

- ▶ **Health, Education, Language, Dialect, and Culture in First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Communities in Canada: An Overview**
- ▶ **Santé, éducation, langue, dialecte et culture des Premières Nations, des Inuits et des Métis au Canada : un survol**

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**KEY WORDS**

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**Abstract**

First Nations, Inuit and Métis are the Indigenous people of Canada and the descendents of Canada's original inhabitants. Like all Canadians, First Nations, Inuit and Métis have need of speech-language pathology services. To date, however, access to such services has been limited, and when accessible, they are not always culturally or linguistically relevant. In order to positively support First Nations, Inuit and Métis people, speech-language pathologists must educate themselves about many historical and contemporary factors that need to be taken into account in the design and delivery of services. The intent of this article is to provide a broad overview of some relevant information in the areas of health, education, culture, social interaction, and language. The information is intended to stimulate further exploration by the reader about the distinctive features, needs and goals of First Nations, Inuit and Métis clients and families. It is important to note that there is no monolithic Aboriginal culture or language. Any practitioner working in a First Nations, Inuit or Métis community or with First Nations, Inuit and Métis individuals will need to inform themselves about the particular beliefs, experiences, culture(s), language(s) and socialization practice(s) relevant to that specific community or individual.

**Abrégé**

Les Premières Nations, les Inuits et les Métis constituent les peuples autochtones du Canada et les descendants des premiers habitants du pays. Il arrive que les membres des Premières Nations, les Inuits et les Métis aient besoin de services d'orthophonie, au même titre que tous les Canadiens. Or, jusqu'à maintenant, leur accès à de tels services est limité et les services offerts ne sont pas toujours adaptés à la culture ou à la langue. Afin d'aider les membres des Premières Nations, les Inuits et les Métis, les orthophonistes doivent connaître les facteurs historiques et contemporains à prendre en considération avant de concevoir et d'offrir des services. Le présent article vise à brosser un tableau de certains renseignements pertinents dans les domaines de la santé, de l'éducation, de la culture, de l'interaction sociale et de la langue. Cette information vise à inciter le lecteur à poursuivre sa recherche sur les caractéristiques, besoins et buts propres aux clients et familles inuits, métis et des Premières Nations. Il est important de noter qu'il n'y a pas qu'une seule culture ou langue autochtone. Tout orthophoniste travaillant dans une communauté inuite, métisse ou des Premières Nations ou avec un membre des Premières Nations, un Inuit ou un Métis devra s'informer des croyances, expériences, cultures, langues et pratiques de socialisation particulières à cette communauté ou personne.

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First Nations, Inuit and Métis people are descendants of Canada's original inhabitants. These three "Aboriginal"<sup>1</sup> groups are recognized in the Constitution Act of Canada (Minister of Justice, 1982). First Nations people include both "status" and "non-status" individuals. "Status" individuals are those who are registered under the Indian Act (Minister of Justice, 2009) and therefore have defined rights accorded by the federal government. First Nations people may live on (~40%) or off reserves, which are designated lands set aside for First Nations use through the Indian Act. These designated lands are only a fraction of the original territories that First Nations people occupied and much of that land is still under dispute (see Figure 1 for the location of reserves in Canada in 2006). As Charland (2007) states, "First Nations acquired legal status as they were recognized as distinct nations under the Crown and ceded territories

in exchange for reserved areas, traditional hunting and fishing rights, and a government commitment ("fiduciary obligation") to provide for their education and welfare" (p. 25). In 2005, approximately 56% of status First Nations people lived on reserve (Raham, 2007). There are currently about 633 First Nations communities or bands in Canada representing over 50 distinct language and cultural groups (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, INAC, 2009). Each band is a government-recognized administrative body. The political structure was imposed by the federal government and is not traditional. Some First Nations bands have treaties with the federal government, others do not.

