Facilitating Language and Literacy Learning for Students with Aboriginal English Dialects

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The author of this article is an Aboriginal speech and language pathologist who relates personal and clinical experience to facilitate the reader's understanding of Aboriginal English dialects and language and literacy learning issues. Historically, Aboriginal English dialect speakers and Aboriginal language users have been stigmatized in the education system where standard English pronunciation, grammar, and discourse rules of the dominant society are upheld. Aboriginal children have been erroneously identified with language, speech, and learning exceptionalities because educators lack knowledge and training in language variation, students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and challenges inherent in learning to use standard English. The sparse documentation of Aboriginal English dialects in Canada and the United States is reviewed. Aboriginal people use Aboriginal English dialects to communicate in their specific cultural community. Each Aboriginal English dialect has regional variation and is evident not only in First Nation communities, but also in rural and urban centers. An overview of the significance of Aboriginal English dialects in the socialization process, cultural identity, linkage to community of origin, and Aboriginal language retention is provided. Recently, a trend has emerged wherein educators are developing understanding of Aboriginal English dialects as being legitimate, systematic, and rule-governed variations of English with distinct pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, discourse, and pragmatic use. Aboriginal language and culture are now considered inseparable and benefits are attributed to knowing more than one language or dialect. Bi-dialectal curriculum is evolving to include cultural and linguistic diversity where code-switching is encouraged to support the acquisition of standard English or academic language as a second dialect to complement and maintain the students' first language—Aboriginal English dialect and Indigenous language. Implications for literacy acquisition are expressed and current trends in the exploration of equitable education contexts and appropriate language-learning supports more aligned with Aboriginal student needs are illustrated. More recently, confidence is growing in the Aboriginal community for bi-dialectal and multi-dialectal children to succeed, and understanding is being gained of the importance and value of Aboriginal English dialects. Further research to document and understand Aboriginal English dialects is called for, and best practices in education are sought.

Background

My clinical experiences as a speech-language pathologist and life experiences as an Aboriginal woman have served to inform me through exposure to a wide variety of contexts and opportunities to explore Aboriginal English dialects, and in particular, education issues. This article presents information that I have gained by observation, relationship-building with Aboriginal families in a number of First Nation

communities, and research on Aboriginal English dialects and Indian education.

As a member of the Loon Clan, Chippewas of Rama Mnjikaning First Nation, Ontario, I have a natural affinity for grassroots communications and knowledge of internal community issues. Over the years, I have come to understand my personal and professional role and responsibilities in the Aboriginal community, and thus I seek to learn more and to share what I have learned to support mutual respect and understanding for all, especially in an education context.

Since 1986, I have worked as a speech-language pathologist with all age groups in the health and education sectors of Anishinabek communities in the Great Lakes Region of Ontario. My clinical experience in the northern Lake Huron area encompasses the Ojibway communities on Manitoulin Island (Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve; M'Chigeeng First Nation; Sheguiandah First Nation, Aundeck Omnikaning First Nation, Sheshegwaning First Nation, and Ziibahsing First Nation) and what is referred to as the North Shore (Sagamock Anishnawbek). I have also worked with Ojibway communities east of Georgian Bay (Atikameksheng First Nation; Nipissing First Nation) as well as south of Georgian Bay (Chippewas of Mnjikaning Rama First Nation; Walpole Island First Nation). Of late I am providing clinical services to urban First Nation (Ojibway, Cree) and Métis elementary students in the region of Sudbury, Ontario.

I have been a part-time student in the Master of Education program at Nipissing University in North Bay, Ontario, for the past two years. This has created opportunities for learning and reflection on Aboriginal English dialects in the context of First Nations education in Canada and the US and the field of linguistic anthropology. Engagement in thesis research about the narratives of First Nations children has supported me in developing the inquiry skill set of academia blended with an Indigenous research paradigm.

The viewpoints that I present here are grounded in the areas of Ontario delineated above and are particularly relevant to the Anishinabek (Ojibway-speaking) people. Much of the historical information and references to Indian education and socialization processes presented are relevant to Canadian Aboriginal people in general as these relate largely to the process of colonization and education as regulated under the *Indian Act* and the federal Department of Indian Affairs. I cannot stress enough the importance for the reader to know that Aboriginal peoples of Canada do not represent a homogeneous group, and that each region and First Nation community in particular has distinct language, social customs, political and historical affiliations, and experiences.

Introduction

Aboriginal English dialects are used by Aboriginal people to communicate in their specific cultural community. These nonstandard varieties of

English have a central place in social discourse and are key to supporting the individual's identity and ties to a distinct Aboriginal community (Leap, 1993). Aboriginal people can usually tell where an individual comes from when they hear the First Nations English dialect, and educators can usually describe some features of the local First Nations dialect.

A number of scholars in the fields of linguistics and education have documented Canadian Indigenous English and American Indian English, which are as diverse as the Aboriginal peoples of North America. Regional varieties have been found to share some common linguistic features and discourse rules (Mulder, 1982; Heit & Blair, 1993; Darnell, 1993; Leap, 1993).

Aboriginal English dialects are evident not only among Aboriginal people who speak their ancestral language, but in today's generation of Aboriginal people who no longer speak their mother tongue. This phenomenon has relatively recently come to light, and educational implications for First Nation language and literacy learning are currently being unexplored.

Many Aboriginal languages are spoken in Canada, and First Nation communities have implemented language revitalization programs to counteract the trend of language loss. Statistics Canada (2006) reports that 29% of First Nations people who responded to the census said that they could speak an Aboriginal language well enough to carry on a conversation. The figure was higher for First Nations people living on reserves (51%) than for those living off reserve (12%). The Elders are keepers of the language, and according to the 2006 Aboriginal census data, "fully one-half of First Nations seniors could converse in an Aboriginal language ... 21% of First Nations children aged 14 and under and 24% of youth aged 15-24 could carry on a conversation in their ancestral language" (p. 48).

According to the 2006 National Census (which surveyed Aboriginal peoples living off-reserve and on-reserve), over 60 Aboriginal languages are spoken by First Nations people in Canada. These are grouped into the following distinct language families: Athapaskan, Siouan, Salish, Tsimshian, Wakashan, Iroquoian, Haida, Kutenai, and Tlingit. Statistics Canada (2006, 2007) reports that Cree, Inuktitut, and Ojibway have the largest number of speakers and are considered more likely to persist.

There has been a 2% decline in the number of Ojibway language-speakers who responded to the Census in 2006 compared with 2001 data. Statistics Canada (2006) reports in the *Aboriginal Children's Survey* with data for Métis, Inuit, and off-reserve First Nations children under the age of 6 in urban, rural, and northern locations across Canada. The "Languages" page includes detailed information about languages used in the child's environment.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) report identified that ancestral languages are key to personal and community well-being and recommended language revitalization efforts nationally.

> Language is the principal 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—our world view. (p. 602)

In 2005, a Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Culture reported to the Minister of Canadian Heritage (2005) on a strategy for First Nation, Inuit, and Métis language revitalization. The report links Aboriginal language use to increased self-esteem and well-being. Aboriginal community actions such as language immersion opportunities and Aboriginal language classes have supported a positive turn of events.

