency and achievement are lost. Based on the positive findings of these two programs there is no reason why the programs should not be extended so that students could continue in immersion right to Grade 12. Using a dual track model where students continue learning some subjects using Mi’kmaq/Wolastopi as the language of instruction and other subjects using English as the language of instruction, as is the case in French immersion, students will maintain all the gains they made in the early immersion program as they continue through school.

Final words

25. **Keep at it!** Developing and sustaining Indigenous immersion programs requires long-term collective efforts on the part of many stakeholders.

**Building research capacity**

The seventh objective of the research study was to build the research capacity of Aboriginal researchers and faculty and Aboriginal graduate students. Starr Sock and Sherise Paul-Gould, MEd students at St. Francis Xavier University, gathered the data for Objective Two as their MEd thesis data collection. Their thesis, titled, *Fluency, Identity and Student Achievement: An In-depth Study of the Mi’kmaq Immersion Program in One Community*, uses interview data and quantitative data on reading test scores, which they gathered as part of this project. Darcy Pirie and Roseanne Clark in Tobique gathered data and developed the program description in Tobique. In both communities, wonderful, rich data was gathered and used in ways that would never have been possible without the outstanding abilities of these researchers. University-based researchers Joanne Tompkins and Anne Murray Orr also learned a great deal about Indigenous research methods and about Indigenous immersion programs in the process of this research study.
A word on language and terminology

Language and terminology are important. The authors have attempted to consider the most appropriate words to use, understanding that words will mean different things depending on the place and time in which they are used. Several terms are commonly used to represent Indigenous peoples. Aboriginal, Indigenous, and First Nations are all terms that appear in the research. Following Marie Battiste’s (personal communication, 2011) advice we use Aboriginal to speak of the experiences of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit who are based in Canada and we use Indigenous when we speak of experiences beyond Canada. Indigenous immersion efforts talk of ‘reclaiming’, ‘revitalizing’, ‘preserving’, and ‘stabilizing’ the language. The authors borrow from the researchers at Northern Arizona University (Cantoni, 1997), preferring the term language stabilization, which appears to them to be a hopeful term. In the research there are several terms used for Indigenous languages; the terms ancestral, heritage, and tribal are found in the literature. Tribal is commonly used in American research papers. Heritage is commonly used in the literature on bilingual education but often refers to non-Indigenous languages. For the purposes of this report we have chosen to use the term ancestral languages to represent Indigenous languages such Mi’kmaq and Wolastoqi Latuwewakon. In the research on the immersion program at Tobique, we use Wolastoqi Latuwewakon [the Maliseet word for the language] to respect the traditional name for the language by the Wolastoqiyik or Maliseet people, as suggested by the Advisory Committee for this project.
Preamble and Review of Literature

Strong educational attainment goes hand in hand with robust economic development. The following table, published in a report by Statistics Canada and the Council of Ministers of Education Canada in 2010, points to research conducted by Tait (1999) in which he used 1996 census data to show a clear decrease in unemployment levels with an increase in education levels for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth.

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<th>Aboriginal</th>
<th>Non-Aboriginal</th>
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<tr>
<td>No high school completed</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School certificate</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College completed</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University completed</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
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Table 1. Unemployment Levels and Education (Tait, 1999, p. 27).

The findings are clear. Aboriginal students who complete high school double their chances of being employed compared to Aboriginal students who do not complete high school. Hull (2008) repeated the research five years later using census data from 2001 “showing that employment rates are heavily influenced by educational attainment, with employment rates for Aboriginal populations rising with higher levels of education” (Council of Ministers of Education, 2010, p. 28). These findings assert the importance connection between schooling and community economic development. The Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat (APCFNC) through its research arm Atlantic Aboriginal Economic Development Integrated Research Program (AAEDIRP) determined the need for research that would point to best practices in Indigenous schooling that would increase the number of Indigenous students who would graduate from high school as confident lifelong learners ready to engage in community economic development. Early on in the discussion of best practices, immersion programs in which Mi’kmaq and Wolastqo Latuwewakon are used as the language of instruction surfaced as promising educational projects to explore.
This report details the findings of research into the ways one Mi’kmaw and one Wolastoqi community implemented and cultivated successful immersion programs. It shows the promising outcomes that can happen when Indigenous youth learn in their ancestral language. When students’ cultural and linguistic identity is affirmed it increases their chances of greater academic success, and their future career, lifelong learning, and their contributions to their communities will be enhanced. AAEDIRP’s Atlantic Aboriginal Economy Building Strategy Goal 3—to develop a skilled and educated Indigenous workforce that can fully participate in the regional economy—is directly addressed in a section of this report entitled *Links between immersion and economic development, lifelong learning, and community contributions*. A goal of this research is to encourage more communities to implement immersion programs, based on the findings and recommendations of this report.

**Indigenous Languages: Precious and Precarious**

Indigenous languages are more than vehicles of interpersonal communication. Marie Battiste (2000) states, “Aboriginal languages are the basic media for the transmission and survival of Aboriginal consciousness, cultures, literatures, histories, religions, political institutions, and values. They provide distinctive perspectives on and understanding of the world” (p. 199). Indigenous languages are sacred and sources of learning about personal and collective strength. On the occasion of International Mother Language Day February 23, 2011, Assembly of First Nations National Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo stated: “Indigenous languages represent the collective heritage and identity of this country and this land. Our Elders have called upon us to never forget our languages, to teach them and to learn from our languages. Indigenous languages must be recognized, respected, fully supported and should be a source of celebration and pride throughout Canada” (Young & Garon, 2011).
Indigenous languages are the main vehicles for passing Indigenous culture on to subsequent generations. Kirkness (1998a) says they are the “principle instrument by which culture is transmitted from one generation to another, by which members of a culture communicate meaning and make sense of their shared experience. Because language defines the world and experience in cultural terms, it literally shapes our way of perceiving the work – our world view... For Aboriginal people, the threat that their languages could disappear...is that their distinctive world view, the wisdom of their ancestors and their ways of being human could be lost as well” (p. 17).

As the world becomes more globalized many minority languages find themselves in an endangered position. International research (Francis & Reyhner, 2002; Skutnab-Kangaas, 2000) states that as many as 90-95% of spoken languages may be extinct or very seriously endangered during this century. Indigenous languages are more likely to be endangered than other languages (Makoni & Pennycook, 2005; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

Eurocentrism, which viewed the dominance of European or Western ways of knowing, doing and being as superior to those of Indigenous people, created political, economic, and social and cultural institutions and systems that led to losses for Indigenous peoples. Relationships to land, resources, family and kin, Indigenous language, and livelihood were all dramatically and often violently changed through colonizing processes (RCAP, 1996; Smith, 1999; Ward, 2005). Formal schooling was seen as a particularly effective cultural institution to speed up the process of assimilation of Indigenous peoples. The residential school movement represents an overtly violent effort to deny Aboriginal people access to their language and culture and much ancestral language loss occurred during this period (Knockwood, 1992). Eurocentric attitudes and their current contemporary manifestation in White privilege continue to create “disinterest in supporting language revitalization or the inclusion of Aboriginal paradigms in education institutions” (Ireland, 2009, p. 26) and perpetuate “English-only attitudes” (Settee,
2008, p. 5) in relation to schooling. Interestingly the mainstream dialogue around Indigenous language loss tends to ignore the colonizing forces that were/are at play regarding language loss and rather creates a discourse about ‘choice’, locating language loss at the level of the individual rather than seeing it at the systemic level. As Battiste (2011) states, “There are social, cultural, political, financial, hegemonic forces that effectively diminish Aboriginal languages and these need to be highlighted lest one think that Aboriginal peoples really had a choice! Aboriginal languages were stolen.”

Aboriginal languages in Canada are in a particularly precarious position and are considered critically endangered and UNESCO states that they are among the most threatened languages in the world (Wurm, 1996). “Canadian census data gathered in 1996, and again in 2001 show a 5% drop both in the proportion of Aboriginal people ‘able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language’ (from 29% to 24%) and in the proportion ‘whose mother tongue is Aboriginal’ (from 26% to 21%; Norris, 2007, p. 19)” (as cited in Sakar & Metallic, 2009, p. 50).

Closer to home and directly applicable to this research are comments by Tim Nicholas from Tobique who worries about the fact that only 10% of the community’s 1600 residents are fluent in Wolastoqi. He states that is difficult to find people with whom he can speak in his mother tongue. “I go around my community speaking my language and people don’t understand me," he says. "It’s like I’m speaking Chinese. Now that’s sad” (Pritchett, 2010). Nicholas points to the trend all too common in many Indigenous communities where speakers of the language are typically over 50, people in their 40s often understand but do not speak the language and those under 40 neither understand nor speak the language. Nicholas worries that if the trend does not change, the language spoken by the Wolastoqiyik will become extinct.

A key way to reverse language loss is to begin by introducing and/or reintroducing the language to the young people. Greymorning (1997), working in language
stabilization in Arapaho communities, states, “the future of any language lies in its ability to be passed on to successive generations” (p. 22). This ‘intergenerational transmission’ (Fishman, 2001) in which adults pass language on to young speakers is essential for language continuity.

**The Promise of Immersion Programs**

“Languages are not ‘subjects’ per se and they cannot be successfully acquired unless they are used for the purposes of active communication” (Fishman, 2001, p. 470). This statement underlies immersion teaching. Learning about a language does not create fluency in that language, as many graduates of core language programs will attest. Rather, learning ‘in’ the language—using the language for real communicative purposes in authentic situations—creates speakers. In this paper, we generally use DeJong’s (1998) definition of immersion as “a method of foreign [or for our purposes, Indigenous] language instruction in which the individual receives all instruction in the target language” (p. 35). Currently, however, some communities (Inuit and Maori) do use the term Language of Instruction (LOI) synonymously with the term immersion.

Indigenous language activists and researchers advocate for the adoption of immersion programs as a way to stabilize Indigenous languages. From his work in Arapaho communities Greymorning (1997) claims “...if we are to maintain any hope of keeping our language viable and alive, it remains absolutely essential that we shift our focus from teaching our children words and phrases to passing on to them the ability to think and effectively communicate in our native languages” (p. 25). Paupanekis and Westfall (2001) speak from the context of language work in Cree communities and state that: “Students should be learning to use the language, not just learning the words in isolation” (p. 8). From yet another location, the Navajo immersion programs at Rock Point Community School and the Fort Defiance Elementary School in Arizona, McCarty and Schaffer (1992) assert, “Using a
language to communicate is infinitely more interesting and creative than the repetition of drilled sequences stripped of context and intention” (p. 119). The success of Indigenous language immersion programs built upon the success of immersion programs that began to flourish in the bilingual language movement of the 1960s. In an effort to create develop bilingualism among Quebec Anglophones an innovative program was put in place in which children from English speaking homes were placed in classrooms where the language of instruction was French. The ‘experiment’ as it was called at the time, was carefully scrutinized and well researched. There was great deal of worry that children educated in a language that was not their home language would suffer academically in school. Yet as early as 1962, Peal and Lambert came to a different conclusion. A rigorous comparison of monolingual and bilingual children showed that bilinguals have a strong cognitive advantage. The bilinguals’ experiences with two languages seemed to result in mental flexibility, greater skill at forming concepts, and a more diversified set of mental abilities. By contrast, the monolinguals appeared to have rather unitary cognitive structures, which restricted their problem-solving ability. Many subsequent studies with bilingual children have substantiated Peal and Lambert’s results (Bialystock & Ryan, 1985; Cummins, 1987; Hakuta, 1986; McLaughlin, 1984)” (Cantoni, 1997, p. 2). The students became fluent in second language with no negative effects on their academic performance in English. The early French immersion experiments were dubbed ‘the balloon that flew’ and mushroomed in popularity throughout the country (Argue, Lapkin, & Swain, 1983).

Attempting to reverse the assimilating effects of schooling in English and borrowing from the success of immersion programming in French, early Indigenous language activists began setting up models of programs where Indigenous languages were used as the language of instruction. The Kahnawake Mohawk Immersion program was the first Aboriginal language immersion program in Canada established under the leadership of Dorothy Lazore (Freeman, 1995). The results of Aboriginal immersion were as promising as they had been for French, and Indigenous immersion programs began to be emerging in Canada, the United States and
throughout the world. Dorothy Lazore played an important role in assisting in setting up the Hawaiian Immersion program and was instrumental in providing teacher training and leadership for immersion teachers in both Eskasoni and Tobique, the two communities involved in this study. Since that time immersion programs have been successfully used in a variety of Indigenous schools (Dick et al., 1994; Holm & Holm, 1995; McCarty & Dick, 1996; Russell & Glynn, 1998; Slaughter, 1997; Stiles, 1997; Taylor & Wright, 2003).

Jim Cummins, an educator whose pioneering research on bilingual education helped many minority language communities advocate for immersion programs, argues that part of why Indigenous language immersion programs work so well is that they address fundamental issues of power. Cummins (1989) argues that children from dominant groups enter schooling with their identity generally intact by virtue of the power they gain from being in that dominant position. In Quebec in the 1960s the English children, although they were a minority in terms of number, were in fact part of a powerful dominant group in terms of power. Through French immersion the young English children simply added another language on to their intact English identity and experience and experienced what he calls ‘additive bilingualism’. Children from non-dominant groups (new Canadians, Aboriginal, and African Canadian) are in a minority position relative to the dominant group. When children who are in a minority position enter school they are already part of a devalued group and their identity is not as robust as it would be if they were part of a dominant group. If minority children are taught in English (rather than their ancestral or home language) they will likely experience ‘subtractive bilingualism’ in which they lose their ability and confidence in their home or ancestral language as they learn English. These children do not develop a strong bicultural identity.

For this reason most immigrant and Indigenous people have suffered ‘subtractive bilingualism’ as part of their schooling experience. Cummins (1996/2001) maintains that bilingual education is about rebalancing power relationships between marginalized and dominant groups. “The bilingual debate reflects a
...discourse of disempowerment intended to reinforce coercive relations of power” (p. 45). He argues, “What is needed is culturally relevant pedagogy that encourages students to maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding academically. Culturally relevant pedagogy advocates that the ways in which identities are negotiated in the micro-interactions between educators and students must challenge the coercive pattern of macro-interactions in the broader society” (p. 31).

Wright and Taylor (2000) point to research among Inuit children in Nunavik, QC and showed that by placing minority students [Inuit] in a school where the societal dominant language [French, English] is being taught sets these children on a path toward subtractive bilingualism. Whereas if [Inuit] children are taught in their ancestral language [Inuttitut] first and then in a second language [French, English] (after mastering the ancestral language first), it will not reduce their proficiency in the ancestral language.

Cantoni (1999) sees great hope in Navajo immersion schools, which become sites of language stabilization and reverse their legacy of being agents of colonization. “School can and must become a strong promoter of minority language preservation and transmission instead of continuing to be one of the main agents of its endangerment” (p. 6).

In this report we focus on the three main aims of Indigenous immersion programming. These aims are to develop fluency in the Indigenous language, strengthen cultural identity and maintain academic achievement in other subject areas.

**Identity**

There is, regrettably a long history of the disastrous effects on Indigenous people of when their language, culture, and identity were ignored, dismissed, devalued, and forbidden in schools. “When a student’s language, culture and experience is ignored or excluded in classroom interactions, students are immediately starting from a disadvantage” (Cummins, 2001, p. 2). This devaluation of identity is created partly
through the existing larger societal power relations in which the dominant class dictates what is best for everyone. This creates a subtractive learning environment for those students from the non-dominant class (as was the case of Aboriginal residential schooling). Andrea Bear Nicholas (2001) claims that communities who engage mother tongue [or Indigenous] language instruction are perhaps engaging in the single most important act of self-determination possible, since language, culture and identity are inextricably interwoven.

In order to create a learning environment that empowers culturally diverse students, educators must embrace their language and culture and include their experiences into the learning process. Cummins (1996/2001) describes the Pajaro Valley Family Literacy Project, where educators acknowledged the language and culture of their Spanish-speaking students. When this was done those students were able to “develop the ability, confidence, and motivation to succeed academically ... and have a sense of ownership for the learning that goes on in the classroom and feel as if they belong” (p. 15).

Cantoni (1997) speaks of the pressure Navajo children feel as they struggle to know where they fit in schooling. They observe their surroundings carefully to decide which parts of their identities are welcome and which ones they must leave at the door. Cantoni argues that young children should not be forced to make that choice. “Most language-minority children encounter powerful pressures for assimilation and conformity to the norms of the mainstream American youth culture even before they enter school. They begin to see themselves as different in language, appearance, and behavior, and they come to regard those differences as undesirable because they impede their easy participation in the society around them. If they want to be accepted, they have to learn English, because others are not going to learn their language. English is the high-status prestige language in the United States and in Canada (as is Spanish in most of Latin America), and although young children do not yet care about prestige and status, they do need belonging and acceptance” (p. 8). Francis and Reyhner (2002) speak of this cultural and ethnic self-affirmation
that occurs in Indigenous language education. “[By] consciously taking on the task of learning and perfecting one’s indigenous language, young people resist the externally imposed conditions for integration into the broader society” (p. 13).

In their research with Inuit children, Wright and Taylor (1995) found how early ancestral language education can have a positive effect on the personal and collective self-esteem of minority language students. As David Littlebear (1990) explains, the English language may provide physical sustenance to American Indians, but tribal language will feed their spirits. Knowing an ancestral language strongly impacts identity, and Ball and Simpkins (2004) suggest that such self-knowledge and pride can even counter the effects of racism. “If children really know who they are, then they can go into white society. We teach them to be proud. The racism is not going to faze them. Instead of shaming, they’re going to hold their head high” (p. 480). In one study of Aboriginal youth and their ability to remain in school in British Columbia school, researchers found that ‘connectedness’ relates to having a good self concept which in turn leads to more youth likely to staying in school (Van der Woerd & Cox, 2003).

Embracing Indigenous immersion programming is about a commitment to build on Indigenous identity and to use that as a strong foundation upon which to cultivate an even stronger identity. McAlpine and Herodier (1994) found that decisions about immersion programming are not merely decisions about language. They are decisions about nation building. “The [Cree] Board’s decision to implement mother tongue instruction can be seen in a much larger context than the preservation and enhancement of the language. It is also potentially a vehicle for strengthening self identity and increasing academic success” (p. 137).

**Fluency**

Not surprisingly, when children are exposed to language in meaningful contexts for extended periods of time and when they are able to use that language for a variety of communicative and cognitive functions, they become fluent speakers. This is the
basis of intergenerational transmission (Fishman, 2001), a principle Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples have used around the globe to ensure language continuance. Several studies provide evidence to support the claim that Indigenous immersion experiences create or sustain fluency in the learners’ ancestral language (Dick, Estell, & McCarty, 1994; Greymorning, 1997; Holm & Holm, 1995; Stiles, 1997; Taylor & Wright, 2003). The contexts differ geographically with the following examples coming from Indigenous experiences in such diverse places as the Canadian Arctic, South-Western United States, the Pacific Islands, and Aotearoa (New Zealand).

Key to developing fluency is extended periods of times required to develop fluency. Greymorning (1997), in his work with the Arapaho language, shows that there was a marked increase in the learning of Arapaho vocabulary when the amount of time devoted to language learning was increased from a few minutes per day, to 45 minutes and then to half a day. Student’s learning of vocabulary and comprehension in kindergarten was much greater than that of preschool where students had only two hours language instruction per day (136 hours over four months).

Not only are children able to learn their ancestral language when immersion is used but they are also able to use that language for complex interactions and to solve complicated problems. In a study conducted in the Katavik School Board in Northern Quebec, it was found that Inuit children who were fluent in their ancestral language of Inuittitut and had completed Grade 2 in an Inuittitut Language of Instruction (LOI) program had developed “a level of language skill that will allow them to use the Inuittitut language to solve complex mental problems” (p. 15). However, children from the same communities who are taking schooling in English or French “while retaining their ability to carry on simple conversations, are falling behind in their ability to function at the highest levels in Inuittitut” (Taylor & Wright, 2003, p. 15).
In Hawaii the Hualapai have adapted the Hualapai Oral Language Test and Language Assessment Scales tests to assess language acquisition and have recorded improvements in skills in their ancestral languages (Stiles, 1997, p. 9). Holm and Holm (1995) show similar results in Fort Defiance, Arizona. “Navajo immersion students did considerably better on tests of Navajo language ability; all but a handful of the original Navajo speakers in the monolingual English program tested lower in Navajo as fourth graders than they had as kindergarteners” (p. 150). This particular study points to the fact that if children do not continue developing their fluency in their ancestral language they will eventually lose the gains they have made. Such research points to the need to continue immersion programs throughout the schooling process. Far too many Indigenous immersion programs terminate by Grade 3 or Grade 4 with the children switching to classrooms where English becomes the language of instruction. Many of the fluency gains are lost when children transition into what Cummins (1989) calls ‘early exit’ immersion models. Far better from the point of view of developing fluency and reversing community language loss would be a dual track model of bilingual education which would see the students continuing their schooling in which there would be a balance between subjects taught in English and those taught using the Indigenous language throughout their entire schooling experience.

The intended effect of immersion programs is to develop fluency in one’s ancestral language, and the above studies show promising evidence of this. It is interesting to note that many of these trailblazing programs began and were sustained by a relatively small number of passionate language advocates, who had only an intuitive sense that immersion would reverse language loss. We are now able to assess these initiatives empirically to show that they are leading to significant language proficiency. For instance, because of the research in Katavik, policy makers can now draw upon this research to show that Inuit children from their communities can use their ancestral language to engage in high level thinking in schooling. Navajo immersion research allows Indigenous community leaders to know with more clarity that immersion programming is preparing students to achieve mastering of
sophisticated elements of reading and writing and social uses of language.

Young children seem well positioned to learn languages. Nicholas (as cited in Pritchett, 2010) notes that “the children seem to innately have the ability to learn it easily...perfecting the Wolastoqi Latuwewakon accent early in their training. ‘It’s like their language skills were dormant and they were woken up,’ he says” (p. 1).

**Academic Achievement**

Of the three dimensions of immersion programs—identity, fluency, and academic achievement—the area of academic achievement is the most misunderstood area for at least two reasons. The first is the powerful and continuous colonial message that elevates the language of the colonizer [English, French, or Spanish] to a superior position relative to the Indigenous language while devaluing, expressing disdain, or forbidding the ancestral language. Residential school policy effectively enforced an English-only policy in schools and, later, many federal day schools effectively assimilated Aboriginal speakers into English by using it as the language of instruction in community schools. Children were frequently punished for speaking their mother tongue. Aboriginal parents often became ashamed of their language and were warned by missionaries and teachers that teaching the ancestral to their children would not allow them access the benefits of mainstream society.

The second reason academic achievement is misunderstood is because of a lack of understanding of the research on bilingual education. Early and erroneous understanding of bilingual education saw the brain as only being able to hold a finite amount of language. Simply stated, the thinking of the day stated that if a child learned one language that language would take up all the space in their brain and there would be little room left for the second language. Consequently the child would perform poorly in the second language. For example a child who spoke Mi’kmaq would have less room to store English and consequently would be weaker in English.
Research has proven that the opposite case is true. If you wanted Mi'kmaq to become strong bilingual learners capable in both Mi'kmaq and English you would be sure to focus on developing strength and competency in Mi'kmaq first and continue to nurture the Mi'kmaq side while adding English as the children develops. As stated previously in the bilingual literature this is called 'additive bilingualism' and it means adding a second language to a strong first language base. Far too often Aboriginal peoples and new Canadians have had a subtractive experience of bilingualism. They arrive at school speaking Wolastoqi Latuwewakon or Polish or Mi'kmaq and through English-only schooling they gradually increase their fluency in English but it is at the expense of their ancestral language. As these students progress through school, English becomes stronger as their ancestral language becomes weaker. This experience of subtractive bilingualism has been far too common a pattern in many Indigenous communities throughout the world.

Cantoni (1997) points to research that supports the transfer that happens between languages in immersion settings. "For those who worry that teaching the home language may interfere with the development of English skills, there is abundant evidence that the opposite occurs (Cummins, 1987). Instruction that promotes proficiency in one’s first language (L1) also promotes proficiency in the second language (L2) provided there is an adequate amount of exposure to L2 and motivation to learn it. Both languages are manifestations of a common underlying proficiency (CUP). The CUP model indicates that concepts and abilities acquired through L1 transfer to L2. For example, bilingual education for Spanish-speaking minorities learning English as a second language leads to higher abilities in both languages, even with limited direct instruction to English (Cummins & Swain, 1986). A student who has mastered a concept of skill in one language does not need to relearn it in his second language; all he needs is learn new words and structures” (p. 2). Parents of immersion students most frequently witness this when they see their children transfer their reading skills developed in Mi’kmaq, for example, to English. They will report with surprise that the children have learned to read in English without anyone formally teaching them that skill. What the children have
done is transfer those reading skills in Mi’kmaq to their English. Immersion teachers know that you teach a child to read only once!