Approximately 51% of First Nations people on-reserve report speaking an Indigenous language, in contrast to 12% off reserve. First Nations communities are located across Canada, with the largest populations



Figure 1: Location of First Nations reserves, 2006 Source: Statistics Canada, Location of Indian reserves by 2006 Census Subdivisions (CSDs), Thematic Maps, 92-173-XIE2006001, July 2008. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/bsolc/olc-cel/olc-cel?lang=eng&catno=92-173-X>

in Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Quebec (in descending size). First Nations are the largest Indigenous group in Canada, constituting approximately 67% of the Indigenous population (Statistics Canada, 2005).

Though somewhat contested, Métis identity is generally understood as a mix of First Nations and European descent. Canada's constitution (Department of Justice, 1982) recognizes the Métis as a separate and distinct Indigenous group with some rights (Charmand, 2007). The traditional languages of the Métis are Cree and Michif, the latter a language derived from the creolization of Cree and French. Currently, only about 4% of Métis report speaking an Indigenous language. The Métis live primarily in the prairie provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba (Métis National Council, 2009) and comprise approximately 29% of the Canadian Indigenous population (Statistics Canada, 2005).

The Inuit of the Canadian Arctic live primarily in 53 northern communities in the Inuit Nunangat or homeland. These are distributed across four major areas: Nunatsiavut in Labrador, Nunavik in Northern Quebec, Nunavut, and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region of the Northwest Territories. The traditional language of the Inuit is the Inuit language which continues to be spoken by an estimated 69% of the population. Inuktitut is an official language of Nunavut. The Inuit constitute approximately 5% of the Canadian Indigenous population (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, INAC, 2009). Approximately half of all First Nations, Inuit and Métis people in Canada live in urban centres.

### The Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC)

The Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada "is responsible for two mandates, *Indian and Inuit Affairs and Northern Development*, which together support Canada's Aboriginal and northern peoples in the pursuit of healthy and sustainable communities and broader economic and social development objectives" (p. 1, INAC, 2008). INAC is responsible for "fulfilling the lawful obligations of the federal government to Aboriginal peoples" in Canada (Raham, 2007, p. 19). Its activities are governed by more than 50 acts and regulations, the most significant being the Indian Act. The Indian Act (Minister of Justice, 2009) is a statute that regulates registered First Nations individuals, bands, band councils and reserves. No similar statute regulates the Métis or Inuit in Canada. Various sections of the Indian Act directly address health and education. For example, the Act stipulates that reserve monies are to be used to "prevent, mitigate and control the spread of diseases on reserve" (Section 66.3.b), to prevent over-crowding (Section 66.3.d), and to provide

sanitary conditions (Section 66.3.e). Section 75.3 gives the Governor in Council power to make regulations in these areas as well as to provide medical treatment and health services (75.3g), and to provide compulsory hospitalization and treatment for infectious diseases (75.3h). In addition, the Office of the Federal Interlocutor provides funding to support representative Métis, non-status "Indian" and off-reserve Indigenous organizations (INAC, 2009). Despite these provisions, Indigenous leaders in Canada consistently cite inadequate funding from the federal government as a primary problem when attempting to meet the health and educational needs of First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities. Indeed, Loppie Reading and Fein (2009) have characterized the impact of policies such as the Indian Act, which are manifestations of the colonization efforts of the Canadian government, as "patently deleterious to the lives and health of First Nations" (p. 2).

### Health of Indigenous Peoples in Canada

Census data for First Nations, Inuit and Métis people are considered unreliable because of incomplete enumeration in these communities. The most current estimate of the number of people in Canada who report having a First Nations, Inuit or Métis identity is 1,172,790, or 3.8% of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2006). Between first contact and the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the population of First Nations, Inuit and Métis is estimated to have been reduced by 90 to 95%. Today, the population is 10 to 20 times smaller than it was before European contact (Miller, 2002). Statistics Canada (2003) characterizes the First Nations, Inuit and Métis population as young, relative to other Canadians, and notes that it has been growing since the 1960s. The relative youth and growth of the First Nations, Inuit and Métis population is attributed in part to an improvement in health care and a consequent reduction in infant mortality rates and increase in overall life-span, as well as a high birth rate. However, according to a 2001 study, infant mortality rates were higher and life spans shorter for Indigenous people relative to the general population of Canada. Thus, in 2001, there were 16.9 deaths per 1000 live births in Nunavut (largely Indigenous), 7.2 deaths per 1000 live births for registered First Nations peoples, and 5.2 deaths per 1000 live births for non-Indigenous Canadians. Life expectancy rates were on average 6.6 years lower for Indigenous peoples than for the general Canadian population (Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, 2005).