The 2006 Census data show that 21% of First Nations children aged 14 and under and 24% of youth aged 15-24 could carry on a conversation in their ancestral language, and this compared with the 2001 data shows a language preservation trend. Of interest is a trend where Aboriginal people are learning an Aboriginal language as a second language. The data show that "one in four First Nations people (25%) reported that they had an Aboriginal mother tongue in 2006. However, more First Nations people could speak an Aboriginal language than reported an Aboriginal language as a mother tongue" (Statistics Canada, 2006, p. 50).

Spielmann (1951) studied the language-in-use discourse patterns and features of Ojibwe language speakers in Ontario urban and First Nation settings to gain insight into how the people think and do things through talk. He states an underlying principle that

> the maintaining of one's Native language is tantamount to maintaining one's culture ... language is the heart and soul of a culture. If a person loses his or her language, lost also are the ideas and culture-specific ways of relating to each other. Aboriginal peoples need their languages to preserve thoughts and ideas that can only best be expressed in their language of origin. (p. 238)

Spielmann stresses the role of Aboriginal language in accessibility of the knowledge and wisdom of the Elders, prevention of assimilation, and preservation of tradition-specific ways of relating to others. He states, "The philosophy, world view, spirituality, and culture-specific ways of thinking and doing things of a people are built right into the very structure of their language" (p. 239).

Battiste (2000) examined the effect of cognitive imperialism in Canada and called for decolonizing in education to ensure maintenance of Aboriginal identity, language, and culture. Educators, leaders, and activists are encouraged to inspire youth to uphold language and culture essential for the formation of Aboriginal identity: crucial for success in life. Legislation is seen as necessary to protect Aboriginal languages and culture.

Aboriginal children who present at school speaking their mother tongue are readily acknowledged as students learning English as a second language. Children who do not speak their Aboriginal language, but who use Aboriginal English dialect are also learning a new language, the standard form of English. In addition, these Aboriginal English dialect-users are experiencing Aboriginal language loss in their home community. Each of these children will go through a normal and predictable process of second-language learning. Thankfully, recent research is showing educators and speech-language clinicians how to facilitate this process rather than perpetuating the historic methods of teaching language and literacy that promoted language loss and mislabeling. Handbooks and research papers are available that increase clinicians' and educators' understanding of bilingualism and the learning process that occurs in second-language learners (Genesee, Paradis, & Crago, 2004).

Features of Aboriginal English Dialects

Research on Aboriginal English dialects is sparse, and a review of the literature provides limited descriptions of grammatical structure, phonological features, and specific examples of discourse. Relevant research is scarce in Canada.

Linguistic interference is attributed as the process responsible for the situation where a particular dialect of English develops outside a bilingual context. An Aboriginal English dialect is observed to be used by predominantly monolingual children learning English in a Canadian coastal Tsimshian community (Mulder, 1982).

Characteristics of Aboriginal English dialect in Saskatchewan, implications for education, and issues in the teaching of standard English to dialect-speaking students have been described (Heit & Blair, 1993). It is important that all Aboriginal students not be considered as comprising one category of language characteristics and learning needs in a student population. Diverse Aboriginal languages are involved; some students are learning English as a second language; and students who no longer speak an Indigenous language may be fluent in standard English or use a fully fledged dialect of English that is the result of the influence of the Indigenous language or mother tongue on the English language. As educators understand the nature of dialects and of second-language learning, a shift from the deficit view toward acceptance of the existence of difference in a language is supported. The following differences between standard English and Aboriginal English dialect, specifically pertinent to Cree people, are illustrated regarding pronunciation (intonation, emphasis and stress patterns, different speech sounds, voiced versus voiceless consonant distinction only in English, additional vowels in English and Cree vowels pronounced differently, vowels in final word position in Cree); grammar (rigid word order in English, irregular plurals, and irregular verbs in English; English classification according to gender and Cree classification

according to animate/inanimate); vocabulary (color words); and discourse (two or four narrative components in Dene rather than three in English), different rules for emphasis, introducing topics, sequencing, and for ending discourse between English and Indigenous languages.

The use of Aboriginal English dialects in the context of Aboriginal language maintenance and revitalization has been studied. The bilingual and bicultural experience of English-speakers who are Aboriginal in Plains Cree communities in northern Alberta and Saskatchewan and Algonquian and Iroquoian communities in southwestern Ontario shows that Aboriginal English dialects are spoken widely for conversation in First Nations communities and even in urban communities by people who are monolingual in English. Urban Aboriginal people in Edmonton speak Aboriginal English dialect although they do not speak Cree (Darnell, 1993). Contemporary First Nations people in mainstream Canadian society are observed to code-switch into Cree when their message is not intended to be accessible to non-Native persons.

The roots of Aboriginal English dialects and descriptions of current use are described in the early learning and speech language fields. A process of *repidginization* or *recreolization* is explained to be driven by a force of cultural distinctiveness and First Nations cultural and linguistic revitalization (Ball & Bernhardt, 2008)

Researchers have shed light on the relationship between language and world view, and this leads to increased understanding of what has been referred to as *the Indian mind*. Educators who are cognizant of this phenomenon are better equipped to make learning experiences relevant to the Aboriginal learner to facilitate acquisition of standard English, to promote maintenance of Aboriginal language and Aboriginal English dialects, and to reinforce purposeful code-switching so that language use is appropriate to context. This acknowledges and supports maintenance of Aboriginal English dialects, Aboriginal languages, Aboriginal learning styles, and Indigenous knowledge in the classroom. Darnell (1993) describes language difference regarding Cree language semantics (e.g., animate and inanimate features of power possessed by objects) and interactional styles and associates these with the Cree world view. The author explains Ojibwa, Oneida, and Mohawk language-speakers' discourse practices and how people talk respectfully to each other (e.g., taciturnity, rules for when to talk, and when not to) and describes narrative conventions. Listeners are urged to have an open mind when Aboriginal people speak using unique conventions of communication.

Much remains to be learned about Aboriginal English dialects, and linguists have gradually moved toward an ethnographic examination of community dialects by studying the context of *language in use* to understand the relationships among language, culture, and society. A Severn Ojibway community of northern Ontario was found to represent a

heterogenous speech community including many diverse speaking styles including conversational styles and dialects (Valentine, 1995). Languages and language use including a variety of related components such as the linguistic levels of phonetics, phonology, morphology, and syntax, as well as components at the discourse (beyond the sentence unit) level, are illustrated in Valentine's book.

The culture-specific ways of thinking and interacting among Ojibwe adults, educators, and teachers-in-training are highlighted to illustrate, for example, how discourse rules such as wait time are different from mainstream interaction patterns and how this affects Aboriginal learners in the mainstream classroom (Spielman, 1951). Ojibwe linguistic concepts and cultural differences associated with the oral tradition are described by Speilman such as verb tense organization in storytelling, humor, and teasing in storytelling and conversation, as well as the importance of personal experience in the storytelling tradition.