Research on how successful immersion children can be in all academic areas has had difficulty penetrating consciousness at the community level. Many parents and some educators still erroneously believe that if children are schooled in a language other than English their English language skills will suffer and they will fall behind in subjects like math or science. “Research on the academic, linguistic, and cognitive effects of bilingualism indicates that an additive development of oral and written second language has no adverse effects and actually seems to provide important metalinguistic, academic and intellectual benefits. These conclusions are confirmed by rigorous and extensive studies by Cummins (1989), Ramirez (1991), Collier (1992), Lindholm and Aclan (1991) and many others” (Cantoni, 1997, p. 2). In Indigenous settings Rosier and Farella (1976) in their ground-breaking research with Navajo students at Rough Rock showed that these students performed better on standardized achievement tests by the end of Grade 6, after having targeted immersion instruction in Navajo until the middle of Grade 2.

An example from the Mohawk immersion program illustrates how parents’ fears about academic achievement were quelled as the program matured and the children’s achievement was researched and shared with the community. “Initially, the Mohawk immersion program was chosen by a minority of parents. Concerns about the detrimental effects of Mohawk immersion on English language skills have been allayed by several studies which have shown that the English skills of Mohawk immersion students do not suffer in the long run (Genesse & Lambert, 1986; Holobow, Genesse, & Lambert, 1987). These findings parallel those of studies of English-speaking children in French immersion programs (Lambert & Tucker, 1972). The Mohawk immersion program is now oversubscribed, and only the lack of trained teachers prevents more children from attending Mohawk immersion” (Hoover & Kanien’kehaka Raotitiohkwa Cultural Center, 1992, p. 271).
The literature provides other examples that illustrate that children’s academic achievement does not suffer in immersion education. McAlpine and Herodier (1994) report on the benefits Cree teachers notice in Quebec. “The teachers of these children (when they enter school) report that the children who have taken a preschool program in Cree have fewer difficulties with math concepts than children who have not done pre-kindergarten in Cree; these teachers suggest that language contains thought processes and that use of the language has enhanced the cognitive development of the children” (p. 132). Later Stiles (1997) showed the Cree Way immersion program, initiated in 1988 in Quebec, has resulted in “active participation of students in the Cree language and increased proficiency in two languages” (p. 3). More recently Aguilera (2007) examined the history and implementation of language instruction for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian children in three different language communities. Findings from the study indicate that in all three case studies Native-speaking students performed well on the achievement tests, which were given in English even as they were taught through Native medium instruction. “Students who have strong sense of their own ethnic identity do better in school than those who don’t. Schools which reinforce positive ethnic identification for students will produce students with higher achievements” (p. 3).

Pertinent to this study, emerging research in the Eskasoni Mi’kmaq community has shown improved educational achievement has resulted from participation in immersion programming in that community (Orr & Cameron, 2004; Orr, Paul, & Paul, 2002). This research indicated that more research needed to be done to develop local evidence to convince the community that Indigenous language fluency can happen without sacrificing English fluency, as others have shown elsewhere. A preliminary study done by Murray Orr, Orr, and Tompkins (2006) documented best practices in the Mi’kmaq immersion program in Eskasoni and investigated underlying themes in relation to students’ fluency in Mi’kmaq language, identity, and academic achievement.
Parents, educators, and policy makers can, with confidence, point to empirical studies which show Aboriginal students who learn their ancestral language in school are likely to do as well or better than their monolingual peers in academic subjects. This evidence can be shared with parents and policy makers to show the strong effects of these programs upon academic learning. These studies confirm that parents need not choose between Aboriginal fluency and academic success; their children can have both.

**Benefits of Immersion**

This literature review should help reassure leadership at the community and the school level that investing in Indigenous immersion makes linguistic, cultural, and academic sense. By their design immersion programs “incorporate linguistic and cultural knowledge into curriculum in ways that democratize schooling for Indigenous students and support the retention of their languages and culture” (McCarty et al., 1997, p. 88). Children who develop confidence in who they are will be more likely to develop competence in school. Confident, competent students are more likely to become successful and contributing members of their community. And community building and renewal ensure the continuation of a people.

“Ultimately it is through language that we not only preserve what we have but create and re-create that which is to come. And if we can ignite the fire of everyday life back into the language, we will no longer be racing against the clock, but instead trying to outrun the sun: the former quest is finite, the latter eternal” (Fillerup, 2000, p. 33).
Successful Immersion Programs Require Supports at Many Levels

Figure 1. Effects of bilingualism (Cummins, 2001, p. 171)

The cartoon (Figure 1) by Cummins (2001) shows that building effective bilingual education for Indigenous students requires an understanding of the theory behind
language acquisition and also requires the proper level of supports for teachers and parents. In this study, several key ideas arose from communities who have been engaged in Indigenous immersion programs and much can be learned from their experiences.

**Support at the Federal and Provincial Level**

Over a decade ago Aboriginal language activist Verna Kirkness (1998) advocated for legal and financial help to with Indigenous language restoration and reclamation. She proposed an Aboriginal Languages Act be passed which would recognize the obligation, both moral and legal, that the Government of Canada has towards Aboriginal languages. This act would recognize the right of Aboriginal languages to be protected, revitalized, maintained and used. Her work is further supported by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, which Canada signed on November 12, 2010. Articles 13 and 14 of the Declaration call on governments worldwide to acknowledge the rights of Indigenous peoples to revitalize and stabilize their ancestral languages as well as have control over their own education system in which these languages play a central role. More recently Assembly of First Nations National Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo said, “We take this opportunity to call on the Government of Canada and all Canadians to partner with Indigenous peoples in their efforts to revitalize our languages. As the original languages of this land, Indigenous languages require significant investment and it should be comparable to that provided for the two 'official' languages in Canada,” (Young & Garon, 2011, p. 1).

**Support at the Community Level**

The literature is clear that schools alone cannot be expected to be solely responsible for Indigenous language reclamation. Young learners of the language need to see that the language they are learning lives and breathes beyond the walls of the classroom. A political will must be established at the community level that sees language stabilization as part of a larger issue of self-determination for Indigenous people. Nettle and Romaine (2000) speak of cultural and political Indigenous
renaissance as a social movement that is connected with language and cultural revitalization and sovereignty. Political will and leadership need to translate into developing and supporting teachers from the community who are speakers of the ancestral language and act as language advocates. Paupanekis and Westfall (2001) found that in their work with successful Cree language programs parents, community members, and leaders needed to show support for the program. They acknowledge that the whole community needed to be involved in language reclamation work.

Cantoni (1997) states “to keep native languages alive, it is not enough to value them; it is essential to use them ... The community must provide direction, but unless the school system participates in the effort, it may lack credibility in the eyes of today’s sophisticated youth” (p. 5). In a study examining Aboriginal language programs across Canada, Burnaby (1996) points to the support of the community as a critical factor in determining the success of language and culture programs. Looking at language reclamation across the Indigenous world, Francis and Reyhner (2002) note that, “language activists and researchers have pointed to the necessity of conscious and persistent community-wide planning efforts to begin to reverse the tendency toward monolingualism in the national language” (p. 13). Most recently the Alberta Ministry of Education (2007), in their work supporting Aboriginal language programs, declared, “advisory bodies and language committees are effective in creating, guiding, supporting, maintaining, and ensuring consistency and accuracy in language programs” (p. vi).

Specific involvement of parents and grandparents is a key factor in successful immersion programs. Parental involvement and politicization has been found to be a key factor in sustaining immersion programs in other Indigenous communities (Holm & Holm, 1995; Penetito, 2002; Slaughter, 1997; Stiles, 1997). As Elders are seen as the ‘universities’ of the community (McCarty & Dick, 1996), their involvement is seen as crucial. Successful programs depend on making
opportunities for language speaking and listening, socially, outside of school structure (Fishman, 2001; Penetito, 2002).

In terms of providing support for parents to learn the Indigenous language, adult immersion classes are gaining popularity in some communities so that parents can parallel and support their children’s efforts. At the Kanien'kehaka Onkwawenna Raotitiohkwa Cultural Center at Kahnawake, Mohawk adult language classes are offered for the ‘lost generation’ (i.e., 20–40 year olds) and there is a push for community insistence on the use of Mohawk whenever possible. In 2010, with the help of a research grant from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the St. Mary's First Nation launched the first adult Wolastoqi Latuwewakon immersion program (Pritchett, 2010).

Support at the School Level
Paupanekis and Westfall (2001) provide the reader with strategies and recommendations on how to create successful immersion language teaching programs. The authors claim being fluent in the language is not enough to teach successfully; teachers must have formal training in order to produce a successful Indigenous immersion language program. Immersion students must have more learning methods other than just writing and reading the language; rather they need to be interacting orally in the language with the use of games, plays, and music. It has to be something that they can relate to and use in everyday life. Greymorning (2001) looked at the growth and development of the Arapaho immersion program on the Wind River Reservation (Wyoming) and felt that while the children did accomplish mastery of the language, they did not come close to fluency because they lacked the ability to independently use and manipulate the language. Greymorning felt that trained teachers who had an understanding of language acquisition were required to successfully teach immersion programs. This is a common problem among language programs because effective teacher training is not always available. Stiles (1997) and McCarty and Dick (1996) examined programs in Hawaii and in the Navajo nation that supported fluent teacher aides and community members to
achieve teaching degrees/certification. Partnerships between Tobique and St. Thomas University as well as Eskasoni and St. Francis Xavier University are providing training and support for immersion teachers.

Curriculum materials and teaching resources are another challenge for immersion schools since materials have to be produced at the local level. It is difficult for immersion teachers to be both teachers and curriculum planners. Lipka et al. (1998) provide one model of how partnership between groups of teachers, Elders, and researchers can assist with curriculum development. Where partnerships are established with universities, the load of developing immersion programs can be shared (Slaughter, 1997). Communities can show support for immersion programs by supporting staff development in the form of curriculum centers (Fillerup, 2000) and sharing Indigenous language and cultural knowledge. Communities can also engage in cross-community sharing of locally-developed resources thus preventing every community from having to reinvent the wheel (Dick, Estell, & McCarty, 1994).

The recommendations at the Symposia on Stabilizing Indigenous Language (1996) perhaps summarize best the attitudes that need to be in place to ensure that immersion practices are successful and allow Indigenous languages to deepen their roots in each community:

1. All educators must show greater respect and appreciation for cultures of their students’ parents.
2. All educators should not criticize those who use the native language in school.
3. There should be no put-downs of people who use the tribal language on the part of anyone who does not know the language.
4. Perceptions that English is better than the local language should not be accepted or transmitted.
5. All educators (including the school principal) should try to learn the students’ home language; even if they do not become proficient, they will have indicated a certain degree of interest and respect.
6. All educators must realize that, although they alone cannot be responsible for the intergenerational transmission of a language, they can do much to encourage positive attitudes towards it (Cantoni, 1996, p. 4).

**Methodology and Objectives**

The objectives for this project had their genesis in conversations that began at the *Life Long Learning-From Youth to Elder Conference* that took place in Fredericton in March 2009. The objectives were further developed at an AAEDIRP workshop held on August 28, 2009 and these were modified on the basis of subsequent conversations among the research team.

This project had seven primary objectives which focused research efforts to document and create awareness about the benefits of Mi’kmaq and Wolastoqi Latuwewakon immersion programs and share knowledge about implementation and development these programs:

1. To document the successes and challenges of the Mi’kmaq and Wolastoqi Latuwewakon immersion programs so they can be shared in our own and other communities;

2. To explore the impact of Mi’kmaq and Wolastoqi Latuwewakon immersion programs on students’ fluency, academic achievement, and identities;

3. To articulate some of the broader leadership and capacity enhancement processes and community assets which appear to have allowed these immersion programs to thrive;
4. To articulate challenges and barriers at the community, provincial, and federal levels that may include legislation, funding arrangements, and policies that may impede implementation of immersion programming;

5. To articulate the link between Indigenous youth having a solid grasp of their language and a strong identity to their educational success, future career, lifelong learning, and contribution to their community;

6. To provide recommendations for the development of immersion programs in Mi’kmaq and Wolastoqi communities where they currently do not exist;

7. To build and enhance the research capacity of Aboriginal researchers and faculty and Indigenous graduate students.

Research Sites

At the time of the project’s proposal development, there was a Kindergarten to Grade 3 Mi’kmaq Immersion program at Eskasoni, as well as a Kindergarten-for-4-year-olds and Kindergarten-for-5-year-olds Wolastoqi Latuwewakon Immersion program at Tobique. Because these were the only two school-based Indigenous immersion programs in the Maritimes, they were chosen as the research sites for this study.

The Wolastoqi Latuwewakon Immersion program at Mah-Sos School at Tobique First Nation was first introduced in 2007-2008 for 4 year-old (K-4) students. It expanded to the K-5 level the next year, with 2 teachers and 2 classrooms of students. This immersion program was the only Kindergarten program at the school in Tobique; there was not an English Kindergarten running alongside the Immersion classes. There were approximately 30-35 children in the program during the 2009-2010 year, the year of this study. There were no plans to expand the program to
Grade 1 given curriculum and resources limitations.

The Mi’kmaq Immersion program at Eskasoni Elementary School in Eskasoni First Nation began in 2000. Mi’kmaq is the language of instruction for Kindergarten, Primary, and Grade 1. English is gradually introduced in Grades 2 and 3, while Mi’kmaq remains the main language of instruction in these grades. In this large community, the Mi’kmaq Immersion program is offered side-by-side with the English program in Kindergarten to Grade 3. When the program began, more children were enrolled in English language Kindergarten programs than in Mi’kmaq Immersion Kindergarten, but as the program has developed there are now more children being enrolled in the Mi’kmaq Immersion program as they enter school. There are six certified Mi’kmaq-speaking teachers and one resource teacher working in the Mi’kmaq Immersion program.

**Methodology**

This is a mixed methods study, with the majority of the research being qualitative in nature, as well as a quantitative section. The methods used in meeting our first objective involved classroom-based observation to document the collection of resources developed and used by immersion teachers, and to study the immersion curriculum developed by teachers and schools, in order to provide a complete picture of the best practices and challenges of the Eskasoni and Tobique immersion programs. Field notes, photographs, and documents were the kinds of data collected. This data collection was undertaken by Roseanne Clarke and Darcy Pirie in Tobique. Joanne Tompkins and Anne Murray Orr completed this work in Eskasoni in an earlier study (Murray Orr, Orr, & Tompkins, 2006). From the data gathered, two substantial documents have been developed, *L’nui’stintinej: Eskasoni Mi’kmaq Immersion Program Description*, and *Tobique Wolastoqi Latuwewakon Immersion Program Description*. The *Tobique Wolastoqi Latuwewakon Immersion Program Description* is attached in Appendix A. *L’nui’stintinej: Eskasoni Mi’kmaq Immersion Program Description* (Murray Orr, Orr, & Tompkins, 2006) is available upon request.
Our second objective involved two kinds of data collection and analysis: one quantitative and one qualitative. Firstly, to address academic achievement, data was collected on reading scores of Grade 7 students in Eskasoni and analyzed to determine performance levels of students who had completed the Kindergarten to Grade 3 immersion program as compared to students who had been in the English stream. Sherise Paul-Gould completed this part of the research. This quantitative data analysis provides an important indication of academic achievement. Because the students in Tobique are much younger, this kind of data is not available.

Preliminary research (Murray Orr, Orr, & Tompkins, 2006) suggested that teachers and family members can articulate noticeable differences in academic achievement, cultural identity, and language fluency in children who have been in immersion programs. In order to learn more about immersion students’ academic achievement, cultural identities, and fluency in Mi’kmaq or Wolastoqi Latuwewakon, interviews with 3 Elders, 11 teachers, 4 Grade 8 students (former immersion students) and 4 parents of these students were conducted in Eskasoni. In Tobique, interviews with 3 Elders, 4 teachers, 5 children, and 5 parents were conducted. These interviews were conducted and transcribed by Starr Sock and Sherise Paul-Gould in Eskasoni and by Roseanne Clarke and Darcy Pirie in Tobique. These interviews provided rich data from a variety of perspectives about the impacts of having been enrolled in Immersion programs for the students. This report provides a detailed analysis of these data.

Starr Sock and Sherise Paul-Gould, MEd students at StFX, gathered the data for Objective Two as their MEd thesis data collection. Their thesis, titled, Fluency, Identity and Student Achievement: An In-depth Study of The Mi’kmaq Immersion Program in One Community, uses interview data and quantitative data on reading
test scores (as described above), which they gathered as part of this project. Darcy Pirie and Roseanne Clark in Tobique gathered data and developed the program description in Tobique. In both communities, wonderful, rich data was gathered and used in ways that would never have been possible without the outstanding abilities of these researchers. This addresses the seventh goal of the research study, to build the research capacity of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers and Indigenous graduate students.

The third and fourth objectives involved identifying the broader conditions that allowed the immersion programs to develop and to identify those people whose leadership and advocacy helped create and sustain the Mi’kmaq and Wolastoqi Latuwewakon programs, as well as the challenges and barriers encountered along the way. In Eskasoni a focus group was held with Elders and community members who had been involved since the early years of the immersion program. The research team also interviewed 5 people who had been involved in the early beginnings of Mi’kmaq immersion in Eskasoni. In Tobique the team interviewed 4 people who were part of the beginnings of Wolastoqi Latuwewakon immersion.

Objective Five, articulating the link between Aboriginal youth having a solid grasp of their language and a strong identity, and their educational success, future career, lifelong learning, and contribution to their community, is a vital one for this project. Using the interview data, we looked for themes that illustrate the critical relationships between language, identity, and students’ future employment and other career goals (and those of their parents and teachers), as well as themes that support the immersion program as a successful model in creating lifelong learners.

Ownership of this data is jointly held between the AAEDIRP project and Starr and Sherise. Starr and Sherise are free to use this data in future publications and conferences, as is the AAEDIRP research team.
In the conclusion of this study the findings of the research team were synthesized to
develop recommendations, for the development of immersion programs in Mi’kmaq
and Wolastoqi communities where they currently do not exist, addressing
Objective 6.

**Findings of the Study**

This section details the findings that were developed as a result of the analysis of the
data collected. The first section describes findings for Objective 2, on the impacts of
the immersion programs on students who participated in the programs. The
findings for Eskasoni and then Tobique are provided. Next is a report of the findings
for Objectives 3 and 4, on the broader conditions that allowed the immersion
programs to develop, as well as the challenges and barriers encountered along the
way. Again, the findings for Eskasoni and then Tobique are given.

*Impacts of Immersion Programs on Former Immersion Students*

In the following section, the findings of the study around the impacts of the Mi’kmaq
and Wolastoiq Latuwewakon Immersion programs on three aspects of former
immersion students’ lives are described: the impacts upon students’ identities as
Mi’kmaq/Wolastoqi people, their fluency in the Mi’kmaq/Wolastoqi language, and
their academic achievement in subjects other than Indigenous language. The first
section details the findings in Eskasoni based on data on the former Mi’kmaq
immersion students. Following this is a section describing the findings in Tobique
based on data on the former Wolastoqi Latuwewakon immersion students.
Impacts of the Mi’kmaq Immersion Program on Identity, Fluency, and Academic Achievement

Impacts of the Mi’kmaq Immersion Program on Identity

Most of the academic literature on immersion programs in Canada foregrounds academic achievement and fluency (Genesse & Lambert, 1986; Holm & Holm, 1995; Holobow, Genesse, & Lambert, 1987; Slaughter, 1997), which are promising indicators of career success. Because instruments have been developed to measure the impact of these indicators they tend to be most often used in promoting immersion programs. However we include a section on identity in this report because in the interview transcripts it became apparent that language and identity are inextricably intertwined. An Elder named Jennie\(^3\) said it best when she said, “Speaking Mi’kmaq is important to our culture and how we are. Like how we are and how we act as Mi’kmaq. If our language is gone, then our culture is gone. For sure, without a doubt” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Jennie, April 29, 2010). Elders spoke about the sacredness of the language and their moral obligation to pass it on to the next generation as an integral part of their Mi’kmaq identity. Teachers spoke of how they observed strong confidence, leadership qualities, and other identity traits in their former immersion students. Parents echoed these observations and students articulated their pride in their knowledge of the language and culture.

Language is who we are: Elders’ perspectives

In a world where Indigenous languages are endangered and on the verge of extinction as the sweep of globalization increases the dominance of the English language exponentially (Francis & Reyhner, 2002; Nettle & Romaine, 2000), listening to the voices of the Elders becomes more urgent than ever before. Marie, an Elder, says, “Our language is the most sacred and holy because it is who we are. If

\(^3\) All names of research participants are pseudonyms, as we endeavor to provide confidentiality for those interviewed.
we give up on our language, then we might as well give up on our children. ... Our language, our mother tongue, is the most sacred because it is what the Elders gave us” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Marie, May 5, 2010). Her call to save the language reflects the awareness of the Elders that this is a vital task for Mi’kmaq communities.

In many of the interviews on the impact of the immersion program participants commented on how learning Mi’kmaq transcends the ability to communicate with others and reaches into the realm of identity and guides children in how to ‘be’ Mi’kmaq. Mi’kmaq people, since contact, have endured the effects of colonization and assimilation (Knockwood, 1992; Paul, 2006) and continually face a devaluing of their cultural identities. In fact, for colonization to achieve its goals, not only must the colonizers’ way of life, language, and way of being become desirable and considered superior, there must be an equal movement in the direction of rendering all the characteristics of the colonized group less worthy, less desirable, inadequate, and primitive (Ngugi, 1981/1989; Smith 1999). Marie provides an example of this in her struggle to complete post-secondary education at a time when there was no Mi’kmaq presence on the academic landscape. “I entered into a university one time. There was not a lot of Mi’kmaq in my day in the educational system. I felt I was alone graduating as the only Mi’kmaw... There is a time when no one speaks to you in Mi’kmaq, your spirit ends” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Marie, May 5, 2010). These powerful words show the potential for Eurocentric schooling to strip away identity—hardly a recipe for academic success.

Jennie offers a vivid example of how the effects of colonization continue to linger in Mi’kmaq communities. As the following example illustrates, the colonial message can be felt from a very young age. “One time ago, not too long ago, when a child was born people would go see the baby and think the baby was cute if they resembled a white person. The children hear this that little white kids are cute and beautiful with blue eyes and light skin. When kids hear this then they are going to think this way... This is what the kids will end up thinking without knowing the difference. These
parents didn’t even realize what they have planted into the minds of their kids. They end up thinking that the English is better than being Mi’kmaq” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Jennie, April 29, 2010).

Mi’kmaq language as healing
Given the hardships that colonization has imposed on the Mi’kmaq language and culture, the Elders’ words show us that the very acts of preserving, enhancing and reclaiming and stabilizing the Mi’kmaq language are in themselves decolonizing undertakings. In reclaiming the language, Elders find healing and strength. Elders gave personal examples of this, such as Ellen’s story. “I try to teach my grandson some words in Mi’kmaq. He likes the words that I teach him. I’d rather teach him in Mi’kmaq than in English. Like I said, I love speaking Mi’kmaq instead” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Ellen, April 28, 2010). Just as Ellen uses an opportunity to help her grandson to learn the language as an instance of cultural empowerment, Marie in the following excerpt shows how Mi’kmaq language is integral to her well-being. “When I go to a place and expect not to hear the Mi’kmaq language, I end up hearing it. I am so happy and I pray that I hear it again in other areas like Montreal. I get so happy when someone speaks Mi’kmaq” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Marie, May 5, 2010).

Significant qualities of immersion student identities noticed by teachers
Teachers in the school offering the Mi’kmaq immersion program are well positioned to observe differences in personal characteristics that might be connected to identity between students who have completed the K-3 immersion program and those whose schooling has been in English. Most of the 11 teachers noted strong self-confidence in the students who had been in immersion. “They seem to be confident and maybe it’s coming up through the immersion program where they are bit more focused and having the two languages having to deal with both Mi’kmaq and English... I find with the crew I have with the Mi’kmaq immersion are wonderful students. They have good discipline, I find... very good self-esteem, good work
habits, good work ethics” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Nancy, March 11, 2010).

Similarly, Molly noticed confidence as a quality common to immersion students. “When I’m thinking of those kids that came from the immersion, I am thinking of self-confidence in the classroom and how they view themselves in general. When I put them in groups, listening in on their conversations, the kids who came from the immersion program are much more confident with their peers...they are leaders... I don’t know how else to say it” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Molly, March 11, 2010). As Molly notes, this confidence becomes the basis for emerging leadership qualities in former immersion students. “They are leaders in the class. ...They are the kids that if there was difficulty in the class, like people talking or not listening, they will be the ones speaking Mi’kmaq to the kid telling them to be quiet or something. They get my point across for me. They are very helpful” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Molly, March 11, 2010).