The social determinants of health in Indigenous peoples are complex. Loppie Reading & Wein (2009) define distal (e.g., colonialism, racism, social exclusion, repression of self-determination), intermediate (community infrastructures, resources and

capacities), and proximal (health behaviors, physical and social environment) components that interact and impact health cumulatively over time. Richmond and Ross (2009) argue that environmental dispossession is an important factor that negatively impacts health, especially the social environment of First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities. Child poverty is epidemic, with rates for Indigenous children reported to be 40% in 2001 as compared to 18% of all Canadian children (Census, 2001). Chronic poverty has well-understood correlates (Anderson, 2007; Baumeister, Kupstas, & Klindworth, 1991; Loppie Reading & Wein, 2009; Roseberry-McKibbin, 2008a). These include:

- Increased stress in individuals and families;
- Hunger and malnutrition;
- Compromised basic safety;
- Reduced knowledge of and access to primary and preventive health care;
- Higher risk for exposure to communicable diseases (e.g., the H1N1 outbreak);
- Reduced access to educational opportunities;
- Compromised environmental conditions (lower access to clean water, poor housing, overcrowded conditions, higher risk of exposure to environmental toxins);
- Diminished social supports;
- Increased substance abuse.

Indicators of general well-being on First Nations reserves are lower, even when compared with non-Indigenous communities carefully matched for geographic location and population size, with well-being decreasing as distance from a large city centre increases (White & Maxim, 2007). Similar decrements in health and well-being are reported for the Inuit (Guèvremont & Cohen, 2001; Strategic Research and Analysis Directorate, 2006) and Métis populations (Statistics Canada, 2006) relative to the general Canadian population. Other indicators also speak to considerable health challenges in First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities in Canada. For example, the prevalence of adolescent mental health and substance abuse problems are reported to be at a “crisis level” on some reserves (Hoyt, Yu, & Walls, 2008).

The hearing status of First Nations, Inuit and Métis has been of concern for many years. In particular, research often has shown high prevalence rates of otitis media (OM) in children of First Nations, Inuit or Métis descent. In addition, these children often have more frequent and more prolonged episodes of OM and the period in which they experience frequent episodes is extended in

comparison to other Canadian children (Boyd, 2005). To the extent that hearing is impacted, chronic extended untreated episodes of OM with concomitant middle ear effusion have been associated with language and learning delays (Friel-Patti & Finitzo, 1990), although findings are variable (Paradise et al., 2000, 2001).

The health concerns of First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities receive frequent news coverage. For example, recent stories have variously highlighted long term problems with accessing clean, potable water on more than 90 reserves, inadequate housing on various reserves, reduced access to health care, inadequate preventive and direct medical care during the H1N1 crisis, and a resurgence of tuberculosis cases (CBC News, February, 2006; November, 2008; August, 2009). Indeed, the plight of First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities in Canada has attracted world attention. On September 13, 2007, the United Nations General Assembly adopted *The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (United Nations, 2008). The *Declaration* identifies basic rights and fundamental freedoms that should be extended to Indigenous populations of any country and delineates the responsibilities of states to take effective measures to ensure that these rights and freedoms are available and protected. Canada was one of only four nations (the others were US, Australia and New Zealand) that voted against adoption of the *Declaration*. Currently, Canada is the only member state in the United Nations that has not endorsed the *Declaration* (the US did so in December, 2010), potentially because of the monetary implications of endorsement. In February 2009, Canada’s human rights record was reviewed under the United Nations Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review process. One key area of identified concern was the welfare of First Nations, Inuit and Métis people. Canada was urged to act immediately, in concert with First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities, to improve their living conditions (Cosentino & Kirkey, 2009).