Aboriginal English dialect features have been identified by Canadian linguists and speech-language pathologists. Phonology differences such as *d* for *th* and deletion of one consonant when a consonant blend occurs at the end of a word, verb or noun endings indicating person or number variability, pronoun deletion, and vocabulary difference, narrative discourse structure differences including thematic sequencing, implicit connections between ideas and brevity, significance of silence, value of listening and observing are described (Ball, Bernhardt, & Deby, 2005). These authors summarize how Aboriginal children tend to be uncomfortable in situations where they are called on to speak when a large group is listening, speaking in the presence of adults, and responding with demonstration of one's knowledge. Children are comfortable when speaking with one person or in a small group, with peers in the absence of adults, and in the situation where the child himself or herself decides he or she is ready to demonstrate knowledge. Differences about questioning and answering are illustrated, and other features of dialect such as prosody, humor, and paralinguistic factors (facial expression, gesture, body language) are offered. Phonology and phonetics, morphosyntax, vocabulary use, and discourse and storytelling elements are illustrated (Ball & Bernhardt, 2008).

Aboriginal English dialect-speakers are described as presenting with a profile of pronunciation differences and grammatical patterns identified through speech and language pathology assessment procedures for Ojibwe children in Ontario (Peltier, 2008). Substitution patterns with gender terms (e.g., he/she, him/her) and speech sounds (e.g., *d*/voiced *th*, *t*/voiceless *th*, *n/r*, *n/l*, *s/sh*), absent prepositional phrases (e.g., in, under, behind), and frequent use of novel past-tense verb forms (e.g., *jamp/jumped*) are elements of the profile presented.

A review of the literature from the US revealed a few studies of notable relevance to this topic. Nelson-Barber (1982) studied the sound system of the language spoken by Pima elementary school students on the Gila River Indian Community in Arizona. Findings reported that some children whose parents did not speak the Pima language presented at school with Aboriginal English dialect exemplified by differences in vowel and consonant productions. The research offers guidance for teachers so that pronunciation differences are not confused with articulatory deficits and awareness of lexical, semantic, and morphosyntactic variations. Educational programs that acknowledge the subtle nuances of the Pima dialect are suggested to aid in Pima children's acquisition of academic English.

Fletcher (1983) reviewed linguistic descriptions of American Indian languages and identified differences from the English language and surveyed the literature on Indian English. The report identified problems that Native Americans and Native Alaskans experience with English and recommended areas for student practice using computer applications. Differences in phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics were described and references made to American Indian world view differences that affect verb forms (tense, mode, and aspect), gender terms (personal pronouns), prepositions, and concepts (paucity of color words to harmonize and synthesize elements of the world rather than to separate and analyze them). English-language instruction with a focus on minimally contrasting vowel pairs, consonant pairs, and practice with novel phonemes, final consonants, and consonant clusters (plural and possessive forms) were recommended.

Leap (1993) illustrates examples of Native American English. The following descriptors are offered: the final consonant is dropped at the end of a word if there are two consonants; plural *s* for nouns is dropped; possessive *s* is dropped; third person verb *s* is dropped; and past tense may be absent; pronouns may be absent; verbs *be* or *have* sometimes are absent; double negatives may be used; and students' spelling will sometimes show pronunciation differences such as *d* for *th*.

Educational Perspectives and Implications for Learning

Researchers in the fields of linguistics, education, psychology, and speech-language pathology have increased educators' understanding of the effect of second-language learning on young children's school experience. Although most of the data pertain to the context of minority-language groups and school experience, such effects can be considered in relation not only to young children who present at school with an Aboriginal language mother tongue, but also for the many Aboriginal children who present with Aboriginal English dialect (a variety of English).

Historically, the Canadian and US education systems actively discouraged maintenance of the first language in minority-language children. Cummins (1978) summarized the origin of the belief that bilingualism was

harmful in schools. Assessment and evaluation practices did not consider all the factors that supported language development and learning. Education language policy was based on the erroneous beliefs that the first language was the cause of academic difficulties experienced by minority-language students, and that the first language impeded the development of standard English. English as a second language (ESL) programming was implemented based on the assimilationist model where immigrant populations were instructed in standard English to fit into mainstream society.

Aboriginal people in Canada and the US have experienced colonization, which has included overt government policies aimed at assimilation and eradication of Aboriginal people and their languages. The residential school era from 1892 to 1996 in Canada meant forced removal of Aboriginal children from their homes with resultant residential school legacy negative effects to generations of Aboriginal people. The federal government's public apology in June 2008 (Harper, 2008) is a positive step in the long process ahead of restoring trust and establishing a positive relationship in education with the Aboriginal community.

Young Aboriginal children are socialized to use Aboriginal English dialect speech and language and discourse patterns in the context of home and community before they enter school. Standard English pronunciation, grammar, and discourse rules are upheld in the formal education system, and the dominant society's standard English holds prestige in institutions and society. Stigmatization of Aboriginal English dialects and Aboriginal languages continues to be problematic in today's society. A young Aboriginal child's communication is often judged delayed or deficient by teachers and specialists such as speech-language pathologists.

Heit and Blair (1993) discuss teachers' attitudes toward Indian and Métis students learning English as a second language and Indigenous English dialect users in Saskatchewan.

> Lack of knowledge ... has led and will continue to lead to misunderstandings and miseducation of Indian and Métis students when language differences are interpreted as language deficiencies, or when they lead to the formation of stereotypes or misjudgements of someone's ability on the basis of his/her spoken language. (p. 121)

These authors state that language education for Indian and Métis students historically included teachers correcting spoken English to conform to standard English, and because

> dialects are languages and language, culture and personality are intimately interrelated, [so] to "correct" someone's language is tantamount to saying that the culture or person is not acceptable. The long-term effects of constant correction, focus on form rather than on content, and non-acceptance of students' language likely contribute to the silence which many Indian and Métis students retreat to in classrooms and to the high attrition rates. (p. 121)

Heit and Blair cite Brophy and Good's (1977) examination of the situation where teachers' values, beliefs, and expectations about students' achievement levels are conveyed to students at an unconscious level and result in a "self-fulfilling prophecy." Judgments about the superiority or inferiority of dialects are made on social grounds and reflect people's ethnic biases.

Teacher training about the nature of dialects and of second-language learning, cross-cultural education, and knowledge of Indian and Métis history and contemporary issues was seen as important to effect positive change in the classroom. The distinctive characteristics of spoken Indigenous English are dialectal differences and not a speech or language deficit, and the past emphasis on assessing and remediating meant that a disproportionate number of Indian and Métis students were designated as "special needs." A new emphasis in school on teaching reading and writing regardless of spoken dialect is called for. Further investigation to assist teachers in understanding differences across cultures such as nonverbal communication; communication styles; the purposes for which language is used; and differing values, world views, and philosophies were identified as important. The basic pedagogical principle of an additive approach that builds on and validates the experiences of the Indian and Métis students in their classrooms is recommended. Suggested ways for teachers to validate the language of their Indian and Métis students are provided to develop facility with language in a wide variety of functions, styles, and registers, supporting an empowerment process rather than one of control and assimilation.

Sterzuk (2008) illustrates the situation in Saskatchewan, where the challenges faced by Indigenous students continue to be framed in a deficit theory rather than viewing First Nation and Métis students as members of a discourse community that uses a variety of English different from that of the white majority. She identifies school practices and procedures that are linguistically oppressive toward Indigenous students who use a nonstandard variety of English, resulting in reduced educational attainment and biased assessment and misdiagnosis.