Justine extended the link to leadership beyond the school, into the community and beyond the present, into the future. “They have the pride and the ability to be potential leaders in our community, not just within our school” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Justine, March 11, 2010). Justine’s words show the huge impact that the immersion program can have in the community shaping political and economic leaders.

*Inquiring minds: Curiosity as a trait of life-long learners*

Other teachers noted other qualities that made the immersion students stand out. Kevin noted that they were “social butterflies... they got along with kids and [are] ready to make friends” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Kevin, April 5, 2010). Sally noted their curiosity in learning new things. “So they were more mature. They were also easy to teach. If I modeled something on the board, it doesn’t matter what it is, they get it. And if they don’t get it, they would ask me what
I wanted. So they were good like that always inquiring. They were so teachable” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Sally, March 12, 2010). Justine concurred, stating, “They are always, always, always, asking questions and not in a bad way. They always seem to [want to] broaden their content knowledge” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Justine, March 11, 2010). This propensity to ask questions and be curious is a characteristic of life-long learners and one that should stand these students in good stead as they grow up and become active adult community members and career men and women.

Justine mentioned the importance of humour in the learning process for former immersion students. “[They are] the leaders in the classroom…I find them extremely comical. They have quite a humour about them and they are not afraid to be able to laugh at themselves. Whereas other children always feel like if you’re joking around...that they are the brunt of your joke, the kids in the immersion program always joke around with one another and that’s how they learn” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Justine, March 11, 2010). Humour and the ability to laugh at oneself have been identified as important qualities in Mi’kmaq culture (Paul, 2006) and it is therefore promising to see it emerging in these students. This use of humour is another trait that will be useful for students as participants in community affairs and in their working lives.

The attitude toward schoolwork on the part of former immersion students seemed to be positive, and connects well with the qualities of confidence and curiosity noted above. “Overall, children who came from immersion seem to be... calmer, seem to work harder, they had a good work ethic. It’s like if I gave them a task, they wanted to understand it – and work at it” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Sally, March 12, 2010). A number of other teachers and parents supported this observation of a strong work ethic in the former immersion students. Again, this is a promising attribute for these students to possess as they enter the workforce and become active in the community.
Sally speculated that one reason that these differences appear to exist between immersion and non-immersion students might be the deep and extended familial-like relationships between the immersion teachers and students over the years between K and Grade 3. “When [one of the first immersion teachers] had that program...she started from the ground up. I think that there was a big difference between from her taking care of those kids right to Grade 3. It had a big effect on those kids in how they learned because she knew them. She knew what they would do or could do. You have to know your kids in order to teach them properly and that was the advantage” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Sally, March 12, 2010). The notion of “taking care of” the students is one that was observed in an earlier study (Murray Orr, Orr, & Tompkins, 2006). The Immersion wing of the school has an environment that might be characterized as family-like, with teachers continuing to teach or interact with students over several years, and speaking with them in ways a parent might. Concern for students’ success in the program runs deep and teachers work closely with individual students. They do not “slip through the cracks” in this program (Murray Orr, Orr, & Tompkins, 2006).

With signs that say, “Only Mi’kmaq spoken here please” posted in the hallways, and ongoing dedication both to students and to developing materials and curriculum, the teachers in the immersion program seem to “know their kids,” as Sally suggest above, and this knowing seems to have lasting effects for students, as the teachers in this section note, in terms of work ethic, intellectual curiosity, self-confidence, and leadership qualities that can be observed in immersion students who graduated from the program several years ago.

*Parents echo teachers’ perceptions*

Parents found their children were attentive and engaged in school, as the following comment by Chloe indicates. “[Karen] is more focused and her behavior is really good in school” (Parent interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Chloe, March 8, 2010). Interestingly, Chloe was able to compare her daughter with her son, Mike,
who did not attend the immersion program. “I see a difference with Mike...the immersion kids’ attitude towards school is a lot better.” All parents interviewed noted the respectful, well-behaved manner of their children who had been in immersion, and stated they received positive reports from teachers on their children’s behaviour as well as their academic progress.

Teachers Sally and Justine noted former immersion students’ abilities to ask good questions and to extend their learning in the section above. Sandra, one of the four parents interviewed, noted that her daughter’s ability to ask questions had benefits for her as a learner. “[Beth] wasn’t doing good in math before but she is starting to understand it because she is stopping the teacher to ask questions...she took the initiative to stop the teacher when she had trouble for the class. Now her marks jumped for math. She’s the one who took the initiative to ask when the rest of the students are hesitant to ask for clarity” (Parent interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Sandra, March 10, 2010). Sandra’s awareness of Beth’s willingness to ask questions that help her become a more active and engaged learner show that this parent noticed the same traits teachers observed in the immersion students. This trait of engagement is regarded as highly important for academic success.

Irene noted leadership qualities in her daughter, Amanda, that extended into the home and she attributed that to the confidence and competence gained in immersion. “She helps her siblings with homework and she shows them how to do it” (Parent interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Irene, March 5, 2010). Parents are able to discern ways their children are demonstrating leadership at home and in their extra-curricular activities. These point to the possibility that the effects of the immersion program already extend beyond school, into homes and the community, a hopeful sign of the power and impact of the immersion program.

*Student pride in language and culture*

Each of the four students interviewed stated they were glad to have been in the immersion program and they considered it an asset to have been in the program.
Each one felt that the program should be extended into higher grades. Sam showed his feelings about the program when he stated, “I’m proud because it’s knowing who I am and it’s good” (Student interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Sam, March 11, 2010). Like the Elders, the students understood that knowing the Mi’kmaq language had meaning beyond simply the ability to communicate. Knowing the language provided them with a stronger sense of being Mi’kmaq. “I am going to remember it forever and speaking in Mi’kmaq and being Mi’kmaq…I am happy and I will never forget from my heart” (Student interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Beth, March 11, 2010). Similarly Karen remarked, “I feel good because I know my language for my culture and stuff” (Student interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Beth, March 11, 2010). These students articulated their awareness that participating in the immersion program had been an important factor in shaping their Mi’kmaq identities.

**Impacts of the Mi’kmaq Immersion Program on Fluency**

The main reason for the existence of the Mi’kmaq Immersion program has been to develop fluent speakers in Mi’kmaq in this community where the language is endangered. As in other Indigenous communities where the language is being seriously threatened, the knowledge that young people must become fluent speakers in order to save the language is the driving force behind the program’s creators and teachers (Fishman, 2001; Francis and Rehyner, 2002). In this section, Elders highlight the grave situation of Mi’kmaq language fluency decline and suggest some ways this tide might be turned, despite how the English language is “growing fast like weeds” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Jennie, April 29, 2010). Teachers, parents, and students provide a look at how the Mi’kmaq Immersion program has impacted students’ fluency in Mi’kmaq several years after they completed the last year, Grade 3, of the immersion program. While there is general acceptance that most students have more fluency in Mi’kmaq than if they had not been in immersion, there is less agreement on the degree of fluency they
retain. The desire for the immersion program to be expanded into upper grades is unanimous among teachers, parents and students.

**Elders perspective on fluency: It has to be Mi'kmaq**

Elders provided a stark awareness of the serious decline in fluency in their Mi'kmaq community. Marie painted a clear picture of the dismal state of the language situation. “I will tell you one thing, in 1980, as I walked through the school in Eskasoni, there was not one kid that I heard speaking Mi’klish or one word in English. Today, they are only speaking English. I walk around today, and I don’t hear l’nu’k and that is our school” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Marie, May 5, 2010). It is clear from Marie’s words; that for children to attain fluency in Mi’kmaq is an up-hill struggle in this school and community. She noted the ways even those who are Mi’kmaq speakers do not always use their language in the community. “You see some that could speak both languages well but they prefer to speak the English instead,” and she spoke longingly of her own family, “I haven’t heard it yet but I wish that my grandchildren would speak Mi’kmaq fluently. I only have a few grandchildren that speak Mi’kmaq.”

Jennie also noted the decrease in language usage in the children of the community. “Twenty years ago they understood it right away. Now it’s all English so I have to say some things in English for them to understand” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Jennie, April 29, 2010). In describing why children are speaking more and more English and less and less Mi’kmaq, Jennie stated, “It’s like, if you give a child tea instead of milk when they are young, then they will drink tea. The parent doesn’t mind this because they like tea anyways. If you speak Mi’kmaq to a child, then they will speak Mi’kmaq. If you speak English to a child, then they will speak English.” Jennie provided a poignant metaphor of language loss when she commented, “Children are losing the language so fast it’s like growing fast like weeds.” The idea of English as a weed, choking out the Mi’kmaq language, shows how great a challenge the Elders know it is to save the language. Yet they are determined.
Ellen, another Elder interviewed, plainly stated her thoughts on how important it is for children to become fluent in Mi’kmaq. “It has to be Mi’kmaq... It’s all right to speak English but you have to speak Mi’kmaq too. They need to speak Mi’kmaq and play using the Mi’kmaq language too” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Ellen, April 28, 2010). Ellen observed important links between fluency and learning in her comment, “The kids are a lot smarter and are able to better explain themselves in Mi’kmaq. It’s really good for them.” Marie echoed this idea, stating, “Whoever can speak Mi’kmaq, you can learn anything and any language” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Marie, May 5, 2010).

Ellen spoke eloquently of how she saw fluency in Mi’kmaq as a legacy she hoped to leave for her grandchildren. “I don’t want them to forget that their grandmother spoke Mi’kmaq. I want them to remember me that way. I want them to be able to say that their grandmother spoke Mi’kmaq when I’m not here anymore. I want them to remember that so they can take over my legacy in speaking Mi’kmaq” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Ellen, April 28, 2010).

The Elders had specific ideas about how to improve Mi’kmaq fluency, focused mainly on the out-of-school domain, as this is where they are situated. Marie stated, “They say that the more we expose our children to the social aspect of our culture, the stronger the language will be” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Marie, May 5, 2010). One way in which Marie thought this social aspect could be used to promote Mi’kmaq was through use of social media. “We have a community channel that we could utilize to incorporate language into our homes. Then, our people will speak better in Mi’kmaq.”

Ellen found that her own dedication to speaking the language at home was one way she could improve fluency of young people in the community. “The way we are, when the kids come home for dinner, I speak only Mi’kmaq to them and they understand me. Some of them, like the little one, respond to me in English but they
understand. But the other ones speak Mi’kmaq. I will speak Mi’kmaq to all of them when they do come over to visit” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Ellen, April 28, 2010). The Elders said parents and families must take the lead in speaking Mi’kmaq at home in order to improve the fluency of young people. “Let’s speak Mi’kmaq to our children. At home, at school, everywhere. Try to encourage everyone to speak Mi’kmaq…. Parents need to speak to their children in Mi’kmaq.” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Marie, May 5, 2010).

Ellen observed that all community members have a role to play in increasing the Mi’kmaq fluency of young people. “The parents play the biggest role in teaching their kids the Mi’kmaq language. The band council has a role by making buildings and hiring people to teach Mi’kmaq. With the grand council, the Kji Keptin could speak to the people about this issue of being Mi’kmaq and how we are and should be. The Elders can play a role in this by going to the school and talking to the children about the importance of language” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Ellen, April 28, 2010). Jennie noted that the pre-school programs should be using Mi’kmaq as the language of instruction in order for young children to develop fluency in the language, which takes time to develop. She states, “Teaching Mi’kmaq is a long process, it can’t be rushed” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Jennie, April 29, 2010). Although it may take a long time for a person to become fluent, Jennie finds that once fluency has been attained, it will not be lost. “After a certain age, you won’t forget how to speak Mi’kmaq. Even if you haven’t been around Mi’kmaq for 10 years and you see one, you can easily catch up on your Mi’kmaq-speaking skills. It’s impossible to forget your language once you have learned it.” This has implications for immersion programming in schools. If students have opportunities to become fluent speakers of Mi’kmaq early in life, there will be life-long benefits even if they find themselves in non-Mi’kmaq environments for periods of time later in life.
Teachers’ thoughts on Mi’kmaq fluency: Mi’kmaq is like fireworks going off

In the teacher interviews, it was notable that most of the non-Mi’kmaq teachers felt the immersion students spoke little to no Mi’kmaq because they rarely heard it in their classrooms. Conversely, Mi’kmaq teachers seemed to find that former immersion students retained a degree of Mi’kmaq fluency after being out of the immersion program for several years. For example, Molly, a non-Mi’kmaq teacher, stated, “There are only like 2 on this list that speak well in Mi’kmaq in class. I was surprised that some kids who came from immersion are not speaking at all” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Molly, March 11, 2010).

Similarly, Sandra said, “I wouldn’t have realized they have gone through the Mi’kmaq Immersion Program because I have never heard them speak Mi’kmaq to one another.” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Sandra, March 12, 2010).

In contrast, Kevin, a Mi’kmaq teacher, noted, “Most of my instruction was in English [in Grade 5] but I realized that I had immersion students and noticed that they would talk to me in Mi’kmaq and [I] would respond to them in Mi’kmaq” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Kevin, April 5, 2010). Kevin does note that students mainly spoke directly with him in Mi’kmaq, and not often with one another. “Rarely ever did I hear them talk amongst themselves in the classroom. But on outdoor duty, these students talked to each other in Mi’kmaq but not as much in the classrooms.”

One of the non-Mi’kmaq teachers did observe a strong degree of fluency in former immersion students in her Grade 6 classroom. “But from what I saw within my own classroom that would be one area that I saw a huge difference. They seemed very fluent to me in speaking Mi’kmaq and it was very often their first language with just chatting” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Cara, March 12, 2010).
Sally, a Mi’kmaq teacher, stated, “Well, now, a lot of immersion students spoke it in and out of school. When I do speak to some of them in Mi’kmaq, they may speak Mi’kmaq back to me. But I find that they are not uncomfortable with the language and I think that it is still strong. Like, they understand how to use it but a lot of it is lost. Not lost as in like they don’t know it but it’s not used as much. It’s not used as much, that’s what I noticed” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Sally, March 12, 2010). Sally appears to find the students retaining some fluency in Mi’kmaq but sees that they have fewer opportunities to use it.

This notion of retaining fluency despite lack of places to use it fits well with the Elder Jennie’s comments about how people will not forget the Mi’kmaq language after they become fluent, even though they may not be able to use it for some period of time. “They are not uncomfortable with the language” seems like a good way to think of how these former immersion students may hold onto their language despite being in classrooms where English is the language of instruction for the past several years.

Tanya, also a Mi’kmaq teacher, found that former immersion students brought a respect for the language into her classroom and used Mi’kmaq to encourage other students to work on their schoolwork. “The immersion students spoke Mi’kmaq in the classroom. Like if Gordon was trying to do his work and he spoke to the kids in English, they wouldn’t listen. But if he spoke in Mi’kmaq, they listened and settled down to do work. It’s like, I don’t know if I should say this, but it’s more respected amongst these ones anyways” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Tanya, March 12, 2010). This implies that Gordon and other former immersion students must have maintained some fluency in the Mi’kmaq language, and importantly, they used it in ways that shaped the classroom environment, bringing cultural values like respect to the fore.

Gina, another Mi’kmaq teacher, vividly compared the spread of the English language in her classroom to an infection. “Mi’kmaq Immersion students use more of our
language. English is used most often in class amongst themselves. The majority of kids speak English. It’s like they got infected with English so they speak it amongst themselves. The Mi’kmaq immersion students speak English to accommodate the others who don’t understand. I speak a lot of Mi’kmaq hoping that those who don’t speak it will catch on” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Gina, March 11, 2010). It is notable that Gina tries to increase the amount of Mi’kmaq spoken in her classroom, in an effort to maintain the fluency of former immersion students and build the fluency of non-Mi’kmaq speakers. This is a task that she takes in stride as part of her role as teacher.

Other Mi’kmaq teachers also note the impact of speaking Mi’kmaq in their classrooms even though they are not teaching in the immersion program. Justine, who grew up in a non-Mi’kmaq-speaking environment, stated with poignancy, “I think that if I was able to speak Mi’kmaq fluently and as beautifully as some of them, I don’t think that I would speak a word again of English” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Justine, March 11, 2010). Justine reflected that although she does not consider herself a strong speaker, she finds it important to try to speak as much Mi’kmaq as she can in her classroom. “I always have to be mindful of the fact that even though I don’t speak Mi’kmaq well that I am able to speak it. I find that when I do remind myself of that and speak Mi’kmaq in the classroom, it’s like fireworks going off” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Justine, March 11, 2010). The huge impact of the teacher using Mi’kmaq in the classroom is visible in Justine’s statement. If her use of Mi’kmaq is “like fireworks going off,” it seems evident that students are really looking for more opportunities to use Mi’kmaq in school, and welcome the ways these Mi’kmaq teachers provide those spaces to increase and maintain fluency.

Justine also noted that students who willingly speak Mi’kmaq in her classroom switch immediately to English when an administrator or other adult enters the classroom. “But at the moment that an adult or authority figure shows up they automatically speak English. They shut down and only speak English. I noticed that
with a lot of kids” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Justine, March 11, 2010). When considering Mi’kmaq fluency in schools, and how it changes over time after the students have completed the end of Grade 3 in the immersion program, it seems this is an area that should be addressed.

**Parent and student voices on fluency: Expand the program**

From the parent interviews, it seemed that students had lost some fluency since completing the Mi’kmaq immersion program, but that they still retained language abilities to some degree, depending on the individual student. Sandra stated, “[Beth] knows how to speak, read, and write in Mi’kmaq. She never lost it. ...She speaks very well...sometimes she forgets but she remembers” (Parent interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Sandra, March 10, 2010). Irene also felt her daughter’s fluency remained high. “She [Amanda] is fluent and she likes speaking Mi’kmaq. She speaks Mi’kmaq to us at home” (Parent interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Irene, March 5, 2010).

Beth and Amanda, in the student interviews, both talked about the importance of speaking Mi’kmaq at home as a way to maintain their fluency. Beth said, “I am a strong speaker because my family speaks to me and I speak to them” (Student interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Beth, March 11, 2010). Similarly, Amanda noted, “Yes [I still speak Mi’kmaq] because of my mom. She doesn’t like anyone speaking English at the house” (Student interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Amanda, March 11, 2010).

While Beth and Amanda have maintained their Mi’kmaq fluency, Chloe described how Karen’s fluency seemed to have diminished. “She knows how to speak Mi’kmaq and understands it but she doesn’t like speaking it at home...When she got out of immersion, she spoke only English but was fluent when she was in immersion” (Parent interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Chloe, March 8, 2010). In considering her son Sam’s fluency, Darlene stated, “All these years, he spoke better than I did in Mi’kmaq. Now he doesn’t” (Parent interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Darlene, March 10, 2010).
programs, Darlene, March 7, 2010). In Chloe’s and Darlene’s statements, they observe that their children were fluent Mi’kmaq speakers while in the immersion program, but acknowledge that this fluency seems to have declined substantially.

Karen agreed with her mother’s assessment of her loss of fluency. “We used to always speak Mi’kmaq and ever since I got out of the immersion program I don’t speak it….I always get tongue-tied now….I understand it but I have a hard time speaking it” (Student interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Karen, March 11, 2010). Sam, too, found he has lost fluency. He said he is “[not a strong speaker] now, not really, because I forgot a lot of it. Never spoke it at home…just don’t remember any of it but understand it” (Student interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Sam, March 11, 2010).

Each student stated they wished the immersion program could be extended into higher grades to address this decline in fluency. As Amanda noted, “Grade 4 wasn’t enough…they forgot it or something because no one taught them or spoke to them. … It would be better to stop at Grade 6…maybe Grade 9, that way everyone will still be speaking Mi’kmaq. … the students will speak a lot better” (Student interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Amanda, March 11, 2010). Beth thought that “[the program] should continue to Grade 10 at least so that we won’t lose our language” (Student interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Amanda, March 11, 2010).

Parents all also expressed a desire for an expansion of the immersion program beyond Grade 3. “When they got to Grade 4 I found that there was more English and it took over and my son spoke only English after that. There needed to be more Mi’kmaq rather than one class. I wanted more Mi’kmaq at that time” (Parent interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Darlene, March 7, 2010). In order to address the loss of fluency that at least some students experience, extending the program into upper grades seems a useful strategy.
In summary, while the Elders spoke of the urgency of saving the language both through school policies such as the immersion program and through broader community efforts, parents, students, and most teachers found that immersion students had a higher level of fluency even after several years out of the program, and were hopeful that they would maintain their fluency. They were quite definite that expanding the program beyond Grade 3 would be beneficial in improving the degree of Mi’kmaq fluency of students.

**Impacts of the Mi’kmaq Immersion Program on Academic Achievement**

Why promote Mi’kmaq fluency among children and young people? Current research in Indigenous immersion programs shows that children with a strong grounding in their Indigenous language are likely to be more articulate and successful in the non-Indigenous language surrounding their community as well (Genesse & Lambert, 1986; Holobow, Genesse, & Lambert, 1987, Stiles, 1997; Slaughter, 1997; Taylor & Wright, 2003). It is the hope of the authors of this report that the words of those interviewed for this study adds further support to this research. As the Elder Ellen stated, “The kids are a lot smarter and are able to better explain themselves in Mi’kmaq. It’s really good for them” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Ellen, April 28, 2010). From Ellen’s comment, one can infer that fluency in Mi’kmaq will increase the academic success of students. The interviews with teachers strongly support Ellen’s statement that learning in Mi’kmaq is good for students, as teachers observed consistent strengths in academic areas amongst former Mi’kmaq immersion students.

*Open your heart: Elders reflect on academic achievement*

Marie, one of the Elders interviewed, reflected, “If one can speak the Mi’kmaq language, it is easier to attain any other languages. If you speak your language, then you open up your heart. Once you open your heart, the more knowledge you are able to absorb. You are able to express yourself better rather than it being lost in translation” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Marie, May 5, 2010).
This is an intriguing link between speaking Mi’kmaq and being able to absorb knowledge. Ellen also referenced this idea in her statement “The kids are a lot smarter and are able to better explain themselves in Mi’kmaq.” These Elders soundly dismiss the colonized misconception that English is necessary to appear intelligent. In fact, they turn that attitude on its head, saying that, instead, Mi’kmaq students will actually be “smarter” if they learn in their own language. The link between the language and the heart, a metaphor for the culture, is made clear by Marie’s words above. Ellen added, “I notice that the kids who are in the Mi’kmaq immersion program are smarter than those who have been taught in the English program. They are taught in the Mi’kmaq way. That is the right way.” For these Elders, the Mi’kmaq immersion program provides not only a path to language fluency but also a path to academic success in other subject areas. Teachers concurred with this idea, revealed in the section that follows.

*Teachers’ voices on academic achievement: Their understanding is deeper*

Almost all teachers interviewed were able to observe academic strengths in the former immersion students. Because success in English literacy is a major concern for parents when enrolling their children in Mi’kmaq immersion, this report focuses on teachers’ observations about success in English Language Arts in the following section, as well as numerical data from a Grade 7 reading assessment, followed by a look at teachers’ remarks about work in other subject areas.

*Teachers find students’ English literacy abilities strong*

Nancy finds English literacy to be an area in which these students achieve success. “I do have a lot of Mi’kmaq immersion students within my class and I go from class to class and I do see a difference. I could see a difference in how they read, how they are more focused and they seem to understand a little bit more in literacy in terms of running records. Most of the comprehension at least for the majority of them was fairly high, so I definitely can see a difference (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Nancy, March 11, 2010). Kevin agreed with Nancy about the students’ abilities in English literacy. “I found that they did really well with literacy.
That was the first time that I saw what an impact the Mi’kmaq immersion program [had on] our students....I noticed their writing was longer....You could tell that they were very critical thinkers and when they stated a statement, they would fully support it” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Kevin, April 5, 2010).

Sally spoke specifically about the literacy skills of the first group of former immersion students. “Their reading and comprehension were really high overall. The year that I had the first immersion graduates, all of them had high reading and comprehension” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Sally, March 12, 2010). Cara concurred, saying, “Those 3 students in particular, I would rate them as excellent in terms of reading skills and writing skills when they came to me in Grade 6” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Cara, March 12, 2010). Gina also noticed this. “Last year, they were smart. They were able to catch on quickly they were able to pick up right away, like their comprehension, they had good fluency in reading” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Cara, March 12, 2010). Each of these teachers noted the above-average skills of the former immersion students in English literacy.

Conversely, Molly found that former immersion students in her class, while able to read the words in a text, did not appear to perform as well in reading comprehension. “Just looking at my list of immersion students that I do have, based on their running records, their reading at higher levels compared to the other kids who weren’t in the Mi’kmaq Immersion program. But I found that, comparing the comprehension levels, even though they are reading at higher levels, their comprehension levels are a little lower. The immersion, their levels are like X, Y, Z but their comprehension is significantly lower” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Molly, March 11, 2010). This is the only instance where a teacher appears to find her former immersion students performing at lower levels than the non-immersion students in literacy. Two other teachers were cautious,
stating they were unsure or found it difficult to compare the former immersion students with other students.