## EDUCATION IN FIRST NATIONS, INUIT, AND MÉTIS COMMUNITIES

First Nations, Inuit and Métis students are at high risk for illiteracy and academic failure. In 2002 – 2003, only 29% of First Nations students who were enrolled in Grade 12 graduated (Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, 2005). Fifty-nine percent of Inuit adults 20 years and older did not graduate from high school (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2005). Only 23% percent of registered First Nations people 15 years of age and older hold a post-secondary certificate, diploma, or degree as compared to 38% of Canadians as a whole (Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, 2005). The negative correlates of school

failure are well known and include unemployment or underemployment, a reduction in life time earnings, higher rates of incarceration and higher rates of substance abuse (Roseberry-McKibbin, 2008a).

### History of Education

Prior to contact with Europeans, First Nations and Inuit educated their children through incorporating and mentoring them in the activities of daily living. Post-contact, educational policy towards Indigenous peoples in Canada has had a strong and destructive assimilationist thrust. Mission day schools, first formed in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century by European missionaries, were a primary mechanism for the spread of Christianity. These schools were replaced largely by residential schools starting in 1879 and continuing until 1996 when the last school was closed. By 1930, almost 75% of First Nations school-aged children were in residential schools (Fournier & Crey, 1997). Residential schools were often repressive institutions that did little to educate but much to disrupt cultural patterns in Indigenous communities (Kirkness, 2000). Children were frequently forcibly removed from their homes and placed in these institutions, often without parental approval and against their wishes. In residential schools, use of Indigenous languages and cultural practices was “vigorously suppressed” (p. S17), mainstream hair cuts and dress were imposed, care provided was often substandard, and abuse and neglect were systemic (Gerlach, 2007; Kirmayer, Simpson, & Cargo, 2003). The legacy of these practices includes language loss, loss of cultural identity, disruption and disintegration of child socialization practices, and loss of confidence, knowledge and trust (Ball, 2008). Approximately twenty percent of adults living on First Nation reserves in 2002 - 2003 attended a residential school (Loppie Reading & Wein, 2009). In the 1950s, residential schools began to be replaced by day schools, often public and located off Indigenous lands. More recent educational policy has seen a shift towards self-determination and self-management in education, resulting in an increasing number of schools on Indigenous land and controlled by Indigenous communities.

### Preschool Education

Ball (in press) describes progress that has been made in early childhood education initiatives for First Nations, Inuit and Métis in recent years. Over the past 15 years, federal investments have supported a groundswell of Indigenous early childhood education capacity, including many promising culturally based program innovations. Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) funds a First Nations and Inuit Child Care Initiative (FNICCI) which, in 2010, supported 462 sites

in First Nation and Inuit communities, providing child care to 8,538 children of parents who are working or training for the labour market. Federal spending on FNICCI has increased from 41 million in 2000 to 57.1 million in 2010. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) funds child care across Canada. As an example, this includes approximately 812 child care spaces in 18 First Nations in Alberta and approximately 2,850 child care spaces in 52 First Nations in Ontario. From 1995, the Public Health Agency of Canada has funded the delivery of Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHS-UNC) for First Nation, Inuit, and Métis children living in urban and northern communities, including approximately 140 preschool programs in 2010. Since 1999, the federal government has funded Health Canada's Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve program (AHSOR) for First Nation children living on reserves and Inuit children, delivered in 383 communities in 2010. Even with this progress, currently only 28% of First Nations children are served by Head Start programs and very few Head Start programs are available in Inuit communities.