Cappon (2008) reviewed the Canadian Council on Learning's (CCL) *Composite Learning Index* to track progress in lifelong learning, with particular reference to the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis learning context. He highlights an Aboriginal view of learning that is holistic, lifelong, and experiential. Cappon illustrated that existing research into measurement approaches for Aboriginal learning failed to take this into account. "They tend to emphasize learning deficits of Aboriginal people, while ignoring positive outcomes" (p. 61). He summarizes a new tool for community planning and development entitled "Redefining How Success is Measured in Aboriginal Learning, 2007." This approach was presented by CCL to develop appropriate tools to measure learning progress in sync with Aboriginal world views of learning.

Typically, during schooling, children experience a loss in their first language if there is little opportunity for use. This phenomenon is described in the literature as "subtractive bilingualism" and leads to the situation where a minority-language child has language skills that are less well developed than those of speakers of either the first or second language (standard English). Cummins (1978) states that school instruction in only the second language (standard English) with no concessions to either the language or culture of the minority-language child frequently results in low levels of competence in both the child's first and second language and leads to academic failure. It is no wonder that in urban and First Nation on-reserve settings, Canadian Aboriginal students have less academic success than students in the general population and rank years behind in reading, writing, and vocabulary (Burnaby, 1982).

It is apparent that ESL programs are inappropriate for Aboriginal English dialect-users and students who present at school with an Aboriginal mother tongue. Westernoff (1994) explains that "classes for learners of English as a second language have been established to help students learn the dominant language [and] promote quick assimilation into the mainstream culture, which may contribute to L1 loss" (p. 165).

Wong Fillmore (1991) states, "any program that emphasizes English at the expense of the primary language is a potential disaster" (p. 325). This author makes reference to the US Project Head Start initiative in 1990 that focused on teaching English and the background experiences and skills needed for school to preschool language-minority and Native American children. The outcome was predictable: the children learned English, dropped their primary languages, and many lost their first language. "As educators and advocates for children and families, it is crucial that we understand what is happening, and that we do something about the problem that our educational policies and practices are creating" (p. 341). Wong Fillmore explores the societal context and summarizes with:

> Second language learning does not result in the loss of the primary language everywhere. But it does often enough in societies like the United States and Canada where linguistic or ethnic diversity are not especially valued ... despite our considerable pride in our diverse multicultural origins. (p. 341)

The assimilative process is explored in the study, which included interviews with immigrant and American Indian families of children who attended English-only or Spanish-English bilingual preschools. The social, emotional, cognitive, and educational negative effects on the development of language-minority children are discussed.

First-language maintenance is supported by attitudinal, linguistic, and experiential factors from the learner's home, community, and school setting. Cummins (1978) explored the effects of sociocultural factors on first-language maintenance in minority-language children. The values of the child, family, and community play a key role in determining whether the

first language will be retained and further developed. The amount of time that a child is actually exposed to or is using the first language functionally is a key factor. Sociocultural factors also affect First Nations English dialect and Aboriginal language acquisition and maintenance. People in the Aboriginal child's home environment may believe that acquisition of standard English is the best path to success in school as this ensures a future place in society at large. The powerful forces of cultural conflict can lead the Aboriginal child to reject his or her own language and culture. It is not uncommon for Aboriginal students to opt out of Native language and culture courses offered at school.

In some situations, the Aboriginal family and community may actively reject the dominant culture and language, and this serves as a motive for language retention and revitalization efforts. It can be said that Aboriginal English dialects are used purposefully as an indicator of opposition to colonization and assimilation. Sadly, however, Aboriginal English dialects have become in some communities "the only remaining trace of the Aboriginal language" (Ball & Bernhardt, 2008, p. 575).

Research in bilingual and immersion school settings has shown that children whose first language is English are in an advantageous situation where their language is dominant and prestigious and there is no danger of replacement by the second language. For example, children in French immersion school enroll in second-language classes and experience an "additive bilingualism" learning environment. Studies from such settings have found that bilingualism accelerates the development of general intelligence and promotes cognitive flexibility and divergent thinking. These students gain an analytic orientation to language and respond with sensitivity to feedback cues from communicative partners. Additive bilingualism enables a student to achieve high levels of competence in both languages because there is no cost to first-language competence. Students experience quality interaction with their educational environment through the use of the cognitive functions of language. Aboriginal language immersion programs, however, are not always available in schools, and language loss in the community is another factor that has a negative effect on an additive-bilingualism educational experience for Aboriginal students with an Aboriginal language and/or First Nations English dialect.

In the case of the young Aboriginal learner, teachers' beliefs operate in a self-fulfilling manner. The societal and educational assimilation process remains active; however, it is not the child's first language (Aboriginal mother tongue and/or Aboriginal English dialect) in itself that causes academic difficulties. Underdevelopment of the first language on school entry, cessation of first-language development, and cultural conflict from pressure to assimilate are the culprits. Failure to encourage maintenance of the home language denies the Aboriginal child the opportunity to develop

a cognitively and culturally enriching form of additive bilingualism (Cummins, 1978). Teachers may note that the child relatively quickly gains the appropriate accent, intonation, and oral fluency in English, and this "linguistic façade" may curtail closer examination of the child's mastery of the cognitive structure of the language (e.g., understanding the meanings of abstract concepts, synonyms, vocabulary, problem-solving) and may be much less complete. When the student struggles, it may be interpreted as a learning or intellectual deficit. Teachers' academic expectations for students who are considered to "not know English" can be lower than for regular students, and consequently, Aboriginal children's lower academic progress is likely to be judged by the teacher as satisfactory.

Research has informed our understanding of bilingualism and learning. We now know that people are capable of learning more than one language and that bilingual learners can participate with success in the mainstream education system. Research from minority-language children shows attainment of conversational skills in standard English within two years and acquisition of language skills for academic application in five to seven years (Cummins et al., 2006; Genesee et al., 2004). Young children are capable of acquiring and using more than one language without detriment to their learning and academic achievement, and the same potential exists for users of Aboriginal English dialect and speakers of Aboriginal languages.

Aboriginal children undergo a learning process wherein they gradually acquire the skills to code-switch. Over time, as they are exposed to various communicative settings and expectations, they learn to make adjustments in how they speak and interact. Aboriginal people who have a close relationship with First Nations community traditions, values, and culture and who work or live in mainstream society become adept at code-switching to participate fully in both cultures. Depending on the place, people, and purpose of their communication, their speech, language, and discourse patterns reflect First Nations English dialect or standard English, and code-switching becomes an automatic and fluid process. Such communicative and social ability sets the standard for bilingual balance. Code-switching maintains the Aboriginal person's individual and social integrity and supports pragmatic and semantic bridges for living in two worlds. The individual exudes comfort with a bilingual and bicultural state of being, which can "enhance their sense of personal well-being, their sense of social justice and their tolerance and appreciation of human diversity" (Lambert, 1975, p. 79).