Justine, like Molly, offered specific comments about the reading assessment scores of the former immersion students she taught. However, her observations were quite different. “I teach English Language Arts to my class and to the kids next door. Between both classes, there are about 6 students who come from the Mi’kmaq Immersion program. When I did my running records in September, I noticed that not only were they at the highest level but their fluency scores were excellent. They were well [above average] in terms of how they read and expression. The one thing that I noticed, the biggest difference that I noticed between them was that they were able to emphasize and connect with whatever text they’re reading and they are able to make inferences unlike the other students. They are able to connect much better than other students on any text. They are able to think critically, honestly and openly and are able to write that in written form as well as oral” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Justine, March 11, 2010). Justine notes that not only were the former immersion students in her classes able to read fluently and with accuracy, they also had strong comprehension of their reading, which is a vital component of successful literacy development. As well, they were able to think critically about what they read, indicating they possessed valuable critical thinking skills. They were able to write with clarity and integrate critical thinking into their writing, which connects well with Kevin’s observation about the students being able to think critically and support their statements fully. In the following section, one member of the research team looked closely at reading assessment scores of all Grade 7 students in comparison with the former immersion students.

Evidence from a Grade 7 reading assessment

English reading assessments in Canada currently look at three dimensions of what a student does when he/she reads: fluency, accuracy, and comprehension (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). This reflects the fact that good readers read with fluency and
accuracy and they understand what they are reading. Reading fluency and accuracy are assessed by listening to individual students’ reading of a short passage, and making notes as they read; comprehension is assessed by asking them questions about the passage and/or to retell the content of that passage after reading. Pinnell and Fountas (2010) developed a kit for assessing reading, and used the term ‘benchmarks’ to refer to appropriate stages of reading development in young readers as they become more and more proficient. Reading passages used in the assessment are divided by reading levels from A to Z, with A being the level of a text appropriate for a very beginning reader and Z representing the level of a text for a fluent, accomplished reader. This kit is widely used across Canada and the United States, and is used in the school in which this study took place.

In the school year 2008-2009, when a number of the first group of former immersion students were Grade 7, Sherise, a Grade 7 teacher and one of the researchers on this project, noticed that it seemed these students were more successful readers in English than their peers. At the beginning of this school year, Sherise assessed the reading abilities of her Grade 7 class consisting of 21 students, four of whom were former immersion students, using the Pinnell and Fountas (2010) kit. These four students scored higher in both reading accuracy and comprehension than the rest of the students in her class. Out of curiosity, Sherise compared the results of these assessments with the other three Grade 7 classes to observe any similarities. Again, a pattern emerged with the former immersion students scoring higher in both reading and comprehension overall, with the exception of a few regular English program schooled students who had not attended the immersion program.

As Sherise saw this assessment pattern emerge, she took the initiative to assess all 81 grade 7 students in attempt to rule out any discrepancies of assessment results that might occur because of the differences between different assessors. The results from the assessments undertaken by Sherise showed that all former Mi’kmaq
Immersion program students were reading and comprehending at higher levels of the Benchmark Assessment Kit 2 than the rest of the student population in Grade 7 (see Figure 2). Out of 81 students overall, there were 16 former immersion students and 65 English instruction program students. There were 25 students (16 MIP and 9 EP) in the X, Y, and Z levels overall in Grade 7. There were 18 students (16 MIP and 2 EP) in the Y and Z levels overall in Grade 7. Finally, there were 14 students (13 MIP and 1 EP) at the Z levels of fluency in both reading and comprehension.

![Figure 2. Grade 7 Reading Levels in Sept. 2008.](image)

These results show that of the 81 students in Grade 7 in September 2008, only the 16 former immersion students and 9 others were reading at the upper levels (X, Y, and Z) of the reading assessment. This indicates that all the former immersion students were among the top-achieving students in Grade 7 reading, which is quite persuasive evidence of their strengths in English literacy.
Academic achievement in other areas

Teachers noticed former immersion students’ strong academic abilities in other subject areas too. Nancy and other teachers also noted that the former immersion students, now in Grades 5-8, were able to maintain good academic standings while being involved in a number of extra-curricular activities. “A lot of them seem to be in band as well. So it seems like that they are able to handle a lot more than the average student might be able to handle. They did the band thing, they did the Mi'kmaq immersion, and they are in the English program now and it seems that they can multi-task more than the other students” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Nancy, March 11, 2010).

Molly, the only teacher who noted lower comprehension in the former immersion students’ reading, stated that apart from this her students who had been in immersion were performing well. “But overall, I would say the kids from the immersion program are at the top of the classes in the academic courses compared to the ones who didn’t go to immersion. The attendance of those who went through the immersion program is a lot higher as well. Looking at my class, there is a higher percentage of kids that came from immersion that are doing well in comparison to the kids who did not go through immersion in the academic program” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Molly, March 11, 2010).

Sally commented on the ways former immersion students performed on tests and projects. “They were just more neater and more organized in their writing or whatever project they had. They had more in-depth writing when they write a test. … The responses were more well thought out. You know how you give students work, a lot of the times they just get it done to satisfy you. Instead, the immersion students did it their own liking, not to my liking or to somebody else’s liking… Their other skills like…good listening and dedication to their work, were like a major plus for them” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Sally, March 12,
Sally’s words seem to indicate that students were self-motivated as learners, a quality likely to lead to academic success and to career success in the future.

Sandra, a Grade 8 science and math teacher, found that the former immersion students showed strength in these subject areas. “I would probably have to say that 90% of the students that went to the Mi’kmaq Immersion program don’t seem to have any difficulty with the content that we have covered in class. I would say that more of the students that went through the Mi’kmaq Immersion program are more of the stronger students just from my perspective of this classroom” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Sandra, March 11, 2010).

Cara found the former immersion students in her science and math classes to be strong academically as well. “With regards to these 3 students, they enjoyed challenges and liked to learn new things. As far as learning new concepts in math and science, they handled that well. It didn’t seem to pose any problem for them” (Teacher interviews, Impact of Immersion programs, Cara, March 12, 2010). Kevin noted that while math was challenging for all, most of the former immersion students were successful. “But math...math was an area where all of my kids struggled with most of the time. But...the immersion students, like 4 out of 5 of them, did okay. Overall, they were...higher than the students that went through the English language instruction in school” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Kevin, April 5, 2010).

Justine described the deeper levels of thinking ability of former immersion students in her Grade 7 math class. “In math it is a little different since math is a different language entirely. But once they are able to connect it to relevant situations for them, I find that they can take the math, internalize it, and make better understandings and make better connections to it. It's a bit of lengthier process and it slows me down as a teacher in covering...all the chapters but the depth of their understanding is far more than I would have ever expected...They are taking a very rich content and a very dense content and they are making it relevant. And because
they are doing that, it is taking more time but their understanding is deeper which is a good thing” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Justine, March 11, 2010). This is significant information, indicating that former immersion students possess abilities to understand math and science concepts in more depth and to apply them, “making it relevant” to their own lives.

Kevin, who taught Grade 5, spoke about an experience he had as parent as a result of his work with former immersion students. He began by voicing a common concern for many parents about immersion programs. “Parents are cynical about how effective the Mi’kmaq Immersion program is. They are afraid [their child will] not learn the English language or [be] capable of learning English….I had the opportunity to teach Grade 5 with students from the initial Mi’kmaq immersion [program]. When I saw how effective Mi’kmaq immersion was, I was really impressed with their confidence levels in all subject areas and all around life, [and it] opened my eyes. My daughter was going to school the following year and it took some time to convince my wife but she agreed upon it. My daughter went into the immersion program and she was in it for two years in kindergarten and primary” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Kevin, April 5, 2010).

Kevin’s observation of the academic success of former immersion students was sufficient to convince him to enroll his daughter in Mi’kmaq immersion, despite the fact his older children had not gone into the program. Kevin then relates how his family had to move to a different community, and his daughter entered Grade 2 in a classroom where English was the language of instruction. “But my daughter...never learned any English before going to this school and right now she is the top student in her class according to her teacher.” Kevin continues to be supportive of the immersion program, both as a parent and as a teacher. “I am just reflecting back on my own experience in teaching that is convincing me that Mi’kmaq immersion is effective and I have even seen the results with my own daughter” (Teacher interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Kevin, April 5, 2010).
The teachers provide rather overwhelming support for the notion that students from the Mi’kmaq immersion program are achieving at higher levels in English language arts, science, and math than their peers in this school. The findings from the reading assessment data analysis undertaken by Sherise Paul Gould further substantiate the teachers’ perceptions. This is a powerful finding and one that provides significant evidence for those wishing to begin an immersion program in their community, as well as for the expansion of the Mi’kmaq immersion program in this community.

*Parents and students perspectives on academic success: She already knows what she wants to be*

Parents observed the academic strengths of their children and were pleased with their successes. Irene stated that her daughter Amanda “is doing very well in all subjects: Mi’kmaq, math, science. She is doing very well in Grade 8 and has no problems” (Parent interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Irene, March 5, 2010). Beth’s mother, Sandra, noted, “I feel good because my daughter is ahead and she is smart” (Parent interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Sandra, March 10, 2010). Sandra also compared the academic achievements of Beth with those of her other two children who were also in immersion. “All my children are/were in immersion and I never had any problems with them reading in English. All 3 kids and they are different...everyone’s different. Beth knew everything at an early age...Fred just started catching on at Grade 2. Calvin just caught on...and they continued on doing good. Calvin is picking up words by sounding out words even at restaurants in English. They all learned different and learning at different rates. Once they learn they continue to progress and they are doing all great” (Parent interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Sandra, March 10, 2010). This is a very helpful insight, as it shows that while not all of Sandra’s three children learned in the same way or at the same rate, she felt they were all successful academically. Children who are diverse in their learning styles can succeed in immersion and flourish academically.
Chloe said she was pleased with Karen’s academic achievement, and found that her daughter strives for very high marks. “She’s got pretty high marks, she is there all the time, test marks, attendance, if she gets an 8/10 or 9/10 on an assignment she wants to do better than that and redoes it. She’s not satisfied with that” (Parent interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Chloe, March 8, 2010). Chloe regretted that she did not place one of her other children in immersion. “Mike was the only one that didn’t go into immersion and I am sorry about that. He is not challenged enough and is bored. He wants to know how to speak it and tries. He would have enjoyed it better. He is not as focused as my other kids.”

Darlene spoke quite specifically of her son Sam’s academic strengths in various subject areas. “I found his problem solving was good and English wasn’t hard for him at all. In Grade 4 he didn’t really need help but he always did his work last minute and it was too easy for him. Challenge wasn’t there anymore. It got too easy for him in Grade 4 and 5...[Now in Grade 8, Sam is] excelling in math and science not so much in English. Those are his favorite subjects but he does good in English. Praise from teachers assures me that he is doing good” (Parent interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Darlene, March 7, 2010). Darlene spoke about a lack of challenge for Sam once he completed the immersion program at the end of Grade 3. This comment suggests this is a possible concern for students who have had the opportunity to learn in Mi’kmaq. “It’s a good program...it provides challenge for the students. It’s good to teach the first language before introducing the second language.” Darlene found the academic challenge of learning in Mi’kmaq a rewarding experience for her son.

When asked if she would recommend the immersion program to others, Beth stated, “I would advise them [to attend] because they would be ahead and smarter in some way because of the language. Advanced in like...I don’t know...you will have 2 languages” (Student interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Beth, March 11, 2010). Beth does indeed seem to be ahead, as illustrated by her mother’s comment, “She already knows what she wants to be. She even knows what courses she needs”
Impacts of the Wolastoqi Latuwewakon Immersion Program on Identity, Fluency, and Academic Achievement

In the following section, the findings about impacts of the Wolastoqi Latuwewakon immersion program on former immersion students in Tobique are detailed.

Impacts of the Wolastoqi Latuwewakon Immersion Program on Identity

Elders’ perspectives: Our language is the strongest part of who we are

For Indigenous people language and culture are linked in a relationship in which each nourishes the other. Indigenous worldview is embedded in and communicated through the ancestral language. Wolastoqi Latuwewakon reaches back through distance in time and provides an unbroken connection to that past and to the ancestors. The Elder Martha states, “it’s [the language] something that’s inside of you and if that’s what your ancestors had, then you should have it. I think that’s very important” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Martha, May 7, 2010). The depth, sacredness, and significance of the connection of the language to the past and to the ancestors are often not fully understood by non-Aboriginal people. Walter, another Elder, remarks that if the young people knew their language “they would have to have some history lessons along the way, how our ancestors survived and lived...Our identity is also our folklore, our language, our songs and stories” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Walter, May 10, 2010). To maintain a connection to one’s ancestral language is to maintain a link to all who have gone before and conversely to lose an ancestral language is to break a connection to those ancestors. Walter warns, “Once we lose that [the language] we
are going to lose our identity, we are going to lose ourselves, that’s what I’m afraid of in the future” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Walter, May 10, 2010). According to the Elders interviewed in Tobique, Wolastoqi Latuwewakon stabilization is a profoundly important issue.

Considering that the language is the vehicle through which the Wolastoqi ways of knowing, being, and doing are embedded and therefore taught, the Elders observe that understanding and speaking the language gives a person a powerful tool for knowing how to live as a Wolastoqi person. Martha explains when she says, “Maliseet instruction is important. Because it tells them the people like where they came from, who they are, where their ancestors came from and their identity. And the teachings, that’s the first thing your teachings are gonna come with that. They’re gonna be people who know where they’re going, where they come from and it’s something they can be proud of. I can’t call myself a white person ‘cause I’m not. But I’m afraid that where they don’t even have the language, and they just have the English. How do they call themselves Maliseet?” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Martha, May 7, 2010). Martha goes on to credit the central place Wolastoqi Latuwewakon has had in her life when she says, “You know they should have the same strong roots that we had in the language” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Martha, May 7, 2010).

The Elders who were interviewed critiqued the enormous debilitating effects that colonization has had on Wolastoqi people. “It was the government that wanted to assimilate us. They made our parents think that’s the way to go and our parents were innocent. And they only went what the white man wanted them to do. That was to lose the culture, lose the language and lose everything and to be just like another white person” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Martha, May 7, 2010). The Elders also acknowledge the role that Wolastoqi Latuwewakon stabilization efforts can play in reversing some the devastating effects of colonization. Martha says, “And now these young kids in their 20s are blaming their parents because they don’t have any of the language. They want the language. Those
young people want the language and I could see how they’re hurting for it because a lot of them didn't get it in their younger years. What are you if you don’t have the language?” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Martha, May 7, 2010).

These Elders support Bear Nicholas’ (2001) view that stabilizing the ancestral language may be the most single important act of self-determination that Indigenous communities can engage in. Passing Wolastoqi Latuwewakon on to future generations can help them find their way. Martha states, “And it’s just like fish out of the water — that’s what we are — fish out of the water. They took us out of our environment and we’re struggling to try and be non-native and you know we’re not. You can’t change people. They have to have their way. They have to have their culture and they have to have their language” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Martha, May 7, 2010). Walter sees the hopeful possibility of the immersion programming allowing the school to becoming to a place of language and cultural acquisition rather than a place of assimilation and loss, as it was for him in his day. “Language is important because it’s a part of who we are. Our language is the strongest part of who we are and as far as I am concerned you have to know who you are before you can go anywhere in life. You have to have a good foundation before you can build a good home/house or good family values around yourself. And I think knowing who you are and respecting and loving who you are is a part—would be a part—of learning your language, then learning your culture. Because when I was going through school I was ashamed of who I was” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Walter, May 10, 2010). Martha sees how language enhances cultural understanding, which would in turn provide a strong foundation for the young people in her community. “I think if you enriched the Maliseet culture in their way of life, I think they would respect life more. Because they would be taught to respect everything” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Martha, May 7, 2010).
Significant qualities of immersion students’ identities noticed by teachers

The immersion teachers are able to comment on the pride and confidence of these young learners as they learn in Wolastoqi Latuwewakon. Sheila feels this pride is linked to children having their cultural identity affirmed right from the start of schooling. “I think when kids are told who they are and they are made to understand then their self esteem is much better... At the beginning like they would cry and be shy but after awhile they were just like they were like a whole different child by the end of the year ... These kids coming here they don’t know they’re Maliseet. They don’t know who they are, a lot of them... I think once they are taught and told repeatedly day after day ‘this is who you are and this is our language,’ I think it’s going back to self-esteem. I think they have a sense of knowing. I hope so anyways. I hope they have a sense of knowing who they are and that they belong here and they are unique and different. They have their language. They have their culture. That’s a part of who they are” (Teacher interview, Impact of immersion programs, Sheila, June 22, 2010). Sheila’s statement makes visible the impact of teaching students about their Wolastoqi culture.

Elizabeth makes an important comment about the need for the school to explicitly help Wolastoqi children develop a strong sense of their cultural and linguistic identity because they are a minority within the larger mainstream Canadian society. “Like you know I taught them to be proud of who they are and you know being from the reserve and their mother tongue you know like. Because at first they thought it was a kind of French. And I told them there’s different languages but they’re not ashamed... I told them ‘That’s [Maliseet] our language’ and where we’re from and they’re proud of themselves” (Teacher interview, Impact of immersion programs, Elizabeth, April 22, 2010).

Elizabeth notes the confidence and the pride the children have to use Wolastoqi Latuwewakon in front of others. When they do, their identity is further strengthened. “... We had the Christmas concert so the songs they learned and stuff
like that they went out and were seeing all the people...They weren’t shy or anything. Like they just said what they had to in Wolastoqi Latuwewakon. When they got done we brought them back in the room and a little while after, one of the teachers came out and said the audience wants to hear them again...So the second time they went out they were prouder, like they gave more” (Teacher interview, Impact of immersion programs, Elizabeth, April 22, 2010). On another occasion during a shared reading activity with an older class Elizabeth noted how proud the immersion students were to be able to read in Wolastoqi Latuwewakon. “They’ll go up and read to Maliseet to the rest of the class. So they’re pretty proud to be able to read in Maliseet” (Teacher interview, Impact of immersion programs, Elizabeth, April 22, 2010). Overall, Elizabeth feels her students have a strong identity that is helping them to apply themselves to their learning. She says, “What can I say? My kids are so smart! I’m not bragging but they’re all so smart... I think my students are more disciplined – paying attention and stuff you know” (Teacher interview, Impact of immersion programs, Elizabeth, April 22, 2010). With their Wolastoqi identity affirmed, these children are developing a focus and ability to apply themselves to their learning tasks.

Elizabeth contrasts the pride she sees in her immersion students and their view toward Wolastoqi Latuwewakon with the attitudes of older students, who have not been through the immersion program. “And the older ones... one thing I notice, supervising out there is you tell them something like ‘kselotin’ [the class is in] and they’ll say ‘We’re not in Maliseet class anymore’. The older kids you know but the younger ones they don’t really respond or say anything like that. They don’t tell us like ‘we’re not in Maliseet class anymore’ (Teacher interview, Impact of immersion programs, Elizabeth, April 22, 2010). Immersion students willingly respond to communication in Wolastoqi Latuwewakon, while those who haven’t been in immersion seem to resist such interaction outside the core Wolastoqi language class.
Elizabeth also feels that young immersion students are able to draw on the Wolastoqi cultural ways of being that are embedded in the language to guide their behavior in the school. “They’re pretty respectful you know what I mean. Like say if one happens to knock a drink down, the others they’ll get napkins and stuff and they’ll help to clean it up and say “moskeyin” (I’m sorry). And they pretty much respect each other… The big difference is that when we go out on our field trips like that, they don’t run around or anything. They stay with me. They have rules to follow too and stuff like that and they respect that …” (Teacher interview, Impact of immersion programs, Elizabeth, April 22, 2010). Wolastoqi values of respect and cooperation can be seen in the classroom and field trip examples that Elizabeth provides.

The Tobique program is still in its very early stages and one teacher, Denise felt it was too early to provide concrete examples of the effect of immersion on the identity of immersion students. But she does believe, based on her own experience of assimilationist schooling and the emerging research she is reading about the Mohawk immersion program, that it will be possible to see a strong sense of confidence and identity develop in children learning in Wolastoqi Latuwewakon. “Because it’s only, what, a year or two, and I think it’s too early… Yeah, you need about two or three or four years anyway. Then we’ll be able to notice it…if it’s changing them. But, you know what I’ve been reading, ‘cause I have to read a lot of that stuff about immersion, with Dorothy Lazore, is that it does help the kids. They [the Mohawk students] even succeed better in high school and they’re proud of themselves now. Like when we were children we weren’t proud of ourselves. We had to fight. You know, we had to fight to be accepted anywhere … but I really believe that immersion will work. And it will bring their self-esteem up. I don’t know about behavior but maybe they will learn how to behave, once they learn the values of our culture” (Teacher interview, Impact of immersion programs, Denise, April 22, 2010).
Denise’s hopes for the Wolastoqi Latuwewakon immersion program are based on her research into other immersion programs as part of her teacher-training program. She contrasts her own experience of having to ‘fight to be accepted’ as a Maliseet person with the promise that Wolastoqi Latuwewakon immersion program holds for today’s generation of children who will find their language and culture affirmed as they grow.

Elizabeth points to the high engagement of the children in her class in the school as another piece of evidence to indicate the cultural pride and confidence they are developing. She notes, "My grade has very good attendance. They have the least days missed and they have the best attendance" (Teacher interview, Impact of immersion programs, Elizabeth, April 22, 2010). It is likely that high attendance indicates a positive attitude towards the Wolastoqi learning environment on the part of both the parents and these young students.

*Parents’ comments of their children’s emerging identities*

This section includes the voices of parents of four children who were in the immersion program for two years as 4- and 5-year-olds. The parents of the children who were enrolled in the immersion program at Tobique are developing an understanding of how Wolastoqi identity and language are inseparably linked. They are coming to see how learning to speak Wolastoqi Latuwewakon helps one know how to be a Wolastoqi person. Kyle understands the profound links between identity and language. “...Because the original instructions are in Maliseet. Our original teachings are in Maliseet. Our original ceremonies are in Maliseet. Everything we do, everything that I do when I get up and go to bed is always Maliseet. I always talk to my ancestors... As a traditional leader in the community I have to use that because I can’t carry hatred. I can’t carry animosity. I can’t carry jealousy. I can carry all the adjectives that there are and I don’t. I try to carry myself in an honourable fashion and you know treat people the way they should be treated" (Parent interview, Impact of immersion programs, Kyle, May 13, 2010). Josephine supports Kyle’s view when she says, “It’s good for [my child] to learn the
culture and you know, it helps Robbie identify who he is basically. You know, it’s background. He is a Maliseet and you know, it’s good for him to learn the language. I really wanted him to learn it. I was glad that they were doing that” (Parent interview, Impact of immersion programs, Josephine, April 22, 2010). Josephine sees the pride that her son Robbie developed in learning to speak his language. “Yeah, basically [being in immersion] gives him the pride and his heritage. So it did, yeah, it affected him” (Parent interview, Impact of immersion programs, Josephine, April 22, 2010). Susan commented that her daughter had a positive experience in immersion, coming home with a sense of pride and wanting to share. “Well, Carla never came home crying or anything. She’s always talking about it. Just like I’ll ask her what she learned at school and she’d tell me things” (Parent interview, Impact of immersion programs, Susan, May 6, 2010).

Theresa remarks on the way that learning in Wolastoqi Latuwewakon has strengthened her daughter Julia’s identity. “It’s not only helped her with her social skills but culturally you see a difference. You see a difference in them. When they are connected to the language and how that language connects to different things in our lives...” (Parent interview, Impact of immersion programs, Theresa, May 24, 2010).

These parents, like the Elders, understand the way that Eurocentric ideology and schooling has colonized and continues to colonize Indigenous people. In her own story Susan knew that not being able to speak her ancestral language took away a part of her Wolastoqi identity and she wants to reclaim that for her children by reintroducing Wolastoqi Latuwewakon to them. “I asked my mother once why she didn’t teach me Maliseet...She said old habits are hard to break from being at the Day School or whatever where they weren’t allowed to speak it. So it kind of stuck with her. But now she kind of regrets it and stuff like that. I told her ‘Mom, it doesn’t matter or anything’ but that’s one of the main reason I enrolled her and her sister and that was just I didn’t want it to get anymore lost. I didn’t want them to have that little piece that was missing or whatever” (Parent interview, Impact of immersion programs, Susan, May 6, 2010).
Theresa sees how understanding the Wolastoqi concepts and ways of being that embedded in Wolastoqi Latuwewakon strengthen who her daughter is. “Like our language is science right. Julia is picking that connection up so quick. You know that she doesn’t pollute the environment because of some of the words she is learning...” (Parent interview, Impact of immersion programs, Theresa, May 24, 2010). As Kyle says, “the language teaches you everything. It’s friggin’ simple” (Parent interview, Impact of immersion programs, Kyle, May 13, 2010). Theresa notes that her daughter is helped to navigate the world of friendship in her classroom by her understanding Wolastoqi Latuwewakon. “Julia is learning about the interaction between two kids... There’s sayings in our language that will take care of that right. [It] makes them stop and think about what their actions are through our language. So she’s even learning how to behave on a different level. Their [the children in immersion] behaviour is different” (Parent interview, Impact of immersion programs, Theresa, May 24, 2010).