Although different from Aboriginal Head Start, Head Start outcomes in the US have been studied extensively and positive results have been demonstrated in both the short (Zill et al., 2003) and long terms (Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Despite this, US Head Start children's academic performance continues to lag behind that of non Head Start children (Zill et al., 2003). Extensive study of preschool programs has demonstrated that the most efficacious programs are intensive, integrated, of high quality and continuous with high quality school programs (Brooks-Gunn, 2003). While research is lacking on Aboriginal Head Start programs, authors have called for the use of holistic, culturally appropriate, collaborative, community development models (Ball, 2008) and for family-focused, strengths-based approaches that are integrated with other available community resources (Gerlach, 2007).

### Primary and Secondary Education

Off reserve, First Nations children attend provincial or independent schools. On reserve, the Indian Act provides three options for the education of First Nations children: a) agreements with provincial or territorial governments; b) agreements with individual school boards or religious organizations (Section 114.1); or c) the establishment, operation and maintenance of First Nations managed schools (Section 114.2; Minister of Justice, 2009). In 2003 - 2004, 120,400 students, or approximately 60% of INAC funded First Nations students were enrolled in schools on reserve. Of these, the majority (85%) were elementary school students while only 45% of grade 12 students went to school on reserve as most schools on reserve do not have secondary classes. In 2007, Raham reported that 507

schools were on-reserve in Canada, 500 of which were under First Nations control. Funding for schooling of reserve children provided by INAC may not be keeping pace with provincial funding. Fulford et al. (2007), for example, reported that the schools funded by INAC in their study were funded on average 3% less per student than nearby provincial/territorial schools and that the 10 schools they studied were collectively funded 17% below the national average of \$8,000 per pupil.

While the language of instruction in provincial schools across Canada is either English or French, efforts to provide courses in Indigenous languages and cultures within the curricula are increasingly evident. One important initiative, for example, involved a coalition between Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, the Northwest Territories, and the Yukon which resulted in the development of *The Common Curriculum Framework for Aboriginal Language and Culture Programs: Kindergarten to Grade 12*, released in October 2000. Provinces and territories have adapted the framework for their individual contexts. Manitoba, for example, used the framework and other documents to develop, in collaboration with Indigenous communities, the *Curriculum Framework of Outcomes* (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2007), which is intended to “standardize learning experiences regarding the teaching of Indigenous languages and cultures in Manitoba” (p. 4).

On-reserve schools also provide training in First Nations languages and cultures to varying degrees. In several provinces, Indigenous communities have jurisdiction over the education of their people. For example, in British Columbia, since 2006, First Nations communities can opt into an agreement with the provincial and federal governments which results in, among other things, “Jurisdiction over education, including the provision of education to all members and non-members who choose to receive it, education law making powers, Community Education Authorities to manage education systems, and First Nation Education Authorities to establish standards in curriculum/exams and teacher/school certification processes.” (First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2009, p.4). The infusion of Indigenous language and culture into curricula has typically followed such initiatives, through a variety of models including teaching in the Indigenous language or teaching the Indigenous language as a second language with class credit provided (Taylor, Crago, & McAlpine, 2001).

In many Inuit communities, the Inuit language is the language of instruction in elementary grades. In Quebec for example, instruction is completed in Inuktitut until 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, when English or French languages replace it. While instruction in Inuktitut continues after 3<sup>rd</sup> grade,

the time spent in Inuktitut instruction is considerably reduced and core academic classes are no longer taught in this language (Kativik, 2009; Wright, Taylor, & Macarthur, 2000). Several studies have provided evidence that early instruction of this type can provide an important buffer to language loss (Wright et al., 2000), especially if continued until children are able to read to learn, around grade 5 (Cummins, 1986; Thomas & Collier, 2002).

## Indigenous Cultures

First Nations, Inuit and Métis people often experience a culture that is distinct in many ways from that of the dominant culture. In a recent chapter, Goodnow (2010) highlighted the difficulty of defining “culture” by describing four conceptual approaches that have been used to study it.