Hall, Cheng, and Carlson (2006) described research on multi-competence and stressed the importance of considering how someone uses language knowledge to make communicative activities and how one's activities construct knowledge. The benefits of quality and variety of an individual's experiences in multiple communicative contexts are seen in

someone who becomes a "multi-contextual communicative expert" (p. 233).

Ball and Bernhardt (2008) describe the important role that Aboriginal English dialects play in language revitalization and enhancement of Aboriginal identity.

> First Nations English dialect can provide speakers who want to learn or re-learn an ancestral language an easier point of entry into language learning. There may be other benefits to being bi-dialectal. By preserving not only the grammatical aspects of the dialect, but also the unique discourse and narrative features that are often an integral part of Aboriginal English dialects, the dialect can play an important role in the ongoing transmission of Indigenous cultures an identities. (p. 575)

Assessment Issues

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) brought to light the concern among Aboriginal leaders that services are lacking and education, specialist services, and screening procedures are culturally inappropriate and result in negative consequences for Aboriginal children. This has led to overidentification and underidentification of Aboriginal children with developmental challenges in language-learning and literacy.

Aboriginal students who use First Nations English dialect are at a disadvantage in the assessment process, and an unfair difference arises when formal test standards are applied. Standardized assessment tools are written in standard English and are biased when applied to the Aboriginal children who speak another dialect of English. Aboriginal children receive low scores on biased standardized literacy tests that do not consider their natural communication patterns, and language arts and literacy rubrics are unfairly biased against many features of the Aboriginal English dialects. Ball et al. (2005) summarize the findings from early child development practitioners shared in focus groups and the literature. Speech and language pathology assessment tests may mistakenly identify an Aboriginal student as having speech, language, and learning difficulties and lead to unneeded remedial therapy, whereas some children who speak nonstandard dialects and who have genuine language disorders go undiagnosed and unserved.

Sterzuk (2008) illustrates current practices where many of the "errors" that are diagnosed in the speech of Indigenous students result from differences in home and school English varieties and appropriate speech behavior. Moreover, rather than assuming that Indigenous students have a speech or language disorder, a more effective approach might be to review and modify mainstream bias toward majority-culture speech patterns. By being more mindful of the appropriate speech of Indigenous' homes, educators and speech and language clinicians could avoid inappropriate assessments and misdiagnoses with harmful long-term effects on students' educational success.

Practitioners involved in facilitating the learning of young children who present at school with a first language other than standard English are challenged to determine whether they have a learning or communication deficit. Accurate evaluation is the cornerstone to appropriate educational programming. Learning evaluation and speech-language assessment practices are only now evolving with sensitivity to this compelling issue of Aboriginal English dialects.

Assessment materials in Aboriginal languages are unavailable, and translation of English tests is problematic. A number of speech-language experts have illustrated the limited applications of translated tests (Westernoff, 1991; Schiff-Myers, 1992). English norms cannot be used when tests are translated, particular test items are inappropriate for speakers from another cultural background, and translation alters the difficulty of some test items.

Schiff-Myers (1992) explored the practice of clinical assessment of second-language learners and stressed the importance of evaluating arrested language development or language loss in the child's first language to ascertain if the child is a normal language-learner. The author states that even if the child is found to be deficient in the primary language and English, it "does not necessarily mean that the child is not a normal language learner" (p. 28). Dialect use at home and learning a second language before competence is achieved in the first language lead to arrested language development or loss of the mother tongue. "This negative effect on the primary language occurs most often if the native language is devalued" (p. 28). Speech-language pathologists are advised to collect an oral history from the child's family to obtain a description of the form and nature of the language(s) used at home by caretakers and the age and conditions when the child began to learn English, ages when the child achieved linguistic developmental milestones in the Native language before exposure to the second language, contacts with Native language-speakers at home, and motivation to maintain or learn each language.

Educators and speech-language pathologists have relatively recently initiated a move toward the use of informal measures such as curriculum-based assessments and use of Native language-speakers as informants and interviewers to gain insight into the child's level of language proficiency in his or her first language. Research has shown that a child with a language disorder presents with a disability in his or her first language. This has highlighted the importance of understanding the level of language proficiency in the first language and also for assessing if a loss of language skills in the first language is at play, which could lead to misinterpretation of assessment results and erroneous identification of a language disorder (Westernoff, 1991). The author explains factors contributing to mother-tongue (L1) language loss and stresses the importance for clinicians to consider the degree of language loss that the child experiences when

carrying out an assessment. Such information is crucial to making an informed decision about whether to assess in the child's mother tongue or in English.

Westernoff (1991) illustrated the intimidation factor experienced by parents of minority-language children when interviewed by professionals such as speech-language pathologists. Parents may not be forthcoming when asked about language use and attitudes about maintenance in the home. Practitioners from mainstream institutions such as clinics and schools are seen as authority figures, and interviewees often respond with what they perceive to be the "right" or "best" answer. This situation is applicable to the context of service provision to Aboriginal families. Aboriginal parents and family members tend to say that standard English is used and promoted when in fact the Aboriginal language and First Nations English dialect are present. Thus the importance of establishing relationships with Aboriginal learners and their families is of paramount importance to the development of an appropriate educational program for the young Aboriginal learner.

Westby (1990) illustrates the benefits of using ethnographic interviewing in such a sensitive process. Westby highlights the importance for the clinician to understand what is important to the child's parents so that therapeutic intervention fits their needs, not the clinician's. "Ethnographic interviewing provides a means for the professionals to discover the culture of the family—their perceptions of the world, behaviors, values, and beliefs—and their strengths and needs" (p. 102). A sociocultural perspective is a key element in ethnographic interviewing that focuses on developing rapport, using descriptive questions, and carefully wording questions. *Why* questions are not appropriate and only lead to suggestions from the professional about what the family should be doing. Westby supports ethnographic interviewing as a means for professionals to "assist families in discovering the answers to their problems" (p. 111).

Rodekohr and Haynes (2001) described norm-referenced language assessment practices as biased against dialectal speakers and investigated the use of processing tasks to measure linguistic knowledge in African-American and white children.

> Processing-dependent measures assess language through means that do not rely heavily on the subject's prior knowledge or events, vocabulary, or language structure. Rather, they test the subject's ability to learn and process new information. Because all of the subjects performing a processing-dependent task are equally familiar with the words/ideas used in the test, the playing field is leveled somewhat for those children who do not have the advantage of intimate knowledge of the culture that produced the test. Repeating novel phonetic non-word sequences, for example, would not involve prior exposure to vocabulary. It would, however, involve metalinguistic ability and some attentional and memory skills. (p. 257)

These authors reported data suggesting that non-word repetition tasks can differentiate children with language impairment from those with normal

language abilities. They studied the use of this type of task as compared with knowledge-based language tests such as the Test of Language Development—Primary (Newcomer & Hammill, 1988) to differentiate African-American English-speakers from those with language impairment. The following important finding was presented: "normally developing African American subjects exhibit a larger performance gap when compared to White children on the knowledge-dependent language tests and less of a gap on processing tasks" (p. 267). Further investigation of this type of tool for application to screening of First Nations English dialect populations may be appropriate for nonbiased assessment of language ability.