Theresa does notice a difference as a parent in the way her child behaves and she credits some of this to her daughter’s experience in learning in Wolastoqi Latuwewakon. “Their connection to people, their connection to others. I mean her actual connection to other people, because of that language connection... Because the children who haven’t the language teaching are a little more abrupt, a little more... I don’t know how to describe it. They are a little more either reserved or too far out there. I find that Julia’s a really balanced kid and I do, of course, because it’s parenting but no... it has to do with the lessons learned through the language in school as well” (Parent interview, Impact of immersion programs, Theresa, May 24, 2010).

The parents note that their children want to share their learning from the immersion program. Josephine shares, “Robbie would come home and tell me what he learned or you know, try to get me to say it, and teach me how to pronounce it is what he would do. Actually both of my kids this is what they did or still do” (Parent
Beyond teaching his mother Josephine also notes how Robbie likes to pass on his knowledge of his ancestral language to other children who don’t know the language. “You know say in Red Bank where his grandmother lives. We go over there quite a bit. He’ll play with his cousins and stuff and I do notice that he’ll say certain things in Maliseet and they just look at him like he’s nuts you know! Like, what you talking about? They want to know what he’s saying and what he means. I guess that’s good in a way. He’s teaching them, basically, you know. They pick up on those words too ‘cause I was talking to one of their mothers and she was saying that they were using that. I forget what the word was now, but that Robbie had taught them something basic, like, a shape, or something little like that, or a color, numbers, something along that line. That was just a couple of years ago so I don’t remember. So yeah, he does you know... he passes it on” (Parent interview, Impact of immersion programs, Josephine, April 22, 2010). The ways that children will pass the language on can have a promising effect as it ripples outward from the small number of children who are in the immersion program.

**Student pride in language and culture**

Four students who completed the immersion in the previous school year were interviewed. Questions of pride and identity are difficult to address directly and even more difficult to phrase for young students, but the students were able to provide some evidence of the pride and confidence they feel from having been in the Wolastoqi Latuwewakon immersion program.

Breanne talked about teaching Wolastoqi Latuwewakon to her cousins who do not speak the language. “Yup, ‘cause my cousins they don’t know how to speak Maliseet so I teach them... I want them to speak Maliseet ‘cause I want them to know everything that I know” (Student interview, Impact of immersion programs, Breanne, June 5, 2010). Carla did the same, sharing her knowledge of Wolastoqi Latuwewakon with others, wanting to help them learn. Roseanne, one of the researchers, asked Carla, “What your mom was telling me that when you go to
Oromocto, you talk to your cousins in Maliseet, you teach them some words. You teach them some words, yup?” Carla nodded her head to indicate that she does teach her cousins Maliseet words when she visits (Student interview, Impact of immersion programs, Carla, May 6, 2010). When asked if she wanted her brother to take Maliseet immersion when he goes to school, Breanne said, “Yup…I do want him to ‘cause I want him to be older like me, so he could learn more Maliseet” (Student interview, Impact of immersion programs, Breanne, June 5, 2010). These students’ desire to share their Wolastoqi Latuwewakon with others is an indication of their valuing of what they have learned.

In the following interview excerpt with Roseanne, Breanne spoke of love which reflects the warm relationship in the immersion classroom and the ways the relationship seemed to be embedded in the Wolastoqi language.

Roseanne: Is there something you say to Elizabeth and Patsy in class sometimes that you like to say?
Breanne: I tell koselmol (I love you) to them and they say koselmol (I love you) back
(Student interview, Impact of immersion programs, Breanne, June 5, 2010).

Because young immersion students are just beginning to develop fluency in the language it is difficult to ascertain theirs level of cultural understandings. Elders, parents and teachers are more able to make observations about young children. However, there are a few examples of students being able to articulate their cultural understandings. Carla seems to demonstrate that she is beginning to incorporate cultural knowledge and Wolastoqi worldview into her identity.

Carla: Woliwon ciw samaqan (thank you for the water) that’s all I can say.
Roseanne: Wow, that’s pretty good. You’re thanking him for the what?
Carla: The water.
Roseanne: The water, ‘cause we need water to live, don’t we?
Carla: Um, hum (nodded her head yes) and it helps us breathe.

(Student interview, Impact of immersion programs, Carla, May 6, 2010).

Carla is already demonstrating a consciousness of the environment that is reflected in Wolastoqi worldview that sees environment and people as integrated and whole and not separated from each other as they tend to be in non-Indigenous worldviews.

**Impact of the Wolastoqi Latuwewakon Immersion Program on Fluency**

_Elders’ perspectives on fluency: So when a kid hears a language, they pick it up!_ The Elders worry about the loss of the Wolastoqi Latuwewakon. Walter shares his fears. “As far as I’m concerned we are on the verge of extinction... as Maliseet people. And our language is on the verge of extinction” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Walter, May 10, 2010). Elders spoke about how good and hopeful it feels for them to hear the mother tongue being spoken by young people because they know the language will only survive if it is passed on to the next generation. One of the tenets of immersion education is that if you create a good educational environment where children are immersed in a classroom where a language is used as the language of instruction, over time the children will become fluent in that language. Josephine’s own life experience tells her that languages can be learned. “Well, I was laying down and I thought about. I don’t know why children can’t pick up the language if they talk Indian to them, right? Because we even talk Indian to our dogs and cats and they understood. Even the pig. The pig understands the language ah? My father used to call him ‘pork chop’. Nit tehc sakiyat (And so he would come to him)” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Josephine, May 5, 2010). She points to her own schooling in regards to learning Latin—a language that was clearly not her own. “And the other thing that they used in school, teaching us even Latin. And we pick it up so whatever somebody is teaching you, you can pick it up ah?... So when a kid can hear the language, they can pick it up. They might not talk at the time in Maliseet, but later in time, something it comes out” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Josephine, May 10, 2010).
Josephine has observed the younger children in Tobique developing fluency as they participate in the immersion program and it clearly warms her heart to hear it spoken. She says, "Well, I don't see too many of 'em [young people] but the ones I know, they speak the language. Even those boys there this morning at Melda's, I didn't know who they were. 'Wolokiskot'. You know. 'It's a nice day'. 'Eci wolihtaqok'. 'That sounded so nice'. They said, 'Good morning', and to me it sounded real good." (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Josephine, May 5, 2010).

Josephine tells of a particularly poignant moment when she was sick and in the hospital and her granddaughter sang her a song in Wolastoqi Latuwewakon. “When I was in the hospital, Roxanne brought her there quite a bit ah? She even sang Maliseet to me. She said, ‘You want to listen to Gracie Aunt?’ And I said, ‘Sure.’ And she sang Mali Lula and she sang another song, all in Maliseet and then before they left she told me, ‘Koselomol’. ‘I love you’. Ntiyahpon, nil ona koselomol. I told her I loved her too! ... She told me that she loves me in Maliseet so I told her ‘I love you too, you keep coming back’. Wow! I just looked at her. I was shocked. Yup, I wish really more children pick it up. And I'm sure they do, the ones that talk Indian to them ah? ... You know I was thinking about that. It would that be wonderful just to hear the little ones ah? Talking Maliseet. Like Gracie and she can sing!” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Josephine, May 5, 2010).

Walter makes two observations on the fluency that the young immersion students are achieving in Wolastoqi Latuwewakon. “I had a chance to work with some of the kids in the past before at the school and I was really quite impressed with ...some of them. I don’t know if I was impressed or jealous. They knew words that I didn’t know. ‘Cause they know their numbers and colors...I try to speak Maliseet with them whenever they are around. Some of them actually understand what I am saying. I was really surprised and pleased at the same time” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Walter, May 10, 2010). Walter is even more pleased when he can point to the fluency of his own daughter who learning to speak
Wolastoqi Latuwewakon. “And I think it’s different with my daughter Annie. I can actually speak to her and I know she understands not all of the words but I guess the root word, like the command word, the root word. Whatever but she knows what I am saying to her” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Walter, May 10, 2010).

*Teachers’ comments on fluency*

Teachers are well-positioned to see the development of fluency in Wolastoqi Latuwewakon because at the beginning of the program many of the children have no understanding of the language and gradually, over time, they come to comprehend the language and begin developing fluency in it. Sheila notes how children simply develop fluency the more they are exposed to the language. “I think it’s more exposure to the language because for example now I will address the kids like when I am out there. I speak Maliseet to them rather than English ’cause I think they’re talking it. They have Maliseet language” (Teacher interview, Impact of immersion programs, Sheila, June 22, 2010).

Sheila notices that over time children extending speaking Wolastoqi Latuwewakon to activities outside the classroom. “Like when we go out to have lunch and stuff they talk to the older grades and stuff. They just all pretty much talk to each other but with me, once they’re done eating they’ll talk to me in Maliseet. They’re done eating and if they need more they say “kotowohsom” ... And the cooks out there they kind of like they’ll hear my kids say talking in Maliseet. The staff they’ll like grin. They notice them speaking our language...I mean I think they know they’re happy and they’re not ashamed of learning and stuff” (Teacher interview, Impact of immersion programs, Sheila, April 22, 2010). Sheila provides another example of how fluency develops as students use the language for everyday routines. “They can ask to go to the bathroom and they can say ‘more milk’ and ‘go ask Linda’ and they use the language a lot more here at lunch with me” (Teacher interview, Impact of immersion programs, Sheila, April 22, 2010).
Sheila notices that in their second year students are beginning to develop fluency in reading and writing Wolastoqi Latuwewakon. "Usually twice a week my students would go into Grade 1 and 2 classes and grade 1 students would read to my class. And so they'd read to them in English. So one day one of my students came back. Well the teacher brought her back and she was wondering if they could have some books in Maliseet. They said one of the students wanted to take the book and read it in Maliseet to the Grade 1. 'Cause my class is immersion and so one of my students took some books back and read it in Maliseet. She was pretty proud ... like she wanted to read in Maliseet. And actually one of my students was excellent in reading in both English and Maliseet ... When we're done reading I'll get one of them to come up and read it in Maliseet. One after another one will want to go up and read. They'll always ask 'Can I read now? Can I read now?' They'll go up and read to Maliseet to the rest of the class...So they're pretty proud to be able to read in Maliseet...” (Teacher interview, Impact of immersion programs, Elizabeth, April 22, 2010).

Elizabeth's comments demonstrate the competence that children are developing in Wolastoqi Latuwewakon and this is certainly linked to the confidence they feel in the immersion program.

Elizabeth notes that the immersion students are not afraid to use their language in public places and before diverse audiences. Their efforts to speak Wolastoqi Latuwewakon in public are always met with enthusiasm. "We've had Graydon Nicholas come and the kids sang to him. He wanted them to say the numbers and they counted, well from 1-20. He was just amazed like just seeing all this and Timmy would ask them something in Maliseet and they would respond back in Maliseet. And Graydon was really amazed by that...You know he said 'My goodness. I can only count to 4 and these kids can count to 20!'" (Teacher interview, Impact of immersion programs, Elizabeth, April 22, 2010). Elizabeth provides another example. "Actually there was this elderly woman. She celebrated her 90th birthday this year so I told the kids it would be nice for my students to go there and sing some songs in Maliseet for the elderly people. Just so they [the Elders] know that it's being taught at school and show how well the young children are picking up the language. They were all
excited. And they sang ‘Happy Birthday’ to the lady and there was about 4 different songs they sang. They were so excited about it and after the elderly people clapped for them. The elderly people were amazed by how much they were learning, like singing. And then we got good feedback from it after from people. Even the school itself. Other people when I met up with them they would always comment ‘Oh I heard your students went to sing in Maliseet’ and they’d be hearing it from the elderly people and stuff” (Teacher interview, Impact of immersion programs, Elizabeth, April 22, 2010). These stories point to the authentic reinforcement that comes from using a language in context. When a person uses a language for real communicative purposes there is natural reinforcement in the environment which make a person more likely to speak that language. In this case, the children’s ability to sing songs in Wolastoqi Latuwewakon brought affirmation from highly-valued members of the community.

Two teachers who teach the children after they have completed the immersion program comment on whether they observe fluency and confidence differences between immersion and non-immersion students. As the program in Tobique is still relatively new and emerging, these observations are preliminary and further research needs to be conducted over time. As Marjorie states, “You know this immersion is young for us...this is only our third year and this is only my second year teaching so you know, it’s hard for me to distinguish to see the difference” (Teacher interview, Impact of immersion programs, Marjorie May 4, 2010). She also points out that she feels the children’s strong sense of identity is linked to the presence of Maliseet teachers and perhaps to cultural and not necessarily linguistic identity. “But I also think because we’re a native school with native teachers that the children just feel at home here...I mean these kids here know that they’re native, know their identity so...you know I think the immersion had nothing to do with it. I think it's just their self-esteem. They know who they are and they’re proud of who they are” (Teacher interview, Impact of immersion programs, Marjorie, May 4, 2010).
Denise, another teacher, does notice some differences but she cautions that her findings are preliminary. “When I would ask the kids their body parts, they [the former immersion students] were the ones that would answer first, before the Grade 2 students. I don’t think the Grade 2 students had the immersion...They [the immersion students] were the ones that were to answer quick, with their body parts, their colors, and their numbers. Yeah, it does make a difference” (Teacher interview, Impact of immersion programs, Denise, May 4, 2010).

Parents’ thoughts on fluency: She was pretty proud coming home and saying her language to me

The four parents interviewed see the real danger that Wolastoqi Latuwewakon faces as a language threatened by the increasing and pervasive influence of English. Theresa notes, “When I heard there were less than 100 fluent speakers and with the lack of resources for myself to learn the language I know that to save our language it has to come from the younger generation. Knowing what we know about kids and how they absorb things so much easier at that age and that level I knew that it was for her” (Parent interview, Impact of immersion programs, Theresa, May 24, 2010).

The parents notice that their children were able to develop beginning fluency in Wolastoqi Latuwewakon. They observe that they can words, short phrases, songs in Maliseet and they are able to understand in a classroom taught all in Maliseet. Theresa notes how her daughters could follow along in the language. “I mean her ability to speak with her teachers [in the immersion classroom] there ...and have those conversations and the overall experience for her has been really positive. I can’t think of her going through any other program now because it’s doing so well for her” (Parent interview, Impact of immersion programs, Theresa, May 24, 2010).

Josephine points to the language that Robbie developed. “You know he’s learned a lot - his colors, animals, the basics of the language...And I’ve learned a lot of Maliseet just from the kids, you know. I’ve had to help them with their work so I’ve enjoyed it myself. I’ve learning a lot of Maliseet over the years with them doing the course” (Parent interview, Impact of immersion programs, Josephine, April 22, 2010).
another parent who is a non-speaker was impressed with how much Maliseet language her daughter Annie was learning. “Well like she was pretty proud coming home saying her language to me you know and I didn’t even know what she was saying” (Parent interview, Impact of immersion programs, Sarah, May 11, 2010).

An important indicator of fluency for immersion students is their ability to carry on some level of conversation with native speakers of the Wolastoqi Latuwewakon. Josephine comments on Robbie’s ability to speak with his grandfather. “He picked up really quick, you know. His grandfather speaks it to him a lot so he more or less wanted to know what his grandfather is teasing him about basically. So he was interested in it. Him and his grandmother were talking. He’s counting and recognizing the Maliseet and the Micmac [sic]. Their numbers are almost identical. There’s just a little different of a pronunciation but you know he learned that as well. The difference between the two language” (Parent interview, Impact of immersion programs, Josephine, April 22, 2010). Kyle, a Wolastoqi speaker himself, speaks to the level of conversation he can have with his son. “Jonah picks up the language just like that you know and it’s because I speak to him all the time when he is here with me on the weekends. I speak to him in the language. And I’m really proud of you guys because you are taking the initiative to pick up the language because we are going to lose it” (Parent interview, Impact of immersion programs, Kyle, May 13, 2010). When asked if Robbie could understand when his grandfather speaks to him in Wolastoqi Latuwewakon, Josephine replied, “Like I said, not always, but he will pick out certain words, or certain phrases. I guess, not always. Well, yes, he can understand what he’s saying or figure it out, I guess” (Parent interview, Impact of immersion programs, Josephine, April 22, 2010). Susan concurs that her daughter can communicate at some level with her grandmother, who is a speaker of the language. “My mother is really fluent. She just didn’t really teach us and my daughter lists off what she knows and my mother understands what she’s saying” (Parent interview, Impact of immersion programs, Susan, May 6, 2010).
Susan comments how much it impacts on her to hear her children using Maliseet to communicate. “It makes me emotional. I wanted it. Like when I was growing up, I knew I was Indian and I was Maliseet. And I knew a couple of things [in the language] and that was it” (Parent interview, Impact of Immersion Programs, Susan, May 6, 2010).

An important point to note with the Tobique Immersion program is that currently it is only available to the children who are 4 and 5 years old. Once children enter Grade 1 they begin instruction in English with only a limited amount of core Wolastoqi Latuwwewakon offered each day. Two of the parents of these former immersion students have noted that the level of fluency in the Maliseet language has declined since their children have left the immersion program. “Annie is being shy. She pretty much lost most of it [the language], you know what I mean” (Parent interview, Impact of immersion programs, Sarah, May 11, 2010). Josephine worries that Robbie's fluency is diminishing. “Like I said again, I’d like for it, you know, to have more, to be more involved in it now. Cause if that’s all they’re going to get, they’re going to slowly forget it. You know over the next couple of years” (Parent interview, Impact of immersion programs, Josephine, April 22, 2010). These comments are supported by the research that suggests that to maintain fluency children in a language must continue to have the opportunity to use that language in authentic and meaningful situations. A discussion of dual maintenance bilingual programs found in the literature review of this report is one means of addresses the issue of maintaining fluency. Kyle, however, does not give hope for expanding the program and feels that it is never too late to begin extending the immersion program. “Delbert [who teaches language at the high school in town] was saying that you can tell the kids who had it [the language] before and those that haven’t had any exposure to it. Those who have had exposure to it, it comes back to them. As long as they are exposed to it, it will come back to them” (Parent interview, Impact of immersion programs, Kyle, May 13, 2010).
**Students and fluency**

When this research was conducted the students had been out of the immersion program for a year. One could speculate that the students would not be as fluent as they had been a year ago unless they were living in Wolastoqi-speaking families. In the following interviews students were able to demonstrate that they had maintained some of the vocabulary and many of the phrases that they had learned in K4 and K5. The following examples attest to this.

Roseanne: Can you count in Maliseet? Can you count for me?

Carla: Pesq, nis, nihi, new, nan, kamahcin, oluwikonok, eqsonatek, qotinsk. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. (p 2)

Roseanne: Wow! That’s pretty good. How about colors? Can you name any colors?

Carla: Um, wisaweyu and stahqoncihte and musqancihte, alinciswocihte and amwi pqeyu and I don’t remember the rest.

Roseanne: Can you tell me more Maliseet words? Teach me some stuff that you know.

Carla: Eyes are siskul,

Roseanne: Eyes are siskul. What else?

Carla: Nose is wihton and mouth, lip is tun, piyehsuwol, (points to her hair)

Roseanne: Right

Carla: …and fingers is pusqilcakonol and mokikon is chest and topskuhk is neck.

Roseanne: Oh my goodness, you know a lot of parts of your body! Pretty good!

Carla: …and sit is feet.

Roseanne: - Sit is feet. Okay, do you want to share any more?

Carla: - Hand is pihthin,

(Student interview, Impact of immersion programs, Carla, May 6, 2010).

Breanne demonstrated use of greetings and phrases and was able to count by 10s to 100 in Maliseet.

Roseanne: Good morning.
Breanne: Good morning.

Roseanne: Woli sepawiw

Breanne: Woli sepawiw

[Breanne could count with confidence to 40 in Maliseet and then by tens to 100]

Roseanne: Can you count from kaahcin kehsinsk (60) to qotaq (100) by counting by 10s?

Breanne: yeah

Roseanne: Okay. What would be after 60? What’s 70 in Maliseet?

Breanne: Oluwikonok kehsinsk (70)

Roseanne: Okay, what’s 80?

Breanne: Oqomulcin kensinsk (80)

Roseanne: What’s 90?

Breanne: Esqonatek kehsinsk (90)

Roseanne: ...and what’s 100?

Breanne: Qotatq (100)

Roseanne: Oh my goodness, you can count clear to 100! Wow!

(Student interview, Impact of immersion programs, Breanne, June 5, 2010).

The same student was able expand from single words and move into combining words and phrases.

Roseanne: Can you give me your favorite Maliseet sentence? Like a sentence. Like I said it has more than one word. Well actually tomehtikonom masqositol has more than two words and it’s really not a sentence. If you said “staqoncihtetol tomehtikonom masqositol” and that would be a sentence. That would mean what?

Breanne: Green string beans.

Roseanne: That’s right. String beans are green!

(Student interview, Impact of immersion programs, Breanne, June 5, 2010).

Unfortunately many of the students were already beginning to forget some of the phrases, songs, and words they had learned in the immersion program, confirming
the parents’ fears that if the program is not extended beyond K5 many gains in Wolastoqi Latuwewakon will be lost. The following passages indicate what happens when language is not used on a daily basis for extended periods in a meaningful context.

Carla: I can sing Rudolph in Maliseet. Rudolph mehqitnat otuhksis, eli...I can’t remember the rest.
Roseanne: You can’t remember the words? You know what? You started off really good. Rudolph, mehqitnat otuhk, eci possaqhek wihton. Psi-te kotkik otuhkiyik ...Do you remember those words?
[Carla smiled and nodded her head]
Carla: Yup!
(Student interview, Impact of immersion programs, Carla, May 6, 2010).

Julia stated in her interview that she could count to 10 in Maliseet but said, “We don't do that anymore” (Student interview, Impact of immersion programs, Julia, May 24, 2010).

**Impacts of the Wolastoqi Latuwewakon Immersion Program on Academic Achievement**

One area that worries parents about immersion education is whether their children will do well in other school subjects like math or science and whether learning in an immersion setting will harm the development of their English skills. Extensive research was conducted in the 1960s when the first French immersion programs were being set up to ease parents’ and educators’ fears, and the research clearly showed that except sometimes for a brief and temporary lag when children are first being formally introduced to English reading and writing, immersion children generally perform as well as their peers and in some cases even perform better than their peers educated in English. More recently, research has been conducted in
other Aboriginal immersion settings among the Mohawk and the Inuit and points the same successes. Children who attend Indigenous immersion program do not suffer any academic loss. They generally perform as well, or better than their non-immersion peers. The research from this report and particularly the findings from the 10-year-old Eskasoni Mi'kmaq program are pointing to the same positive results in academic achievement (See Figure 2).

As has been stated several times in this report, because the program in Tobique is still in its infancy, it is difficult to come to any significant conclusions regarding academic achievement. There are a few comments that do suggest that the pattern of the Wolastoqi Latuwewakon immersion program in Tobique is following the predictable pattern of successful immersion program.

A parent’s perspective on academic achievement
The parents of these young immersion students have commented elsewhere that their children are performing well in school. They report that their children are confident and have a sense of pride in themselves and they are becoming fluent in Wolastoqi Latuwewakon. Theresa points to examples of how well her daughter is performing in all other areas. “Not only that but she is excelling in other areas. She is reading at a level that is well beyond her age group. So overall is it very positive…[The language] is teaching them a different dynamic, a way of speaking, a way of connecting. It’s because of the language they’re able to be easy. They are picking up on things, a lot easier from the English language. And math skills and science skills” (Parent interview, Impact of immersion programs, Theresa, May 24, 2010).

Teachers’ perspectives
Elizabeth provides an example of the high academic achievement when she recounts this example, cited earlier, of her students reading in both Wolastoqi Latuwewakon and English. “Usually twice a week my students would go into Grade 1 and 2 classes and Grade 1 students would read to my class. And so they’d read to them in English.
So one day one of my students came back. Well the teacher brought her back and she was wondering if they could have some books in Maliseet. They said one of the students wanted to take the book and read it in Maliseet to the Grade 1. ‘Cause my class is immersion and so one of my students took some books back and read it in Maliseet. She was pretty proud like she wanted to read in Maliseet. And so and actually one of my student she was excellent in reading in both English and Maliseet … When we’re done reading I'll get one of them to come up and read it in Maliseet one after another one. They'll always ask ‘Can I read now? Can I read now?’ They'll go up and read to Maliseet to the rest of the class...So they're pretty proud to be able to read in Maliseet...” (Teacher interview, Impact of immersion programs, Elizabeth, April 22, 2010).

Elizabeth’s comments speak to the confidence the students have in their ability and it speaks to their fluency to be able to read in Wolastoqi Latuwewakon. But it also speaks to academic achievement because the children are clearly developing competence in reading. Marjorie, a teacher who teaches the children after they complete the immersion program, does see some slight differences in academic achievement. “I see a slight difference between the immersion and non-immersion children. I found the ones in Grade 1 this year were reading at a greater pace than the ones that were not in immersion. But yeah I would say there’s a slight difference” (Teacher interview, Impact of immersion programs, Marjorie, May 4, 2010). This observation suggests that reading skills developed in Wolastoqi Latuwewakon are being transferred to English because as Cummins (1989) tells us, children only learn to read once and then they transfer those learning to the second language. Clearly immersion is not holding these children back in any way in their current classes and it is expected that over time parents’ fears about whether their children will ‘learn English’ will be laid to rest.
Looking Back at the Impact of Two Indigenous Immersion Programs on Identity, Fluency, and Academic Success

In the preceding section of this report, the impact of the Mi’kmaq and Wolastoqi immersion programs upon students’ language fluency, academic achievement, and sense of cultural identity has been investigated. Looking across the three strands of this research, one can see several themes emerging. The academic achievements of former Mi’kmaq immersion students are well supported by the interview data and the data from the reading assessments of the Grade 7 students. Certainly more research is needed in this area, but current findings point to the general trend toward greater academic success for students who complete the Mi’kmaq immersion program. Findings in the identity section of this report state that former immersion students seem to possess leadership qualities as well as other positive personal characteristics that will enable them to take on central roles in the community and in the workforce. In the fluency section, it was shown that the first group of immersion students maintained at least some fluency in the Mi’kmaq language five years after they completed the program. As Elders reminded the research team, maintaining the Mi’kmaq language is of vital importance to this community’s well-being. For a young person to be fluent in Mi’kmaq means he or she can contribute to the community’s cultural renewal and can bring strong language and cultural assets to the workforce of that community.

Looking at the data on the immersion program on Tobique, the promising impact of Wolastoqi Latuwewakon immersion on identity and fluency is evident. The confidence, pride, and strong attendance that young immersion students display are surely foundational for future success. The characteristics that these young learners are developing are ones that will open the doors to many future career and community possibilities. It is difficult to gather data on academic achievement for these young learners, but transcript data indicate that parents and teachers do observe academic strengths in these students. As the program develops, there will be a need to document academic achievement in these students.
Based upon the findings of this study, the impacts of the Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqi Latuwewakon immersion programs in shaping a young person’s identity, fluency, and academic achievement are impressive. The findings provide a number of persuasive reasons for further investing in immersion programs in these communities, for developing plans to begin such programs in other communities, as well as conducting further research and following students in more longitudinal studies.

**Leadership, Assets, and Challenges in Beginning Language Immersion Programs**

The following section addresses the findings of this study in relation to leadership, assets, and challenges observed and experienced in setting up Indigenous language programs. In the focus group and interviews for this section, the research team spoke with people who had been involved in the early beginnings of the Mi’kmaq Immersion program in Eskasoni, and of the Wolastoqi Latuwewakon Immersion program in Tobique. These people were asked to articulate some of the broader leadership and capacity enhancement processes and community assets that appear to have allowed these immersion programs to thrive, as well as barriers and challenges that may have impeded implementation of immersion programming.

**Eskasoni: What Happened to Enable Mi’kmaq Immersion to begin There?**

In this section the findings from Eskasoni are detailed. Five people were interviewed after being identified as being involved in the beginning stages of Mi’kmaq immersion. Brenda is a teacher who saw the need for an immersion program and worked tirelessly to make it happen. Rachel is an Elder who has been instrumental in developing materials and resources since the beginning of the Immersion program. Vanessa, a senior administrator in an educational leadership position, supported the program for many years. Gerald, also a senior administrator in an educational leadership position, was on the school board when the Immersion
Program was beginning. Trevor, an administrator in the Faculty of Education at St. Francis Xavier University, has worked to graduate over 100 qualified Mi’kmaq teachers from the BEd program at StFX and into the school system of Eskasoni and other Mi’kmaq communities. He too was involved since the beginning of the immersion program.

Having a vision: Pushing for immersion through many obstacles and over many years

Each of the people interviewed in this section has a strong vision for Mi’kmaq language in the community. Vanessa spoke of “having our own Mi’kmaq school. A school where children will be taught the language, culture and the in general the curriculum all in Mi’kmaq” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Vanessa, January 29, 2011). She is a supporter of the Mi’kmaq Immersion program and her vision calls for a dramatic expansion of this program so that the whole curriculum from K-12 is taught in Mi’kmaq. However, she stated that this is not enough to ensure the survival of the Mi’kmaq language. “But it doesn’t stop there, people need to speak to the children in Mi’kmaq. Along with that, the school can only do so much to teach the language. Without the parents speaking to the children in Mi’kmaq, it doesn’t help them learn effectively. They would understand a little bit but not fluently” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Vanessa, January 29, 2011). So the vision Vanessa has for Mi’kmaq immersion in the school is closely connected with a vision for the community. Indeed, each of those interviewed made this important connection between the school and the need for wider support in the community.

Rachel, an Elder who has developed many resources for the Mi’kmaq Immersion program, echoed Vanessa’s vision of a school that was fully Mi’kmaq. “There is a need for a separate school for immersion, a separate place away from this school so it could be immersion. They are following the English way too much [at the current school]” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Rachel, January 24, 2011). Rachel’s belief that a separate school is needed is supported by the research literature, which states that language immersion is most successful when the immersion is more complete (Aguilera, 2007; Fillerup, 2000; Holm & Holm, 1995). In this case, the
Mi'kmaq Immersion program is in one wing of the school but there is English spoken elsewhere in the school, on the playground and in the office. So the children are not fully immersed in a Mi'kmaq setting each day at school. Rachel recognizes that this is not ideal, and her vision calls for a more holistic Mi'kmaq immersion program.

Gerald, a former teacher in several Mi'kmaq communities and now working in a leadership role at Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (MK), recalls studying about language loss at university, and then seeing it in his own school. "We studied how language loss occurs. Then I'm looking around and seeing it all around all over the place. I was teaching at [another Mi'kmaw community] at that time and I'm seeing it with the kids....Do you hear it in the playground and that's the group that like you speak it with, with your peers?" (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Gerald, January 7, 2011). Gerald noticed in the 1980s that Mi'kmaq language usage was declining drastically. One of the most important places he noticed this decline was on the playground. Research shows that when children do not use the language with their peers, it is in danger of being lost (Francis & Reyhner, 2002; McCarty & Dick, 1996; Slaughter, 1997).

However, Gerald has also studied the research on immersion programs in schools. “With all the stuff that they had they were showing especially that you can add a language, additive language. That it was positive. There was nothing there to say that it was not positive.” Gerald knew that Immersion programs in other Indigenous communities had been successful. He became a strong supporter of beginning an Immersion program in Eskasoni. “And I was saying if we are losing the language. ... It was getting to that point. I was on the school board in the early 90s and [a teacher] brought in a proposal to start teaching some of the language in the school. I supported it. ...I'm going to push for total immersion” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Gerald, January 7, 2011).
**Dedicated visionaries needed: The long slow work of gaining support for Immersion**

Gerald points out that many were not in support of the Mi’kmaq Immersion program at first, including those in key positions like the school board. “At that point, Indian Affairs…and I think many people on the [school] board didn’t agree with teaching the language” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Gerald, January 7, 2011). Gerald spoke of his efforts to convince the school board that Mi’kmaq immersion could work. “In the early 90s, I [told] the school board…that we were now [losing the Mi’kmaq language] at an [alarming] rate...since the 1980s. I showed them a graph of 100% speakers to 0% speakers. The kids coming in the 80s, about 100% were fluent. In 1985, about 70% were fluent. By 1990, about 40% were fluent. By 1995, we were at about 20%. At the rate we were going, you could draw a line like this [slope downwards] and by 1998, we should have no speakers at all coming into the school which means that the language is dead. I said, all of us on the school board, if someone were to ask, we were the ones in charge, the ones who were making the decisions when we lost the language. Once we get to this critical mass, you can’t bring it back other than doing some other things. And I remember like, if it finally starts clicking in and starting to listen.” Gerald analyzed the drastic state of language loss and was able to provide compelling evidence to the school board. As well, he reminded them about the responsibility they had to try to save the Mi’kmaq language, and he provided them with the knowledge he had gained about immersion programs elsewhere, as a way to address this crisis. Gerald’s deep dedication to getting the Mi’kmaq immersion program off the ground is evident here.

Gerald knew the school board would not start out with a Mi’kmaq immersion program for all grades, but he lobbied for that as a way to raise awareness. “I’m going to push for the sky knowing full well that they will seek a compromise. The compromise being, let’s do a few classes” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Gerald, January 7, 2011). And so a pilot program began in Eskasoni in 1999, in Kindergarten. This program extended each year as the children completed one grade after another, until it reached Grade 3.
The importance of this kind of long-term commitment to the vision of stabilizing the language and gradually developing community support is evident. Gerald kept reminding community members about the central goal of saving the language. “Everyone is...forgetting what the real purpose was...The purpose is [to save the language]... we are losing the language every year and it still bothers me today” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Gerald, January 7, 2011). Gerald’s vision directed his actions throughout the years. “If there has been any focus all along, to me, it is what can I do about it? Where am I in position to help it and do it in a manner that is non-threatening?”

He gives examples of this commitment to Mi’kmaq language in different aspects of his life, from school board member to working at MK, to church member. “Simple things like...I remember when...I told [another church member], let’s put all the prayers and laminate them for the church. And get the kids each day to do the readings and pray in Mi’kmaq. Every Sunday, we did a showcase.” Gerald convinced others that having the children learn prayers and songs in Mi’kmaq would help to keep the language alive in the community. He encountered resistance but kept true to the vision of saving the language. “[Another church member] said, you can’t put these [laminated prayers] in the church. They will steal them. And I said, now, come by me [person’s name]. If they are going to steal them, what are they going to do with them home? They are probably going to try to learn. I was like, isn’t that what we are trying to do? Aren’t we trying to get material into the homes so they will read and start looking at them? And hopefully, it would start flickering in something else.” Gerald looked for ways, both large and small, to initiate strategies to save the language both in schools and out in the community, because he was able to keep his focus on the vision of saving the Mi’kmaq language.

*Teacher as warriors: The foundation of the program*

Gerald referred to the teachers who were the first ones to pilot the Mi’kmaq Immersion program as “warriors” who gathered information and developed
Brenda states that her wish to attend this Immersion Teachers’ Certification Program at St. Thomas University was not fulfilled immediately, but that eventually she and two other teachers were sent by the school board for this training, in 1999. As soon as they began the training, the school started piloting the Mi’kmaq Immersion program. Brenda reflects that this was a good thing, as no time was wasted. “Right away, we started immersion even before we finished school... we graduated in 2003 [from the program at St. Thomas]. Ready or not, it was that one. They just did it correctly. Otherwise, we would have been still waiting” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Brenda, January 24, 2011). Brenda’s words make it clear that if a community waits until everything is perfectly in place to begin an immersion program, that time will probably never come. It is important to make a start, perhaps with a pilot, and gradually develop the program.

**A teacher’s vision: Brenda**

Brenda marvels at how the Mi’kmaq Immersion program has grown, while seeing the need for much more growth. “For me, 25 years ago when I went to school, I thought this day would never come [when the program has run successfully for over 10 years]” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Brenda, January 24, 2011). Brenda’s vision calls for a continuation of the program and provides a reminder of
the success of the Quebec model of enforcing a French-only policy in the school system. "We need to continue what we are doing. We need to continue with what we are doing in immersion. We have control over our own school and we have a school board. It is in our best interest to teach the children in our language so everyone will speak Mi'kmaq. Look at the French communities. Everyone there can speak French there. Everything is in French including their schools. They have no choice but to learn the language whether they like it or not.” Brenda’s description of another successful language model highlights the importance of policies developed by community leaders, of the impact of decisions made by the school board and other community leaders. This echoes Gerald’s statement about the need for the school board to take a leadership role in beginning an Immersion program.

*Community Assets and Partners: Supporting Roles in Establishing the Mi’kmaq Immersion Program*

Vanessa stated that the Elders were a vital community asset for establishing the Mi’kmaq Immersion program. “What we needed the most were the Elders to help us out. The Elders have so much knowledge of the language and it is very important for us to utilize that as much as we can” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Vanessa, January 29, 2011). Brenda stated that children who come to Kindergarten speaking Mi’kmaq are great assets, ones that are unfortunately not as strong as they once were. “There were a lot of children who spoke Mi’kmaq [until] just recently. They do not speak Mi’kmaq now...that was our greatest asset before. It’s [still] our greatest asset today, but there were more speakers before” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Brenda, January 24, 2011).

As well as the children who are speakers, Brenda identified Elders and community members employed by the school who “specialize and who know how to write,” such as Rachel (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Brenda, January 24, 2011). Brenda mentioned the Centre of Excellence where Rachel worked, which is no longer in operation. This centre was supported by the school board and MK and was a valuable asset to the program as it began, especially for teachers who were not
confident in their reading and writing abilities in Mi’kmaq. “I do not even need to know how to write in Mi’kmaq, I can just give it to [Rachel] and she will help me. Our Elders too were good at helping us. The Center of Excellence was a good help. We were lucky to have them. They had information there that we could use. They would help us find material if we ask them. They found material for us” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Brenda, January 24, 2011).

The Education Director at the time of the beginnings of the Mi’kmaq Immersion program was identified by most interviewed as an important figure and an asset in getting the program off the ground. It must have been a big decision for the person in this role to commit to beginning the first Mi’kmaq Immersion program, and it was clear she did not make this decision lightly. Trevor recalled, “Well [the Education Director] made this happen. She had the guts to do this... she made sure she consulted and had her opinions lined up” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Trevor, February 21, 2011). Gerald spoke of how the Education Director was instrumental in ensuring the program started off on a strong footing. “Once she made a commitment to immersion, the first thing she did was...she wouldn’t commit to immersion unless she sent teachers for training in immersion. She said, ‘In good faith, I cannot send people into a classroom without feeling that they have the tools to do the job’ ” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Gerald, January 7, 2011). It is striking how the Education Director not only made the decision that allowed the program to begin, but also made certain that teachers were well equipped to succeed in the fledgling Mi’kmaq Immersion program.

Another community asset that Gerald described was a program to teach parents and other adults in the community more of the Mi’kmaq language. Parents, in particular, wanted to know more of the language as their children brought home homework in Mi’kmaq. “The problem that comes in that we send a whole bunch of stuff home and tell them, help your kid with this. Except we never taught the parents how to read and write this. So how are they going to help their kids? So we offered a few courses to anybody who wants to take them. These classes were full and you should have
seen that class, it was full. Rachel taught that one. We used to have a great time. The reason was that they were getting enough skills so they can read” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Gerald, January 7, 2011]. There have been many years when no adult programming was offered; however it is evident the creation of adult language classes was important for parents in the early years of the program, and continues to be important when offered.

University partners who helped in beginning and maintaining the Mi’kmaq Immersion program
Gerald discussed a number of partners that enabled the success of the beginning Mi’kmaq Immersion program. He stated that several universities played significant roles, including St. Francis Xavier University, Cape Breton University, and St. Thomas University. St. Francis Xavier University partnered with MK in preparing certified Mi’kmaq teachers, which enabled the Mi’kmaq Immersion program to be staffed with Mi’kmaq-speaking teachers who were trained and possessed credentials. This meant the immersion program had stability and depth. “You are going to have to set up the infrastructure. You will have to train your people...The best thing to do is to train your own people. We’ve been pushing teacher training, StFX is doing well for that. We’ve had some cohorts coming through, like if we know a school is coming up, we set up teacher training for them. So by the time the school opens then you will have teachers from your own community. We are creating jobs for communities...Creating jobs for a community creates infrastructure in the community. It’s important for people to have those skills. People may have the passion but without those skills it’s impossible” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Gerald, January 7, 2011]. Gerald linked the need for teacher training with the economic impact of having qualified teachers from the community to staff the Mi’kmaq Immersion program.

Trevor, an administrator in the Faculty of Education at St. Francis Xavier University, spoke about his ongoing commitment to the Mi’kmaq Immersion program and the Mi’kmaq language. “In 1996 when I first become Chair, one of the first pieces of
business I dealt with was a letter from Thomas and Gerald asking for our support to support teachers to learn the language. We had already begun a Mi’kmaq focus to the BEd. Thomas and Gerald laid out the dramatic language loss that was underway that meant fewer students were speakers. I never forgot this and worked with them from that day forward to help populate the schools with as many certified teachers as possible. We have now prepared 100 teachers, most of who are speakers. You can’t have programs without qualified dedicated people. This Eskasoni now has. Since then, we have engaged in research to further support this. And gradually this research has shifted the authority to Mi’kmaq voices as they are now our graduate students” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Trevor, February 21, 2011).

Cape Breton University was also an important partner in the development of the Mi’kmaq Studies program. Many of the Mi’kmaq teachers who came to StFX for their BEd degrees went to CBU first for their undergraduate degrees, often with a major or minor in Mi’kmaq Studies. Trevor spoke of the need for a “friendly ally at the undergraduate level” for students before the BEd program. For Eskasoni, this ally has often been CBU.

St. Thomas University, represented by Dorothy Lazore, was a partner in the early years of Mi’kmaq immersion as well. Dorothy Lazore, who taught an Indigenous Immersion teacher training program, made a big impact on the first Immersion teacher who went to St. Thomas for training. Gerald recalled how the Education Director in 1999 “sent them off to learn immersion pedagogy with…Dorothy Lazore. Remember, she is the one who introduced the immersion. She set up the infrastructure for the immersion program to occur properly. If it wasn’t for her, the language would have been lost and she was powerful enough to convince the right people that we were doing the right thing” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Gerald, January 7, 2011).

The impact of having university partners who commit their energies toward the success of the Mi’kmaq Immersion program is evident here. Trevor spoke of how
this commitment has existed since 1996 for him. “I just keep at it. Every year that I was in a position to influence things, I would ensure that every Mi’kmaw applicant got a fair shake and admission. This meant that more and more graduates were available. You needed to have a committed admissions coordinator. There were several faculty members along the way that were also committed to this project and have continued to be, just making sure that students had every opportunity to get credentialed. Gradually, we have created a critical consciousness that this is what we do, so now, no one would question this as a central part of our work. But there were many moments when I had lots to be discouraged about. It has been 15 years of relentless work.” Similar to the long-term vision articulated by Gerald and others, Trevor speaks of the need to “keep at it” from the university partner’s perspective. (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Trevor, February 21, 2011).

L’nui’sultinej Conference and Mi’kmash Language Foundation Document

Just before the first years of the Mi’kmash Immersion program, in 1997, StFX and MK partnered to design a Mi’kmash language conference, with the long-term goal of Mi’kmash Immersion as one important reason for bringing the conference into being. The conference was called L’nui’sultinej: Let us speak Mi’kmash. “At that point, we were also talking about a conference ...The purpose of the L’nuisultine’j Conference was to convince our own teachers what we know. We have to convince them that adding a second language is not going to hurt a kid...We needed immersion. We started talking about it and we set up a few groups and told Trevor when they leave, they need information. [Teachers] are like warriors leaving and now they have it [good information]. I remember photocopying and leaving it for people to take it. As much as possible, I shared what I had. Every second year, people came back to recharge and learn more stuff when they are going out” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Gerald, January 7, 2011]. This conference has continued to be held every second year at StFX since 1997, and has been, as Gerald stated, a re-energizing place for Immersion teachers as well as core Mi’kmash teachers and other teachers and supporters of the Mi’kmash language.
From the very first L’nui’sultinej Conference arose the idea of developing a provincial foundation document for Mi’kmaq language. Gerald recalled this development. “After that first year, instead of waiting for the second year, we held a symposium that summer at the school. And out of that came the [provincial] foundation document. Now we had to start providing structure, which the parents and the teachers will see the progression of skills… showing them that there is a map. And that was the foundation document. (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Gerald, January 7, 2011). This foundation document provided an outline of curriculum for Grades P to 12, and was the first time such a document was developed. This much-needed curriculum development was also an asset to the pilot Mi’kmaq Immersion program that emerged in 1999.

Other assets
Materials are always a problem in Indigenous immersion programs, as so little published work exists in these languages. One aspect of needed materials is a dictionary or lexicon for the language. Gerald said, “I thought that we lost a lot of the material and someone has to amass it. We started to do that at MK bringing that lexicon and the online dictionary. I told them that we now have an agreement if we do the dictionary project with all the different writing structures then everyone will have a dictionary in their back pocket. But I said that we are not selling anything. It’s free and the students should have it. We now have one dictionary and we just keep adding to it. We are going to keep getting students to add to it to increase the words” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Gerald, January 7, 2011). The online dictionary will provide an ongoing and important resource for Mi’kmaq immersion and for all Mi’kmaq speakers.

Challenges in Beginning and Maintaining the Mi’kmaq Immersion Program

All those interviewed cited the production of curriculum materials for the Mi’kmaq Immersion program as a challenge at the beginning of the program, and one that continues to this day. Brenda said it most clearly: “There was nothing, no
curriculum... That is the greatest hurdle, not enough material” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Brenda, January 24, 2011). Vanessa agreed this is the most significant challenge, and linked it to funding, “A major challenge is the material and the funding for using the material making curriculum for the classroom” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Vanessa, January 29, 2011).

Gerald found this a challenge as well. “Materials, curriculum...I remember [the Education Director] saying, it bothers me when a kid...how can you say that they are teaching a language when a kid comes home and the parent tells me, how come my kid in Grade 6 has the same material that my kid in Grade 2 is using? A valid question. How can they be studying the same thing? We are short in material” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Gerald, January 7, 2011). Gerald connected the materials shortage to a curriculum problem in which students may be taught the same thing more than once because of a lack of planned curriculum and supporting materials. Rachel expanded on this problem when she commented on the challenges of developing and translating new material. “It’s hard to translate a word if I don’t know the word for it. Like the word ‘air’, do I use the Mi’kmaq word wind for it? Or like the word ‘mass’, it’s a challenge to translate it when there is no Mi’kmaq word for it. It’s a challenge just to create a new Mi’kmaq word for those kinds of words. Same thing with math. It’s not easy to take the English curriculum and convert it into Mi’kmaq terminology” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Rachel, January 24, 2011). From each of these perspectives, one can see that developing materials and curriculum for the Mi’kmaq Immersion program was a challenge in its beginning years and still is.

Support from the administration of the school and from the community is seen as significant. Vanessa said, “Administrative support is also very important. The leaders need to help their staff and help the teachers teaching in the immersion program. Not just the subject but the program. Like if a child is in the Immersion program, it should be considered equivalent to or better than a regular program” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Vanessa, January 29, 2011). Brenda expands
on the issue of support in the school. “Another barrier was that we had no resource
teacher, nor did we have teacher aides. We didn’t have the specialists like they did in
the regular classes. The programs were not treated the same...well you see the other
classes having teacher aides but not us” (Leadership and challenges transcripts,
Brenda, January 24, 2011). When the Mi’kmaq Immersion program began, it seems
that it took time to develop the kinds of supportive programming for the immersion
classes that was already in place in the English language classrooms.

Beyond the school, those interviewed identified community support as a challenge.
“It can’t just be left up to the school, it has to be supported at home by the parents
and family members,” said Vanessa (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Vanessa,
January 29, 2011). Brenda agreed, saying, “Community support, I would have liked
to have seen more of that. We did have a lot of students enrolled in the first year. But
I would have liked to have a greater turn out...I would have liked to see more
support from councilors. We [should] not [have to] go out and defend immersion.
We do not need to do that. They should just tell us what to do this and tell us here is
money. It would have been simpler that way. But no, we do not have that kind of
support” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Brenda, January 24, 2011). Brenda
spoke of having to canvas the community for support and to convince families to
send their children to immersion. She felt this was above and beyond what teachers
should have to do.

In connection with this, Gerald noted how community members were reluctant to
send their children to Mi’kmaq Immersion because of fears their children would not
succeed. “How our people being socialized to believe that after hearing it, hearing it,
hearing it, that Indians are stupid and they can’t do this, etc. So, that must mean how
valid is having [Mi’kmaq] language since it’s not going to get you a job. Why should
we teach it to them? It’s not going to get them a job. They can’t use it anywhere.
Who are they going to write a letter to? Why, there aren’t any books!” (Leadership
and challenges transcripts, Gerald, January 7, 2011). The challenge of overcoming
these concerns and the persistent belief that English is better is one Gerald clearly articulated.