Supportive Interventions

Awareness of Aboriginal English dialects is growing from the fields of linguistics, education, and speech-language pathology. Together Aboriginal parents, community members, and practitioners are coming to understand the importance and value of Aboriginal English dialects and Aboriginal languages. Positive acknowledgment is the initial step toward applying Aboriginal English dialect in the learning environment of the schools to facilitate Aboriginal children's successful acquisition of literate forms of English.

Epstein and Xu (2003) reviewed the literature about teaching English as a second dialect to Aboriginal students and illustrate the historical practice in education where Aboriginal students were not instructed explicitly about differences in their use of oral *vernacular* dialect and formal language structures of *standard* English that occur only in written form. This leads to poor performance in language-learning, especially in the areas of reading and writing. Where ESL/ESD programs focused in primary classrooms, Aboriginal students developed only the conversational variety of English-language proficiency, and teachers misinterpreted this as mastery. Educational approaches that highlight differences in pronunciation, spelling, grammar, and discourse patterns and ethnically based narrative styles and academic writing conventions are helpful.

When teachers connect at a human level with culturally and linguistically diverse students and display an attitude of respect, where Aboriginal culture and language are included in education, a more friendly sociocultural learning environment is achieved. Two-way educational experiences for students based on the circle where Aboriginal and mainstream culture and language are accepted and taught supports a cooperative relationship among teachers and students. Researchers suggest that educators document dialect features to create a language profile of the bi-dialectal education setting to increase understanding of the languages and dialects. A shift in attitude among knowledgeable teachers results in a valuing of Aboriginal English to the education process. Teacher training that dialect is a legitimate language variation aids in dispelling misconceptions and

stereotypes and promotes students' skills for investigation and cross-cultural understanding. Teachers are seen as the impetus for change because they have seen first hand how the education system has inadequately responded to linguistic diversity.

Promising practices in northern communities in Canada where most students speak an Aboriginal language or dialect of English include an alternate or additive approach in bilingual programs during the early grades where ESL or ESD is taught as an academic subject and instruction is gradually shifted to standard English. Reading is initially in the vernacular dialect. In other situations where English-only instruction is in place, content-based and task-based language support helps Aboriginal students cope with academic work in an ESD class for one to two hours per day. Aboriginal world view and unique learning styles are supported, and critical thinking and learning strategies are used. Important practices are stressed where teachers ignore pronunciation and dialect differences that do not interfere with meaning by looking at context to derive meaning and use a contrastive approach to analyze written discourse differences.

An Aboriginal child's writing and spelling reflect the phonology of Aboriginal English dialect. Sterzuk (2008) suggests "teaching dialect speakers to read and write using the non-standard code, designing reading and writing programs to include additional steps for dialect speakers, teacher training, and dialect awareness courses for dialect speakers" (p. 17). Further research is necessary to reduce the marginalization that Aboriginal learners face.

Cummins et al. (2006) reviewed English language-learners (ELL) educational approaches and provide a critique of phonics instruction and high-stakes testing procedures for low-income students that have become broadly used in the absence of scientific support for such approaches. This group of educators proposes an "Academic Expertise Framework" that acknowledges the ELL students' prior experience

> as an important resource for learning, and instruction explicitly aims for transfer of knowledge and skills across languages. Instruction communicates respect for students' language and culture, and aims explicitly to enable students to engage with literacy and invest their identities in the learning process. (p. 10)

The Framework is presented as a tool to stimulate discussion in the school about changes to the school-based language policy. The authors state that educators do have choices and, rather than ignoring or just paying lip service to what students are bringing into the classroom, can create alternative pedagogical policies and practices that enable students to use their home language as a resource for learning. The Framework transforms the role of the parents in their child's education as collaborators in creating identity tests, affirming intelligence, imagination, and multilingual talents of these learners and acknowledging funds of knowledge available in the

community. The authors stress that "human relationships are at the heart of schooling" (p. 12).

Ball et al. (2005) recommended a specialized Standard English as a Second Dialect approach as a promising practice after reviewing the literature and forum findings. Such an approach would draw attention to the differences between the child's dialect and the standard English dialect, help the child to recognize situations for appropriate use of each dialect, and provide modeling opportunities for the child to learn standard English grammar and phonology. "This approach has been successfully employed for Aboriginal English in Australia, and African-American English in some parts of the USA. Some school districts provide such programs in Canada (p. 12).

Peltier (2008) is one of several known Aboriginal speech-language pathologists in Canada. She recommended a "new direction for promoting speech sound/phonemic awareness programming in the early years and language programming to support code-switching between 'school talk' and 'home talk' rather than provision of direct clinical interventions for speech and language" (p. 568).

Speech and language pathologists with experience in providing services to Aboriginal children have recommended culturally responsive practices. Crago (1992) is a speech-language pathologist with expertise in remote and northern Aboriginal communities who illustrates the benefits of ethnographic tools and language socialization theory to view cross-cultural communicative competence. This author discusses how a clinician's cultural and language socialization affects interpretation of non-mainstream children's communication skills. It is important for a clinician who is not knowledgeable about children's culture to realize that they are not likely to be adequate communicative partners in assessment activities such as language sampling. Also, parent-intervention programs created by such naïve clinicians are not sensitive to differences and may disrupt the fiber of caregiver-child communicative interactions by recommending foreign approaches. As is the case for successful education, speech and language "intervention that is maximally congruent and minimally discontinuous with the home culture's patterns of language socialization will be most effective" (p. 35). Crago recommends that clinicians and educators inform their practice with language socialization study outcomes, initiate projects with ethnographic researchers, collaborate with non-mainstream parents and teachers to identify culturally appropriate educational and clinical goals and practices, and engage in a two-way dialogue where the professional is trained by the cultural members and where the same professional shares knowledge of speech and language disorders with the non-mainstream families, other professionals, and paraprofessionals. The author calls for recognition of the strength and relation of language and culture by educators and clinicians to curb the pattern where children

have not been educated (and remediated) in a culturally congruent manner. Crago states,

> Practitioners who are ignorant of, or refuse to alter their practices in ways that recognize the strength of, cultural patterns of communicative interaction, can, in fact, be asserting the hegemony of the mainstream culture and can thereby contribute, often unknowingly, to a form of cultural genocide of nonmainstream communicative practices. (p. 37)

Ball (2005) reported on a survey of Canadian practitioners and identified the need for speech-language pathologists, jointly with the Aboriginal community and family, to identify the values and styles of language interaction that culture holds as ideal and language facilitation strengths in the community on which to build. A collaborative approach was suggested that emphasized the importance of working with Elders, community governing bodies, parents, and other trusted service providers and being responsive to expressed values and wishes. In their experience, these people can offer feedback about tools, methods, and messages that are likely to be accepted and effective in various families or community groups.

Professional practice guidelines for speech-language pathologists working in multilingual and multicultural contexts support the maintenance and use of the child's mother tongue at home and in school (Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists, 2002; American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2004; Genesee et al., 2004).

Children with an Aboriginal language or First Nations English dialect should be supported to enroll in Native second-language classes even if they have a language disorder. Genesee et al. (2004) illustrate that "in appropriate circumstances, children, even those with language impairment, have the capacity to learn two languages. Professionals and parents ... should never automatically assume that having two languages is the exclusive domain of children with typical development" (p. 212). It is crucial that educators and parents have this understanding so that language maintenance and revitalization efforts are supported.