Gerald also spoke of lack of understanding about second language learning as a challenge. “The other problem was, and it goes to how you learn language, people confuse a couple of things. They confuse skills or skill sets related to how language is learned. Many people are fluent and can orally understand the language and they will know how to speak the language orally. They will not have...they would not be able to read it and they won’t know how to write it. Those are separate skills yet people when teaching a language that all of sudden they start focusing on the hardest skills which are how to read and write it” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Gerald, January 7, 2011). This challenge is not with the teachers, who received strong training in immersion pedagogy, but with the community, who did not understand the program, and perhaps were not supportive because of their lack of understanding.

Gerald and Trevor spoke of upcoming challenges for the Mi'kmaq Immersion program. “There is a new generation of teachers that will need to replace the trail blazers. They are often concerned that they are less-able speakers. The pedagogy cohort StFX created will likely need to be repeated as there is a need for more spreading of this to others” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Trevor, February 21, 2011). When Brenda and the other original immersion teachers begin to retire, the challenge will be to provide younger teachers with Mi'kmaq Immersion training as they follow in their footsteps as immersion teachers. StFX developed a certification program in 2009 for Mi'kmaq Language and will perhaps need to have more of these programs in future.

Gerald spoke of the challenge to keep energy levels high to continue to work for the stability and growth of the Mi'kmaq Immersion program. “In the next 10 years or so, those immersion students may become the teachers that will teach the kids. If it continues to do well, then maybe they could continue teaching the kids our
language. So we still have 9-10 years that we must continue to fight for it and maintain that energy. It’s so easy to lose that energy too” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Gerald, January 7, 2011). As Gerald said in speaking of his vision for the Mi’kmaq Immersion program, it is necessary to have a long-term vision for the success of the program. Keeping at this long-term work, for policy makers, for community supporters, for partners, and for teachers, requires keeping one’s energy and continuing to fight for immersion as a significant way toward saving the language.

*Advice for communities beginning immersion programs*

Gerald had some advice for those considering beginning an immersion program. “What people need to start doing is thinking that they are working alone and to work as a group. We need some collective activity” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Gerald, January 7, 2011). Having community support is a theme others echo as significant. The support can come from another community that might share its resources and its knowledge.

Brenda’s advice concerned the need to ensure student interest in the program. “Conversational-wise, there has to be interest there amongst the kids. They don’t want to hear the phonetic sounds of what an “a” or “e” sounds like. They don’t want to hear the phonetics, they want to learn the language through conversation” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Brenda, January 24, 2011). Brenda’s words bring the students into focus, and are an important reminder that without students who are enthusiastic about the program, it will not be successful.

Trevor, Brenda, and Gerald all mentioned the need to begin to develop a set of qualified teacher as a critical goal for communities wanting to begin an immersion program. “You can’t have programs without qualified, dedicated people” (Leadership and challenges transcripts, Trevor, February 21, 2011). Trevor spoke of the need for “a relentless commitment to all elements of program” as essential for
getting an Indigenous Immersion program started, with relentlessness on the part of school staff, school boards, community supporters, and university partners.

The Vision for Wolastoqí Latuwewakon: Leadership, Assets and Challenges in Beginning Language Immersion Programs

In this part of the report some of the key leaders in setting up the immersion program in Tobique talked about the leadership, assets and challenges that were part of setting up the Wolastoqí Latuwewakon program. John is a Maliseet teacher who served in leadership roles at both the school and band level. Elizabeth and Sheila are teachers in the Wolastoqí Latuwewakon program. Denise and Marjorie are currently teaching the former immersion students. These trailblazers spoke about the leadership and vision that was required to make the Wolastoqí Latuwewakon immersion program become a reality. Their conversations also speak to the assets required to build a successful program and the challenges which need to be overcome.

The importance of a vision: Knowing where you’re heading

Part of any change movement is creating a vision for success. A vision is an effort of both hope and imagination and exists as a construct in the future. A vision that is clear, well articulated, and shared is key to creating change. Elizabeth’s vision of immersion programming is simple yet bold and daring. She states, “My dream is one day to have our language back” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, Elizabeth, January 31, 2011). The trailblazers of the immersion program had this vision in their mind when they began their work, and as the immersion program has evolved, it has been refined and sharpened but not strayed from that vision. John says “Well right now my vision is strong for our community, for our language … because of what’s evident and what’s happening for our community. It seems there’s a there’s a tug-of-war I guess with language stabilization. Because on one end, you’re losing the language and on the other end you’re trying to save the language
and have more speakers. I'm optimistic at this time because there are language programs going on here at the Mahsos School as well as the High School, as well as in our community...In January of this year, there's a language program where people come in on Tuesday evenings and also on Friday afternoons and I've attended the Tuesday evening ones and there was a good turnout of people and, so if we can keep that momentum going and people are going to jump on the band wagon for language" (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, John, January 30, 2011).

Elizabeth reinforces John's words when she says, “we need to get our culture and language I think is important so one day we'll be able to bring back what we've lost a long time ago” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, Elizabeth, January 31, 2011). She adds that she sees that the vision has to extend beyond the language and include the culture. “Just have more of the Elders. We do have that now or other people that are good in like basket making or beading. Whatever it may be. Have them do projects where they could involve the students, along with parents to learn like what we had a long time ago... like fishing, camping or whatever it was they used to do a long time ago...like even like hunting ... or tan hides ...[It could be] basket making and even the different wigwams they make, the difference between the summer one and the winter one and all this, making dresses whatever and all this would be important” (Leadership, assets and challenges Interview, Elizabeth, January 31, 2011).

The school has always held a central place in the vision for Wolastoqi Latuwewakon stabilization. Marjorie states, “The school is part of the vision by offering Maliseet Immersion in the early grades and to older students in the future” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, Marjorie, February 11, 2011). Sheila feels that the vision of the program needs to expand so that it is extended throughout the school beyond K5 but also that more Wolastoqi Latuwewakon used throughout the school. “It needs to continue like that program is going to do it and then there definitely needs to be more of it in the school we need more of the language in the school” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, Sheila, January 31, 2011).
A vision that becomes real, usually comes from deep inside a person. Elizabeth says, “I guess you have to have it in your heart to want to do it” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, Elizabeth, January 31, 2011). John says simply, “We all remember the Creator gave us this language and that it’s our duty as a carriers of the language to bring it forth...Well, I’ve always had this belief that in each of us. We have the language and it stays dormant or sleeping until it’s awakened. When I first started teaching language back years ago, I couldn’t get over how quickly the children learned, even though they’ve never spoken the language. They had the intonation, the right way of saying the language and to me that’s where I got this idea that in each of us that language is sleeping and it just needs to be awakened. I think that’s what’s happening here is it’s being awakened” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, John, January 30, 2011).

Sheila shows how there was urgency for her to be part of this vision to reclaim and revitalize the language. “There is a lot of people that have pride but they’re proud to be Maliseet or native but yet they don’t care about the language. Like I mean who are you without your culture or your language? You have just been labeled but you have nothing to show for it other than you are living here on the reserve. And I hate to see that happen. Maybe a little bit too late. Maybe I should have been doing this ten years ago but I didn’t think it was my job too. I thought it was up to someone else. Now I realize that it isn’t up to someone, it isn’t just up to me; it is up to all of us!” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, Sheila, January 31, 2011). Sheila shares how she had the deep vision to be involved in this work but at first she was not sure of what that vision might look like as she worked with her young learners. “That’s how I felt when I started this I didn’t know what I was doing. I mean I had an idea of how the K4 program would be run, should be run but I felt awkward when I first started using the language. Now you get comfortable as you go by, go along, but it is really awkward at the start” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, Sheila, January 31, 2011).
The Assets for Building an Immersion Program

The presence of Elders and speakers of the language
To translate a vision into reality, a certain number of assets must be in place and these four educators talk of the assets there were in Tobique at the time the program began. One of the most important assets was the presence of Elders and fluent speakers of Wolastoqi Latuwewakon. Some of these people acted as keepers of the language and culture. “We have the advantage of having fluent Elders to rely on for translation and history of our community” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, Marjorie, February 11, 2011). John speaks of the resources the Elders provided. “We had one Elder but with her she had access to other Elders as well as the workers …[The] Elders you could talk to them and they’d help you with words and translations. That was important that you had that support from the Elders… As well there were stories that were gathered by people such as Lazlo Szabu and they were recorded on tape so all those assets were helpful with the work that had to be done to develop the immersion program” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, John, January 30, 2011).

Other adult speakers can serve as language role models for the young learners. “We have the Grade 1 teacher that can teach fluently, a Grade 4 teacher that can speak fluently, like I say, three quarters of the teachers there can speak, the janitors, the cooks, they all know how to speak the language. I guess we’re lucky we still have quite a few, teachers I guess, that can speak the language at the school” (Focus interview, Elizabeth, February 11, 2011).

Parents who were willing to send us their children
Among the most important asset in the community, Sheila credits parents who were willing to place their children in the first immersion class. She credits these parents with allowing the immersion program to exist in the first place. “[What support I did get] from the community [was] the parents willing to send their
children here and they did know that is was going to be immersion” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, Sheila, January 31, 2011). This point cannot be overstated. It took a certain leap of faith for the parents of the immersion students to register their children in this program.

Supports for teaching: Methods, materials and Wolastoqi Latuwewakon support

At the time that the program started there were significant supports available to the teachers. Perhaps the most important support provided came from the partnership with St. Thomas University that provided leadership in immersion pedagogy. John explains, “And at about the same time [as we were thinking about immersion] Andrea and Darryl Nicholas were having talks or discussions with St. Thomas University about creating a program for teaching teachers on how to teach the Maliseet language. And one of the professors or instructors was Dorothy Lazore, a Mohawk lady from Ontario” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, John, January 30, 2011). Dorothy Lazore provided key leadership in establishing the first Aboriginal immersion program in Canada and her expertise in immersion education greatly influenced the teachers and exposed them to different teaching strategies. Dorothy had many personal examples to share from the Mohawk experience of immersion and she was also able to expose the teachers to the larger field of Indigenous immersion education. Elizabeth explains how these courses impacted on her teaching. “Because I learned when I went to university some of Greymorning’s and Dorothy Lazore and the other guy there, Phil Lesourd... Like those are the courses I took was from them and they were all helpful ...You know Greymorning is what helped quite a bit like with the pictures and stuff like that...I think the school should have a lot of visuals, pictures on the wall, like paintings, traditional native stuff... Even the words themselves like in the bathroom, in the classrooms and all that I think should have words for children to recognize too, along with the teachers even the ones that don’t know how to speak it like” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, Elizabeth, January 31, 2011). From her classes Elizabeth was able to incorporate “drumming with the children, chanting and puppets and legends.
They did legends with the children and stuff like that and they really enjoyed that” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, Elizabeth, January 31, 2011).

John concurs that the St. Thomas program continues to provide important training and professional development for immersion teachers and acknowledges that the community is helping with financial support for the immersion teachers to attend these classes. The immersion teachers from Tobique also are enriched by the sharing that takes place in these courses among teachers from other communities. “We’re all taking courses at St. Thomas at this time. In fact, next week we begin another course. I’m not too sure what the name of it is but this gives us a chance to meet with other Maliseet language teachers from the St. John Valley. And again, this kind of kindles the fire in that we support each other and share teaching practices and help each other with translation so it all helps with our roles in teaching children to learn the Maliseet language in school” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, John, January 30, 2011).

At the time the immersion program began there were some, albeit limited, print resources available that helped in preparing teaching materials. “There were dictionaries that were found and used to help with translation. There were about three or four dictionaries that were developed over the years where linguists came into our communities and accessed and translated into their phonetic system” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, John, January 30, 2011).

Site visits to other communities that had started Indigenous immersion programs

Having the ability to visit another Indigenous community (Eskasoni) where a Mi’kmaq language program was already in existence helped provide insight to the leadership in Tobique and helped the immersion leaders visualize what such a program might look like. It laid to rest some fears about whether Indigenous immersion programs could live up to its promise. John credits this visit to Eskasoni as being a turning point for mobilizing band support for the program. “At the
beginning we had core language at Mahsos School and that didn’t seem to work after four or five years because 45 minutes of having language just didn't seem to create anything permanent. This was kind of disheartening for the teachers who were dedicated to the language so I spoke with the Director of Education at the time ... to talk about bringing in an Immersion program. At the outset he kind of didn’t ...think ... that it could happen. But there was one year when we went down to teachers’ workshops in Eskasoni and one of the keynote speakers was Dorothy Moore, a Mi’kmaw educator. And she started talking about how at first she wasn't in favor of a Mi’kmaq language program in her community but then she had a change of heart because the people had so much passion for their language and they were able to convince her about immersion programs. She said it in such a way that it affected her audience that the director and I were a part of. So it was being at the right place at the right time that when we were coming back... we traveled back together and we talked about how we could have it in our community, in our school” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, John, January 30, 2011).

Support from the Education Director: Funding

At the point at which the program was to become a reality funds were directed to the program, not just for teachers but also for curriculum support for the teachers and this greatly helped with resource development. “We convinced our Chief at the time...that we needed a curriculum committee and curriculum workers to translate because it was difficult for the teachers to do both, teach and as the school year went on. So, education monies were set aside to hire an Elder as well as teachers and other people that were beginning to learn how to write the language. [There was] a core teacher at one time [who] also took part in helping to develop units for Maliseet. With Dorothy Lazore we were able to purchase or acquire language material from the Mohawk language which was sent to us and then the curriculum workers translated the materials into Maliseet as well as they developed. Eventually they did develop audiotapes as well. And other teaching aids that would help the teachers that were teaching in our schools” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, John, January 30, 2011).
Evidence that the program was working was shared with the community.

One of the biggest assets in spreading the vision for immersion programming was the evidence the children provided themselves as they began to speak Wolastoqi Latuwewakon. Among the children in the immersion classroom were children who began school speaking only English and yet after only several months they could clearly speak some words and phrases in their ancestral language. Elizabeth describes one of the first Christmas concerts where the young immersion students presented their songs in Wolastoqi Latuwewakon in front of the whole community. “When parents and Elders see young children using the language it stirs something inside them. You know we had a Christmas play there with the kids and they did a play all in Maliseet. They sang songs all in Maliseet. Even the kids I’d speak Maliseet to them and they’d answer me back in Maliseet and the parents of the children I had in my class they were really amazed by what their children were learning. They’d go home and tell their parents what they learned in school and I guess after awhile they were pretty proud of their kids that they actually learned the language. Even through homework and stuff they took home and brought back the parents were really quite amazed by that I guess that their children could actually learn the language. I guess after awhile, even after the concert, the parents would come in and they’d really more or less in support of it after that knowing that their children were learning the language and they were encouraging after that” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, Elizabeth, January 31, 2011). There is the old adage that ‘nothing succeeds like success’ and this story illustrates that point.

Program Challenges

Internalized colonial attitudes about the lack of value of Wolastoqi Latuwewakon which translate into a lack of support from some community members

The process of colonization elevated the language, beliefs, accomplishments, and ways of being of the colonizers to a superior position while at the same time
devaluing the language, worldview, history, and culture of the Wolastoqiyik. Both
groups—the colonizers and colonized—internalize these messages. And thus it is
that some community members in Tobique do not know their ancestral language
nor do they see its value. This lack of support and sometimes criticism by
community members towards the immersion program was and is sometimes
disheartening for those who have worked so hard to bring immersion to the school.
John says, “Some of the challenges came from our own community members. Our
own people said that this was a waste of time and that it was even detrimental to
learning for the people who were learning the language. I think that’s a kind of
mental component that challenges you as an educator that wants to teach the
language” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, John, January 30, 2011).
Marjorie says “lack of interest from the younger parents who value the Wolastoqi
language” is a challenge the program faces (Leadership, assets and challenges
interview, Marjorie, February 11, 2011).
Elizabeth shares how disheartening it can be to experience such a lack of support. “I
guess a lot of parents here on the reserve they just, I hate to say it but don’t have
faith in the teachers here on the reserve. I guess because they’re not giving their all
to the kids like and so the majority of them send their kids to town. …Sometimes a
lack of support comes from your own staff at work, like they don’t support you. I
don’t know, even from the parents you know. It’s not important to them …our
language and stuff. I guess it’s more English all the time and stuff. Even like the staff
members, the politicians and we try to get support from them and it’s always like
negative all the time. So it’s like you’re what you’re trying to do, they don’t find it to
be important... the language” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview,
Elizabeth, January 31, 2011).

John understands that it is the long and on-going process of colonizing through
Eurocentric schooling that has caused this lack of valuing of Wolastoqi
Latuwewakon to occur and he does know that the immersion work is one important
way to decolonize the mind. And so he persists. “And the best way to take it is to
take it as a challenge and change something negative that's told to you and create something positive so that you understand and it keeps in that direction...And there are challenges and barriers and they become smaller I guess as we succeed and as we work together. As I said, as this month is very hopeful because I sat in on a session with Henrietta Black on a Tuesday evening and there were young people in their thirties. Some of them brought their children and they were saying that you know their kids come home from school and they come home excited with their songs and their words [in Wolastoqi Latuwewakon] and they don't know what their saying. And their impetus for coming to these language classes was that they can converse with their children and that and we talked about situations where language can be used and one young mother mentioned that you know at the dinner table they wanted to use more language and that’s ideal really because they're using it in a practical sense. For communication ... that’s how it's meant to be ‘cause immersion came from its use. It's necessity for daily living so when, as I said when I hear those kinds of comments coming from young parents then that makes you hopeful” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, John, January 30, 2011).

These comments underscore the importance of collaboration in immersion program. Typically people cooperate or collaborate in communities when the job is too big to do alone, when materials are scare, or when many creative ideas are needed. All of these conditions exist in Aboriginal immersion programming. It is a big job where materials in the ancestral language are scare and where many ideas are needed. Collaboration among teachers, across agencies, and throughout the community and among communities can only serve to advance immersion programs.

*Lack of stable funding*

Lack of stable funding for Indigenous immersion programming is cited as another challenge for building a program that can be sustained over years. Administrators are continually spending time seeking out funding and can never be sure if and when there will be gaps in programs. Secure and adequate levels of funding for
French immersion programs throughout Canada from both the federal and provincial governments have allowed these programs to grow and flourish. The same commitment to funding does not yet exist for Aboriginal languages in Canada, and yet it is known that they are among the most endangered languages in the world. John explains: “In the early years I sought out help from organizations such as Assembly of First Nations and as well as the Heritage Canada, trying to find monies to help hire our community members for teaching. I was quite lucky and fortunate in finding an organization through Heritage Canada ... Unfortunately the downside was there were restrictions placed after awhile on government organizations where it became almost impossible to meet our needs. By that I mean that we wanted to have summer programs off school times but the funding was geared in such a way that money had to be spent from January of the year to March 31st. ... This money was getting harder and harder to access and we seem to think it was designed that way because our language programs were starting to be successful. For our languages, for our native languages across the country, we faced barriers in acquiring money. And I think that’s still the case today when money is available we seem to have to fight over it too and that shouldn’t be the case at all” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, John, January 30, 2011). Without secure funding it is difficult to plan from year to year and it makes it difficult to provide funds to bring Elders and resource people into schools. Funding insecurity has also impacted on curriculum work with the school leading to lay-offs of personnel.

Support for teachers: Teacher training and professional development, creating teaching material, and providing language and cultural support.

There is a need for on-going training and professional development for immersion teachers. At the time of this report there was still a need for an immersion teacher in Grade 1. There are speakers of Wolastoqi Latuwewakon but they lack teacher certification and immersion training. There are fluent speakers who are trained teachers at the school who lack training in immersion teaching. The certificate program offered through St. Thomas University plays an important role in preparing
individuals to teach the immersion program well. However it is not easy for full-time teachers. “Because the way you feel after taking classes all weekend it just drains you. It takes you two days to get yourself back to normal because your mind is just going, thinking, thinking” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, Sheila, February 11, 2011).

Another big challenge in the immersion program is related to providing support to teachers. To teach immersion well, excellent teaching materials need to be provided and most of those need to be developed at the local level. Unfortunately due to funding cuts the curriculum support for the immersion program has been cut. “What happened was the curriculum committee were laid off. In our community we had a situation where our finances were in difficulty causing the leadership to lay off people, not only in education, but also in other facets of our reserve, social and capital. What happened was our Elder was laid off as well as our secretary who wrote and transcribed the work and that only left one worker and that’s been an ongoing situation for three years now...There has been some discussion with the Chief about the bringing back the curriculum committee so they can be a stronger support for the language teachers” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, John, January 30, 2011). Teachers cannot be expected to be curriculum developers at the same time as they teach. Curriculum support is necessary to sustain teachers in their jobs. Good quality materials are needed to engage the children in learning in Wolastoqi Latuwewakon. Sheila talks about the kinds of teaching supports that help her teach well. “The songs really work. I need more songs...In a dream world I would like to have tapes and books that are already translated... I think it would be a great idea to have an Elder in residence at the school. Someone we can go to when we need help with a word or the spelling or even someone the kids and go and talk to. It doesn’t have to be one Elder but you know they can alternate each week or something, I think that would be very beneficial” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, Sheila, February 11, 2011). Sheila also knows from her work with Dorothy Lazore and the certificate program for Maliseet teacher that community language teams can help in this challenge. “Dorothy said you need a team working
on this and another team to do that and another team to do that. We don’t have the manpower or the money” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, Sheila, February 11, 2011).

**Expanding immersion: To younger and older kids**

Immersion leaders spoke about expanding the program. The immersion leaders see the need to continue the program beyond K4 and K5. It was clear in the conversations with the teachers and parents that the children who have left the K5 class and are now receiving their schooling in English are losing some of the fluency they gained in the immersion program. Sheila feels the immersion program must start younger “because I know in the communities you are talking about where this [immersion] really works – they start right in daycare or nursery or whatever they call it” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, Sheila, February 11, 2011). Marjorie agrees that it must start young but also feels that the program must also extend into the higher grades so that children can keep developing their fluency. “The school is part of the vision by offering Maliseet Immersion in the early grades and to older students in the future” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, Marjorie, February 11, 2011). Expanding the program, however, implies that supports are available in terms of personnel and in terms of teaching and curriculum resources.

**Advice from Tobique**

From their experience three years into immersion education the educators from Tobique offer the advice to other communities.

1. **Just do it!** The urgency of language stabilization work means that communities have to be ready to start, even if they feel they are not totally ready to begin. With each passing year Indigenous languages become more endangered. “Well basically if somebody come to me and asked me how to get started or whatever, whatever, I’d just tell them… and just go ahead and do it!” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, Sheila, February 11, 2011).
interview, Elizabeth, January 31, 2011). Marjorie echoes this. “Just do it!” John found in his visit to another immersion site that not all the supports were in place before they had started. The story of Indigenous immersion programming is typically about a small group of passionate people with a vision and a will to keep ancestral languages alive and who are fed up waiting for somebody else to come along and make it happen. John says, “In the other places that we visited where there was no language and then it was only through the work of a very small group of people that there was a big turnaround” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, John, January 30, 2011).

2. **Leadership is key.** Leadership is key to establishing Aboriginal immersion programs. While the school has a role to play, support at the community level is essential to affirm the value of immersion programming. John argues that at the most senior level Atlantic Chiefs declare their support for immersion. “Leadership plays a big role in language building. If we could have that type of documentation where Chief and Council and not only Chief and Council ... even to the organizations for example, the Atlantic Policy Congress, would develop... some kind of document where they support and push for language immersion, that definitely would help” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, John, January 30, 2011). Marjorie urges that at the community level “each First Nation makes it a priority to preserve the language by having employees take classes or make an effort to learn the language. Have signs posted in all public buildings in our languages” (Focus interview, Marjorie, February 11, 2011). Sheila suggests the band council pass a resolution to extend total immersion in the school and for employees of the school use Wolastoqi Latuwewakon in their work place. “It should be the policy that everyone who wants to work here has to take those classes too. If you know the language you should be speaking as much as you can to the kids within the classroom” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, Sheila, February 11, 2011).

3. **Establish community language support teams.** Doing language stabilization work is important but demanding and sometimes difficult work because it involves
changing some community attitudes. There is a need to both support language programs with materials but also for people involved in language stabilization work to support each other. John talks about the ways that materials can be developed with the community. “We need to develop language tapes, not tapes, CDs, I guess I’m dating myself how old I am, but CDs, audiovisuals, something that can be stored and taken. These CDs and audiovisual tapes could be taken into the home setting where the family sits around in the evening and listens to these tapes and shares the practicing, the repetition and the comprehension needed for acquiring a language. It takes a lot and results don’t come right away” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, John, January 30, 2011). Sheila, who works at the classroom level, concurs with the need for resource materials. “Make sure they have enough resources. You need resources. You need curriculum” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, Sheila, February 11, 2011).

John also talks about support groups where people come together to gain strength from working together around stabilizing and deepening understanding of Wolastoqi Latuwewakon. “There’s a certain tenacity I guess within an individual to stick with it [language work]. That’s that strength that you need so to communities out there that want to set up an immersion program. Beat every bush I guess. And exhaust every place that you can go to until you can have something. Start small in your community but over time will get stronger and bigger... So I think that we need a recruitment of our people. Some people are, often say, you know, ‘what can I contribute? How can I help?’ but little do they know is they can contribute ‘cause they’ve lived in the community and that alone they can hold the program. We can help the people that are trying” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, John, January 30, 2011).

4. Share with others. As noted above the task of developing locally-made materials is a demanding one and wherever possible communities can share materials, teaching strategies, and experiences. John recounted how a visit to another Indigenous immersion site helped to give confidence to the people in Tobique. Elizabeth also
believes that every community, every school shouldn’t have to reinvent the wheel. “I’d be willing to help that person you know to get started and I’d share what materials I have to help them out you know. Because I started from scratch myself and you know what I did was a lot of pictures and different things and ...It’s a lot of work you know but it’s worth it. Anything to bring the language back for the kids and I’d be willing to help and give them what materials I have” (Leadership, assets and challenges interview, Elizabeth, February 11, 2011).

Links between Immersion and Economic Development, Lifelong Learning, and Community Contributions

In terms of the impact of immersion programs on community economic development, there are a number of promising indicators emerging from this report. High self-esteem, intellectual curiosity, strong work ethic, and awareness, fluency and pride in ancestral language and culture surface as qualities found in former immersion students. These qualities are foundations for success as lifelong learners, as engaged community members and citizens, and as accomplished professionals.

Economic impacts of identity extending into the community and economic development

Given the many examples that were noted by teachers, parents, and students regarding the positive impact of immersion on identity it is important to consider ways in which immersion programs could shape a community over time. The leadership qualities of former immersion students as well their attitudes of curiosity, hard work, sociability, cultural awareness, strong bilingual skills, and pride point to the possibilities of what could be in Indigenous education in Canada. Given the persistent underachievement of Aboriginal students struggling in Eurocentric programs in which English is used as language of instruction (Bear Nicholas, 2001; Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003), Indigenous immersion programs provide a powerful antidote to the colonial model. Students who know who they are
and where they come are more likely to engage in school, want to come every day, want to share what they know with others, and feel a higher sense of self-esteem. This is a strong foundation upon which to build an academic career and later career aspirations. It would seem that immersion education would be an investment in economic development.

The impact of seeing Mi’kmaq/Maliseet professionals speaking the language both in the school and beyond into the community builds on the power of the immersion program in shaping Indigenous identities, as noted by Elders and parents. As one parent said, “A Mi’kmaq will listen to a Mi’kmaq speaking teacher, instead of a non-native teacher speaking English” (Parent interviews, Impact of immersion programs, Chloe, March 8, 2010). This parent recognized the impact of Mi’kmaq teachers speaking Mi’kmaq in their classrooms as more than transmission of the language. Mi’kmaq/Maliseet teachers using their language and cultural practical knowledge (Orr, Paul, & Paul, 2002) in classrooms embody the culture and guiding their students towards a Mi’kmaq/Wolastoqi worldview.

The use of Mi’kmaq or Wolastoqi Latuwewakon as the language of communication in other workplaces and professions as well as in school provides a potent model for students to follow. “It’s the same for language. You have to be speaking it everywhere not only at home. Even for nurses, it’s important for kids to hear them speak Mi’kmaq too. The kids hear what language is being used in those professions and speaking Mi’kmaq is a good thing for them. They need to be able to say that they too can be nurses even with the Mi’kmaq language. This would entice the kids to those types of professions” (Elder interview, Impact of immersion programs, Jennie, April 29, 2010). A community functioning completely in Mi’kmaq or Wolastoqi Latuwewakon becomes a place of career possibility when students observe models like nurses and other professionals using the language.
Economic impacts of fluency extending into the community and economic development

Elders who were interviewed made it clear that maintaining the ancestral language is of vital importance to this community’s well-being. For a young person to be fluent in Mi’kmaq or Wolastoqi Latuwewakon means he or she can contribute to the community’s cultural renewal and can bring strong language and cultural assets to the workforce of that community. The importance of increasing the amount of Mi’kmaq/Wolastoqi language spoken in workplaces in the community has been addressed in the previous section. In order to maintain the language, it is necessary that the numbers of young people who are fluent speakers be increased. Immersion programs are one important and obvious way for this to happen. Teachers, parents, and students themselves noted that the immersion program provided students with Mi’kmaq/Wolastoqi language fluency. The challenge is to maintain and extend this fluency after graduating from the immersion program, which virtually everyone who was interviewed wanted to have expanded.

Impacts of academic achievement extending into the community and economic development

The findings of the section on academic achievement strongly suggest that students who have completed the Mi’kmaq Immersion program in this school are ahead in terms of English literacy and in academic achievement in other subject areas. As Sandra noted in the previous section, her daughter, a Grade 8 student, is experiencing academic success and already knows what her career plans are and even what courses she will take after high school. With student profiles that look like this, the successes of the immersion program seem very promising. In Tobique, students who do well academically are more likely to continue their education, to graduate, and to enter post-secondary education. These students will become professionals and find careers that will bring economic security both for themselves and their families and the community.
Recommendations

The following recommendations arise from the analysis of the data gathered for this study. They are grouped into sub-categories of leadership, planning priorities, resource development—both human and material, research, issues beyond the school, and future directions for existing programs.

Leadership

1. **Just do it!** Once you have some committed community members pushing for immersion, start the program. Do not wait until everything is in place to begin, as you may never be completely ready. Typically, Indigenous immersion programs have been started by a small group of people with a passion and a will to keep the ancestral language alive.

2. **Leadership is key.** AFN has provided strong recent support for Aboriginal immersion. Capitalize on leadership at the federal and provincial levels as a means to cultivate community support. Lobby at these levels for stable and adequate funding to support Indigenous immersion programming in the same way these bodies support French immersion.

3. **Garner community and school board support.** Leaders who invest time and energy in educating community members and school board members about Aboriginal immersion are invaluable. They garner support for the immersion from decision makers such as the education director, and encourage parents to enroll their children in the program. They also support and lobby for funding at the band council or school board level to send teachers for Indigenous immersion training.

4. **Garner the support of the school administration.** The immersion program will require commitment by school administrators in terms of both moral support and funding decisions that enable this new program to flourish.
Items such as materials, resource support for students with special learning needs, teacher aides, and preparation time need to be considered.

5. **Keep focused on the purposes of the immersion program**, which are to create a stronger pool of fluent speakers of the language and to make speaking the language an avenue for career success and citizenship within the community.

*Planning priorities*

6. **Make a plan to support education of as many qualified teachers** from the community as possible, preferably speakers. This is the foundation upon which the immersion program will be built and continued over time.

7. **Develop a university partnership to put this plan of certifying teachers into action.** The Canadian Deans of Education (2010) have committed to prioritizing support for Aboriginal teacher education and therefore universities should be open to such a partnership.

8. **Make plans for Indigenous immersion teacher training** for qualified teachers. The success of the current immersion training programs at St. Francis Xavier University and St. Thomas University is evident.

*Resource development: Human and material*

9. **Develop an Aboriginal immersion approach that focuses on language use for communicative purposes**, rather than emphasizing phonetic methods that de-contextualize the language. It is vital to ensure the students remain enthusiastic about the program.

10. **Create a center for development of curriculum materials.** These will often have to be created at the local level. This is a big task for any Aboriginal immersion program and teachers will require a great deal of support in
developing books, posters, multi-media materials, subject-specific textbooks, and worksheet resources.

11. **Draw on the community assets** such as Elders and community members who can read and write the language and who hold traditional knowledge.

12. **Create regular opportunities for professional development** for immersion teachers and supporters. Forums such as the biennial L’nui’sultinej: Mi’kmaq Language Conference are important for teachers and supporters to share ideas and re-energize.

13. **Create Language Advisory teams** made up of community members who can provide ideas for curriculum development in language and culture and support to sustain enthusiasm for the program.

14. **Draw on the resources developed by other communities** with immersion programs. These resources can sometimes be used as they are, and often can be adapted to provide templates for creating a community’s own resources. Contacts with current immersion teachers can be very helpful.

15. **Arrange for visits to community with existing immersion programs.** Seeing the successes of immersion programs firsthand empowers leaders to begin that journey in their own communities.

*Research*

16. **Access current research** on successes of Indigenous immersion programs in Atlantic Canada and beyond to garner community support. Parents and others who are new to immersion may be skeptical of its success, and this research can change their minds.
17. **Make current research available online.** Research from this study will be accessible through a link on the First Nations Help Desk website. Future research should be added to this online reference site.

18. **Begin gathering data** on the immersion program as soon as the program starts. This data will enable the community to garner more community support. Gather data such as attendance data, anecdotal comments, achievement test results, and progress reports to document the program's success.

*Beyond the school*

19. **Create opportunities for language use outside the school.** Students need to hear the language outside of school, in a variety of contexts. For example, make Mi'kmaq/Wolastoqi Latuwewakon the language of community workplaces and community events. Develop programming for community radio and television stations in the ancestral language.

20. **Develop adult language classes.** To support their children in immersion, parents and others are motivated to learn the language. Adult classes that focus on oral language are needed.

21. **Provide opportunities to showcase students speaking the language** such as Christmas concerts, Elder teas, and other community events. Recognize that this will help overcome some of the resistance to immersion in the community.

*Future directions for existing programs*

22. **Develop a plan for replacing trailblazers** who taught in the first years of immersion programs. This requires continuing to recruit younger speakers of the language into the teaching profession and providing them with immersion training.
23. **Expand the current immersion programs.** All research participants called for expansion of the immersion programs downward into pre-school and upward into higher grades.

24. **In expanding current immersion programs, aim to develop a dual track bilingual system.** When immersion stops too early, many of the important gains in fluency and achievement are lost. Based on the positive findings of these two programs, there is no reason why the programs should not be extended so that students could continue in immersion right to Grade 12. Using a dual track model where students continue learning some subjects using Mi’kmaq/Wolastoqi as the language of instruction and other subjects using English as the language of instruction, as in the case in French immersion, students will maintain all the gains they made in the early immersion program as they continue through school.

*Final words*

25. **Keep at it!** Developing and sustaining Indigenous immersion programs requires long-term collective efforts on the part of many stakeholders.

**Building the Research Capacity of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Researchers and Graduate Students**

The seventh objective of the research study was to build the research capacity of Aboriginal researchers and faculty and Aboriginal graduate students. Starr Sock and Sherise Paul-Gould, MEd students at StFX, gathered the data for Objective Two as their MEd thesis data collection. Their thesis, titled, *Fluency, Identity and Student Achievement: An In-depth Study Of The Mi’kmaq Immersion Program in One Community*, uses interview data and quantitative data on reading test scores (as
described above), which they gathered as part of this project. Darcy Pirie and Roseanne Clark in Tobique gathered data and developing the program description in Tobique. In both communities, wonderful, rich data was gathered and used in ways that would never have been possible without the relational positioning of these women within their communities and their outstanding abilities as researchers. University-based researchers Joanne Tompkins and Anne Murray Orr learned a great deal about Indigenous research methods and about Indigenous immersion programs in the process of this research study.

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4 Ownership of this data is jointly held between the AAEDIRP project and Starr and Sherise. Starr and Sherise are free to use this data in future publications and conferences, as is the AAEDIRP research team.
References


Council of Ministers of Education. (2010). A literature review of factors that support successful transitions by Aboriginal people from K-12 to postsecondary education.


Wolastoqi Latuwewakon Immersion Program (Tobique) Appendix A

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

2010
Wolastoqi Latuwewakon Immersion Program
Pre-Kindergarten
K-4 Class
PLAYTIME

The classroom is divided into many playing and learning centres for the students. There is a kitchen section, art section, house and dolls, cars and mat, and a reading section. During playtime the teacher plays music so the children can listen while they are playing.

At this time the teacher may review vocabulary words such as car or doll and introduce new vocabulary for the children.
TRANSITION

When the teacher wants to start a lesson or new activity a bell is used to signal that it is time to change to a new activity or lesson. The children clean up what they were working on or playing with and then sit in the designated learning area. Once everyone has done that the teacher begins her lesson or activity.
WEATHER

While the children are sitting in the designated learning area the teacher will ask one student to see what the weather is like for that day. The student goes to the window and looks out to see what the weather is like. The student then goes over to the weather chart at the front of the class and picks out the picture of what the weather is like for that day. For example if it was raining out the student will pick the raindrop and place it on the weather chart for that day. The teacher will ask the student to repeat what the weather is like for the day in Maliseet. The rest of the class repeats after them. The teacher then sings a song about the weather for that day and the students sing along.
THE ALPHABET

Reviewing the alphabet and letter sounds is part of the students’ daily routine. The alphabet is placed at the front of the classroom where the students can see it easily. Each letter of the alphabet has a picture of something that is associated with that letter sound. For example, “A” has a picture of a horse; “ahas” is the Maliseet word for horse.

The teacher has the students line up at the front of the classroom. The teacher uses a pointer and points to the first letter “a”, the teacher models how to pronounce the letter sound and the students repeat after the teacher.
BEHAVIOUR

Students who understand the teacher and participate in class display a different body language from those who are having a hard time understanding the teacher. The students who are able to pay attention are sitting up ready to learn. Those students who are having a hard time understanding and are struggling often do not sit still or pay attention. The teacher spends time discussing how to behave properly while in class and school.
INCORPORATING SONGS INTO DAILY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

After the teacher finishes lessons for the day, the last fifteen minutes of class involves singing songs in Maliseet and dancing. The teacher and the students sing songs such as “Ring a Round the Rosie,” “Skidamarink,” “Hokey Pokey,” “Mary Had a Little Lamb,” and “It’s a Small World.” While singing in Maliseet the teacher models the dancing moves that go along with each of the songs. The students repeat after the teacher and copy the dance moves.
Hand Gestures to Convey Meaning

When a student or students do not understand what the teacher is saying and are confused, the teacher will use hand gestures to help clarify things for the student(s) while repeating the word(s) in Maliseet. This is repeated until the student(s) show some sign of understanding.
VOCABULARY REVIEW

At various times throughout the day the teacher points out and reviews vocabulary words with the students. For example, when the students first arrive at school, the teacher will review vocabulary words such as “shoes” or “jacket” as students are hanging up their jackets and putting on their shoes.

During snack time is another great opportunity for the teacher to review vocabulary words. The teacher will review words such as “juice” and “water” or the teacher may introduce new words for snack foods if the students are not familiar with them.
The teacher has made a poster of the different family members. On the poster it has a picture of a Momo (Grandfather), Meme (Grandmother), Mom, Dad, brother, sister and baby. While the students are sitting in the designated learning area the teacher uses the poster to review the different family members with the students. As the teacher points to one of the family members she may call upon a student to provide the Maliseet word. Also the teacher will ask each student who their Momo is, or Meme, and repeats that for each of the different family members. If the student does not know the name for their family member the teacher will provide that for them.
EMOTIONS

At the front of the classroom are 10 pictures of different emotions. The teacher will review with the students the words for different emotions in Maliseet. While reviewing each of the emotions the teacher models the behaviour of each emotion. For example, for the emotion of sad, the teacher will make a sad face and use body language to convey the emotion. After each of the emotions have been reviewed the teacher asks each of the students how they are feeling today. The student will reply in Maliseet one of the emotions and model the behaviour for it as well.
NAMING NUMBERS

The students gather at the front of the class by the number posters. The teacher uses the pointer to point to the numbers on each of the posters from 1 to 10. The teacher reviews each of the numbers one by one and the students repeat after her. On each of the posters are stars that correspond with that number. The teacher points to one of the numbers, for example 6, and she will repeat the Maliseet word for 6 and count each of the stars in the picture. The students review each number as they count the number of stars in each of the pictures.
IDENTIFYING NUMBERS THROUGH PROBLEM SOLVING

Using flashcards of the numbers 1 to 10 the teacher will pick one card and ask the students to find its match on the bulletin board. The teacher will use one of the flashcards and place it under one of the posters on the bulletin board. For example, the teacher will put the flashcard of the number 9 under the poster for number 6 and asks the students if that is correct. If not, the students have to identify which number on the bulletin board the flashcard corresponds with.
IDENTIFYING NUMBERS THROUGH PROBLEM SOLVING

The teacher uses the number flashcards 1 to 10 and counting blocks to identify numbers. First the teacher will model this a few times for the students, for example, the teacher will have the flashcard for the number 4 and counts out the number of blocks she needs to correspond with the number four. After this has been modeled a few times, the teacher gives the students each their own flashcard and blocks and asks them to identify the number using blocks. The student will identify the number and count the number of blocks they need to correspond with the number on the flashcard.
The students are encouraged to develop their coordination and motor skills for the tasks of writing, and drawing. The teacher helps the students by putting her hand over theirs and tracing the numbers out so they can see what they need to do.
Students learn about different animals. The teacher uses pictures of animals and models the pronunciation of the animal names to the students. The students will then repeat after the teacher. After the teacher has done this a few times, the teacher will hold up one of the animals and call upon an individual student to see if they know what it is.
Pre-Kindergarten
K-5 Class
OPENING DAY PRAYER

A culturally relevant prayer is used to open each day's activities. The teacher leads the students in Maliseet saying the prayer and reinforcing the words with pictures. The students follow along by repeating the Maliseet phrases and observing the pictures that coincide with the words. As the prayer is gradually mastered the students can be tested orally by questioning them regarding the pictures. In this way the students become very competent and comfortable with this daily beginning. The Maliseet worldview is reinforced by the prayer content. The prayer as used by the Nekw’tkok K 5 teachers:
Thank You Prayer

Let us give thanks for life.  
Thank you for everything.  
Thank you for the water.  
Thank you for the sweet grass.  
Thank you for the food.  
Thank you for the medicine.  
Thank you for the forest.  
Thank you for the animals.  
Thank you for the birds.  
Thank you for the thunder.  
Thank you for the rain.  
Thank you for the sun.  
Thank you for the moon.  
Thank you for the stars.  
Thank you Mother Earth for taking care of us by giving us everything we need.
CLASSROOM ARRANGEMENT

The classroom is divided into many playing and learning centres for the students including reading, art and play centres. Each centre contains relevant learning materials, i.e. puzzles, books, toys, art supplies, CD player, and CDS by native artists. The students can be allowed to choose an activity centre where they can use the materials during “free time.” Students are encouraged to visit all the centres and therefore be exposed to more variety.
TRANSITION

When the teacher wants to start a lesson or new activity a bell is used to signal the children that it is time to change. The students become conditioned to the sound of the bell and the transition becomes second nature. Instead of a bell, a more culturally relevant sound such as a drum beat could be used.
WEATHER

The teacher makes use of songs, body gestures, and actual current weather conditions outside. Wall charts depicting weather conditions such as: sunny, cloudy, snowy, rainy, foggy, windy, thunder and outdoor temperature are used.

1. The teacher leads the class in singing the weather song. The song contains all the weather terminology. The weather terminology is acted out by the students and the teacher with appropriate gestures and facial expressions depicting the corresponding weather.

2. Students are asked to look out the window and then the teacher asks the student in Maliseet “What is the weather?” The student responds to the question in Maliseet. The entire class then repeats the correct response. The teacher then invites the student to point to the wall chart that corresponds to the proper weather condition.

3. Additionally, the teacher asks the group in Maliseet if the day is a hot day or a cold day. The student must also identify the proper picture that describes that day's temperature.
THE ALPHABET SOUNDS

The key strategy for learning the alphabet sounds is the use of corresponding pictures that represent the sounds. The teacher names the object in the picture that corresponds to the letter sound being taught. For example: the object “wikowam” (house) would be used to teach the sound of “w” in the Maliseet language. The objects in the pictures always contain the letter sound being taught at the beginning of the word.
CLAPPING SYLLABLES

Multi syllable words are sounded out and accompanied by hand clapping to emphasize each syllable. This is used especially for new vocabulary that assists the student to hear all the syllables that compose the word. This reinforces the concept of oral instruction as opposed to relying on written material. The students repeat the word after the teacher.
MALISEET SONGS/DANCING

Various songs are used to teach movement and body parts. Children enjoy these activities which are very useful to teach and reinforce many Maliseet words and phrases. Many common children’s songs and nursery rhymes can be translated into Maliseet and used in this way.
GENERAL USE OF PICTURES AND WALL CHARTS

Pictures, charts and other visual aids are invaluable tools in the immersion setting, especially for children of kindergarten age. It is imperative that these visual aids are culturally relevant. This reinforces cultural identity and also a positive self-image.

Examples:
1. A lesson on family members can use pictures of each family member to teach the proper vocabulary.

2. A number chart is very useful for teaching numbers and counting. The chart would have the number 1, a single object indicating one single thing, and the Maliseet
word for one (peskw). The next block in the chart would deal with the number 2, etc. on up to 20. A second chart covering all the numbers from 0 to 100 can be used to teach counting by 1's, 2's, 5's and 10's. The wall charts become useful reference tools that the students will commonly look to when working with numbers.
3. Calendars can be used to teach days of the week and numbers.

4. Charts can be used to teach various colors. The color is paired with the Maliseet word for that color. A picture of a brown crayon is shown next to the Maliseet word for “brown”.
5. Pictures depicting different emotions are placed on the wall where the students can view them. Each picture represents a different emotion such as happiness. The teacher reviews the emotions with the children while acting out the emotion as well. The students learn to associate the pictures and the teacher's behavior with the Maliseet words for the different emotions. The teacher may ask a pupil to indicate which picture reflects how they feel at that time. The students repeat the words after the teacher.
HAND GESTURES

Hand gestures can be used to convey meaning which allows the teacher to avoid using English. For example, the teacher holds up three fingers to indicate the number 3.
VOCABULARY AND PHRASES

Relate words and phrases to the movements, activities and regular classroom routines that the students engage in during their normal day. Going to the bathroom, cleaning up work areas, sitting down, standing up, pushing chair under the table, washing hands are all samples of behaviours that can be repeated and reinforced on a daily basis. In this way Maliseet words and phrases are quickly learned and opportunities to practice the language are constantly available.
A phrase such as “the shirt is yellow” is learned in Maliseet. Then the noun word “shirt” is replaced by a different noun such as “table” and the phrase now becomes “the table is yellow”. In this way the phrase is repeated over and over using different noun words thus it becomes a pattern drill. This technique can be used for almost any phrase suitable for this age group.
HYGIENE

Good hygiene practices are reinforced with wall charts and posters. Opportunities to use Maliseet phrases are taken advantage of during the daily activities and routines. Trips to the washroom or hand washing before lunch present good opportunities to use Maliseet. These common phrases such as “wash your hands” become second nature. The children also are quick to remind each other of these tasks and become quite comfortable with the language.
USING MALISEET DURING LUNCH BREAK

The lunch menu for the day is discussed with the students when they arrive in the morning. Food choices are presented and the students choose their preferences all the while speaking Maliseet. The teacher must be diligent in sticking with Maliseet words and phrases, as this will bring the best results.

During lunch break when the students are all together presents a great learning opportunity. The words and phrases associated with eating lunch provides the teacher with the opportunity to extend the immersion experience from the classroom to other parts of the school. All conversations among the teacher and the students will be conducted in Maliseet. For example: Chew your food well, Are you finished eating? Do you want more? Clean your plate – these are phrases that the teacher will use every day and the students soon master them.
PLACEMATS

Placemats are constructed by the children. The children draw pictures on the placemats of various themes. For example: all the eating utensils with the corresponding Maliseet word are drawn on the placemat. The plate can contain various foods with their names. The placemats are laminated and the children are encouraged to use them at home. In this way the parents can readily see the accomplishments of their child. This supports the language use at home to even those family members who may have very little language.
INVOLVING THE IMMERSION STUDENTS IN COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Use community occasions such as birthday parties to involve the immersion students outside the classroom. This is especially important when elders are present. The language appreciation is usually very evident by the elders. These events can be good experiences for both the students and the elders. It is important to develop good public relations for the immersion program in communities to increase support for the program. The cultural value of elder respect can be reinforced at these times.
Visiting and performing in nearby non-native communities can be very beneficial to native and non-native relationships. The immersion students become great ambassadors for the native community and the native language.
CULTURE DAYS AND ROLE MODELS

Culture days and other special occasions can be used to demonstrate the language skills that the children have learned. Performances such as songs and plays done in the Maliseet language show the parents and community members the great value and pride that the students hold for the language. Inviting prominent native role models can have very positive effects on the children. It is even better if the invitee is very pro-language and therefore may assist in promoting the language.