Scaldwell and Frame (1985) researched the prevalence of otitis media (middle-ear infections) in Aboriginal children attending on-reserve schools and found lower reading and spelling results. The authors believed this was due to living in isolated areas, having a first language other than English, and having a different cultural and experiential background. They shed light on the fact that "a high incidence of middle ear disease among Indian children has also been noted," and this factor is considered relevant. This research identified that 40% of the Aboriginal students presented with otitis media. An auditory- or phonetic-only method of teaching was not recommended, and emphasis on developing other teaching methods and programs was seen to be important.

Bowd (2004) reviewed the literature on middle-ear disease in Canadian Aboriginal children and adolescents and characterized the prevalence of otitis media as "alarming." Some Inuit communities have been found to exhibit prevalence that is more than 60 times the rate for southern Canadians, and

> among First Nations peoples it is not unusual for the disease to be as much as ten times more prevalent than among non-Aboriginal Canadians. The economic, social, health and educational costs are immense, and yet research in this area is fragmented, while the need for culturally-appropriate public health and educational interventions continues to expand. (p. 36)

The "promotion of healthy practices, the creation of good listening and learning environments in schools, and collaboration with families in the management ... frequent in-service education ... [and] research in this area is necessary" (p. 38).

Langan, Sockalingam, Caissie, and Corsten (2007) studied ear infections in First Nations children in Nova Scotia. They report that the general population of children typically outgrow the condition of inflammation in the middle ear cavity by the age of 3, whereas "It is not clear why the Aboriginal population seems to remain at risk for developing otitis media beyond early childhood" (p. 180). They found that tympanometry was useful as a quantitative measure of tympanic membrane activity, and pneumatic otoscopy resulted in a qualitative diagnosis. Data reported from the study revealed that 25.5% of children had middle ear pathology in October, and 24.4% presented with ear infection in April. Also,

> 50% of the students found to have middle ear pathology in October continued to exhibit the same pathology in April. These results suggest that middle ear disease and hearing loss among the Mi'kmaq elementary school children in eastern Canada remain relatively high throughout the school year. (p. 183)

Lack of medical and audiological treatment is identified as a concern as even a 15-dB hearing loss or unilateral hearing loss has been found to pose educational and learning problems in children. Because a conductive hearing loss (associated with ear infection) fluctuates and may go unrecognized by parents and teachers, often poor ability to hear and attend to the teacher results in off-task behavior or difficulty in keeping up with the pace of class discussion, and teachers misinterpret this as noncompliance, attention difficulties, or learning difficulties. Langan et al. stated that soundfield amplification systems should be installed in the classroom to accommodate those students with incomplete and inconsistent hearing and recommended regular hearing and tympanometry screenings be conducted by clinicians with follow-up referral. Education for parents and teachers about the high incidence of otitis media and hearing loss in First Nations communities to raise awareness and implement remediation strategies was seen as beneficial.

Spielman (1951) suggests application of knowledge gleaned from discourse analysis so that "Aboriginal language teachers [use] methods and techniques [that] can be applied in practical ways in the teaching and revitalizing of Aboriginal languages" (p. 235). Spielman states that in his work as a teacher-trainer,

> Teachers were better able to understand and teach appropriate ways of using the language in naturally occurring settings, transmit how the language works beyond the level of the sentence, and explore the relationship between language and identity, world view, and culture-specific ways of thinking and doing things. (p. 235)

He concludes that "discourse studies can lead to better understandings and increased respect for Aboriginal-specific ways of learning and enhance the educational experience for both Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal teachers" (p. 237).

Clinical experts in the field of pragmatics of language suggest intervention approaches that are sensitive to cultural language. Laurence and Fey (1991) suggested a pragmatic intervention approach for children with grammatical errors that emphasizes language in context. These clinicians recommend associating relevant social contexts in which to use particular grammatical forms during therapeutic interventions. They summarize such an approach:

> By directing attention toward language as a tool for social action, pragmatics has freed speech-language pathologists from the necessity to focus on grammatical or even lexical form in intervention programs ... [alone] grammar must share center stage with semantic and pragmatic functions. (p. 335)

Craig (1991) reviewed linguistic analysis and speech-language pathology evaluations of pragmatic language skills that included discourse analysis. Such an approach was seen as having roots in linguistic, social, and cognitive domains, which are important areas for investigation in the assessment and treatment of language disorders.

Positive Trends and Next Steps

Confidence is growing in the Aboriginal community for bi-dialectal and multi-dialectal children to succeed, and understanding is being gained of the importance and value of Aboriginal English dialects. Linguists, educators, and speech-language pathologists are assuming the role of advocates in the process to support the maintenance of home language as a means of developing a cognitively and culturally enriching form of additive bilingualism, which improves educational access and attainment.

Teacher training programs should include current information so that Aboriginal children's dialects are viewed as assets and not obstacles to learning. Teachers need updated instructional and assessment strategies. Some provincial ministry of education policies are now in place to recognize Aboriginal English dialects. Teachers are not provided with information that Aboriginal English dialects are varieties of English with equal

value to standard English. Curriculum documents in the area of language arts do not describe appropriate teaching strategies to address these Aboriginal students' unique learning needs. The focus is on acquisition of standard English. The specific features of local Aboriginal English dialects are not described, and teachers are given the scenario that the students' grammar differences are the same as those of Aboriginal English second-language learners.

The Ontario Ministry of Education ELL (2007) and the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education (1994) are examples. The Ontario Ministry of Education's practical guide for teachers to support English language-learners states that it would be counterproductive to segregate ESL/ELL students as they need to continue their education at the same time as they learn standard English across all subject areas. In the document, ESL programs are the recommended track for Aboriginal students who "speak a first language other than English, such as Cree or Ojibwe [and] others [who] speak a variety of English significantly different from that of the school environment," Aboriginal English dialect-speakers. The English Literacy Development (ELD) track is recommended for newcomers to Canada and "some Aboriginal students from remote communities" where access to education has been limited or where they may have had limited opportunities to develop language and literacy skills in any language (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 51).

The Saskatchewan Ministry of Education (1994) has a curriculum guide for adapting English language arts for Aboriginal and Métis students. It states,

> A growing number of Indian and Métis students use English as their first language. However, the influence of their Aboriginal background may have an impact on their English language use, particularly on the syntax and grammar. These students are recognized as English as Second Dialect (ESD) learners. (Section 4)

Such education documents are lacking in the provision of explicit initial assessment tools and protocols for ongoing evaluation. These need to be developed to identify fairly where these students are in their development of standard English and for teachers to measure progress in an even approach with stages of development for standard English language and literacy.

Speech-language pathology university training programs have not historically addressed the topic of Aboriginal English dialects, and curriculum development and implementation in this area of study are cutting edge. Ball and Bernhardt (2008) report on forum participants' recommendation that speech-language associations and university training programs take an active role in developing research, coursework, and service-learning opportunities in speech-language pathology practice with First Nations people. The University of British Columbia School of

Audiology and Speech Sciences recently piloted a course about practice with Aboriginal people.

Peltier (2008) acknowledges the trend underway in professional association conferences and education-sector training venues to include

> Presentations regarding Aboriginal English dialect issues as these relate to literacy and communication...to create education and language programming that is more aligned with Aboriginal student needs and is a key factor in reducing the historic marginalization of First Nations people.

This creates "a sense of renewed confidence in the field of clinical practice to better address the needs of the First Nation community by providing culturally sensitive and relevant speech-language pathology services" (p. 569).

Fair assessment tools have not yet been developed for evaluating the literacy and speech language development of Aboriginal children, especially those who present with Aboriginal English dialects. Regional databases on the features of local dialects and language sampling are required as a starting point. Aboriginal English dialects in British Columbia are currently being explored by linguists and speech-language pathologists, and no published data are yet available. Ball (2005) highlighted the need for new screening measures that are sensitive to language development differences for Aboriginal children such as pronouns, prepositions, and speech dialect differences.

Also, ethnographic information about the cultural values and practices of each regional group of Aboriginal people is required so that test development and intervention goals are appropriate and relevant. Because language is socially and culturally situated, assessment methodology must be sensitive to context. It is important that new assessment protocols not be overgeneralized for use with all Aboriginal populations. Crago and Cole (1991) cautioned, "What appears to the outsider as one cultural group (e.g., Ojibway, Cree) with one set of practices may have numerous subgroups with very different belief systems, political and economic histories, and cultural patterns of communication" (p. 111).

Bernhardt, Ball, and Deby (2007) summarize trends in the field of speech-language pathology where new tools are emerging to evaluate language varieties fairly. The *Diagnostic Evaluation of Language Variation* (*DELV*, Seymour, Roeper, & DeVilliers, 2003) focuses on the elements of varieties of English that are in common with standard varieties. The tool is described as appropriate for differentiation of African-American English from general American English and may not be sensitive to differences as opposed to impairment of language in other cultural or linguistic backgrounds. However, such a tool is a positive step toward reducing assessment bias. Bernhardt et al. offer an informal language and speech analysis procedure for clinicians to adopt that uses phonetic transcription of a child's speech for target words and comparison with the phonetic and

syllabic inventory of the child's first language or language dialect (obtained by researching the language/dialect's properties and consultation with a Native speaker). They urge practitioners to make immediate changes in practice that reflect cross-cultural sensitivity. "Because cross-cultural interaction is just that, an interaction, the local SLP can form partnerships with community members ... in order to develop useful and sensitive assessment and treatment methodologies together" (p. 104).

Dynamic assessment is gaining popularity as a clinical tool appropriate for assessing Aboriginal children with First Nations English dialect issues in a nonbiased way. Gutierrez-Clellen and Quinn (1993) reviewed the assessment practices historically used by speech-language clinicians to examine children's discourse skills and recommended dynamic assessment as a nondiscriminatory alternative. They state,

> most of the analytical frameworks ... used to evaluate narratives suggest that the structure of stories is universal and that we may apply the same approach to assess any narrative produced by a speaker in any context ... [This practice is problematic because] individual differences in children's narrative performance may reflect differences in experience with listening and telling stories, general world knowledge, and assumptions about audience involvement in narrative interactions. Narrative tasks used in assessment do not uncover knowledge of story structure but, rather, familiarity with the discourse rules of the dominant cultural group. (p. 2)

The storyteller's perspective on the purpose and context of the storytelling also influences what is told.

> Much of what one considers relevant to be told, emphasized, or explained is dependent upon cultural assumptions about the reportability of narrative information and the assumed role of the audience in deriving unstated meanings. Thus, an analysis of narratives based on discrete informational units or story constituents may not be a useful indicator of narrative ability across cultural/linguistic groups, (p. 4)

Kramer, Mallet, Schneider, and Hayward (2009) investigated the use of the *Dynamic Assessment and Intervention* tool (*DAI*, Miller, Gillam, & Peña, 2001) for evaluating storytelling skills to ascertain the language-learning abilities of Cree students in Alberta. These speech-language clinicians found the tool useful for identifying students who were normal language-learners and those with language learning difficulties.

Ukrainetz, Harpell, Walsh, and Coyle (2000) investigated the use of dynamic assessment to distinguish difference from disorder in minority groups. Dynamic assessment is based on the work of Feuerstein (1980) and Vygotsky (1978), and Ukrainetz et al. describe this test-teach-retest application where a baseline score on a language skill is established, and then a brief period of direct teaching is provided that includes "mediated learning." The practitioner rates the child's learning behaviors such as degree of attention, planning, self-regulation, application, motivation, responsiveness to intervention, examiner intensity required to effect change, and indication of carry-over. After this phase of mediation, the examiner retests the student to measure the learning that has occurred.

Data-based examples of using dynamic assessment to differentiate language difference versus disorder are sparse; however, the results of this study involving Native American kindergarten children are described as promising. It is suggested that dynamic assessment information can be used "together with currently available norm-referenced and descriptive testing practices to arrive at more valid conclusions concerning language learning ability" for Native Americans (p. 151).

Westernoff (1994) suggests that speech-language pathologists are suited to the role of advocate as they encourage educators to consider research results rather than adhering to erroneous assumptions about bilingual learning. Provision of information as to why language differences do not constitute language disorders and promotion of additive bilingual contexts are important.

Ball and Bernhardt (2008) recommend a paradigm shift in research practices with First Nations so that the community's culture and goals are respected. Such

> a decolonizing perspective calls for mutual recognition of the different kinds of expertise brought by investigators and participants in research [which] calls for research to be identified as a priority for the well-being of the people participating in the research. (p. 582)

These authors highlight ethical practices for such partnerships as outlined by the Canadian Institutes for Health Research. They stress the importance of aligning research project outcomes with the community's own goals for supporting children's development rather than imposing the values of mainstream researchers in the process.

Summary

Aboriginal people use Aboriginal English dialects to communicate in their specific cultural communities. These nonstandard varieties of English have a central place in social discourse and are key to supporting the individual's identity and ties to a distinct Aboriginal community. Documentation of Aboriginal English dialects in Canada and the US is sparse considering that each dialect has regional variation and is evident in First Nations communities and rural and urban centers.

Historically, Aboriginal English dialect-speakers and Aboriginal language-users have been stigmatized in the education system, where standard English pronunciation, grammar, and discourse rules of the dominant society are upheld. Aboriginal children have been erroneously identified with language, speech, and learning exceptionalities because educators lack knowledge and training in language variation, students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and the challenges inherent in learning to use standard English.

More recently, a trend has emerged where educators are beginning to understand Aboriginal English dialects as legitimate, systematic, and rule-governed variations of English with distinct pronunciation, vocabulary,

grammar, discourse, and pragmatic use. Aboriginal language and culture are now considered inseparable, and benefits are attributed to knowing more than one language or dialect. Bi-dialectal curriculum is evolving to include cultural and linguistic diversity where code-switching is encouraged to support acquisition of standard English or academic language as a second dialect to complement and maintain the students' first language: Aboriginal English dialect and Indigenous language. Further research to document and understand Aboriginal English dialects is called for, and best practices in education are sought.

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