“[T]hree focus on ways of describing content. The first emphasizes the nature of ideologies, values and norms—ways of viewing the world that are often summarized by the term “cultural models.” The second emphasizes what people do—the practices, activities, or routines that mark a social group. The third emphasizes what is available to people in the form of paths, routes, or opportunities. The fourth cuts across these descriptions. Regardless of whether the focus is on values, practices, or paths, this kind of account emphasizes the extent to which a context is marked by homogeneity or heterogeneity—by uniformity or by competition and “contest” among diverse ways of thinking and acting.” (p. 4).

Goodnow focuses attention upon the necessity to understand both the generalizations that can be made about a particular cultural group and the variability that exists within that group and across cultural communities. There is no monolithic Indigenous culture in Canada. Instead, there are multiple cultures with distinct histories, values, beliefs, practices, activities and paths to different goals. As well, within each First Nation, Inuit or Métis community, cultural diversity exists, and not all members live and think the same way. There are differences in individual adherence to traditional Indigenous beliefs and practices, for example, and differing degrees of acculturation into mainstream Canadian culture (Roseberry-McKibbin, 2008). Culture is not a static phenomenon. Rather, it evolves over time as it is impacted by external and internal beliefs, pressures, needs and goals. There are components of any cultural community that are distinctive and other components that are shared with other communities. The commonality of some past and present experiences (i.e., a “history of European colonization and an ongoing struggle aimed at countering its long-term consequences” Pesco & Crago, 2008, p. 274) and current

beliefs and goals across Indigenous communities, have resulted in pan-Indigenous movements and political alliances. These have also impacted cultural beliefs, activities and paths over time, and had a homogenizing effect on Indigenous cultures.

### Socialization Practices

One critical component of culture is the practices communities use to socialize their children. Key to these practices is language use in social interactions between adults and children. Gauvain and Parke (2010) state: “Cultures differ in what knowledge they consider important to pass on to children, how this knowledge is conveyed, and when children should acquire it” (p. 241). Nonetheless, while certain types of learning processes are more prevalent in some cultures than others, Gauvain and Parke (2010) argue that all cultures use a variety of learning processes to socialize their children. The application of each process, they suggest, varies with the type of learning that is required. For example, didactic processes, they suggest, tend to be used across cultures to teach rules and codes of conduct, implicit and gradual learning processes to teach routines, and scaffolding to teach activities that need to be carried out error-free. Johnston and Wong (2002) also highlight similarities as well as differences in child socialization practices, in their analysis of survey responses of Chinese (Chinese-speaking with a Chinese surname) and Western (English-speaking, Canadian or European born) mothers.

In many First Nations, Inuit, or Métis communities, extended families are important in child rearing. Multiple generations may live in the same household and care of children is often shared (Roseberry-McKibbin, 2008b). As a consequence, primary caregivers of Indigenous children are less likely to be restricted to parents. As well, daycares and preschools may be less frequently accessed. A number of researchers have suggested that socialization practices of Indigenous adults to children differ from that of the mainstream culture (Pesco & Crago, 2008). For example, Crago, Annahatuk, and Ningiuruvik (1993) observed that four Inuit adults used the following strategies when interacting with their 12- to 24-month-old children:

- A change in voice quality and word complexity;
- Frequent repetition routines to teach greetings, and in the case of the younger mothers, to teach English;
- Frequent imperatives;
- Few questions.

These mothers also expected their children not to question adults.

Instructional discourse patterns used by Inuit educators in elementary schools have been found to differ from mainstream patterns. While both Inuit and non-Inuit educators spent much of their time eliciting verbal productions from their students, the Inuit educators were less likely to evaluate the responses students made. Instead they used strategies such as repeating, recasting, modeling, requesting clarification or acknowledging (Eriks-Brophy & Crago, 1994; 2003). Eriks-Brophy and Crago also reported that Inuit educators requested group rather than individual responses more often, explaining that children needed to learn from each other. The authors noted that mismatches between Inuit student and non-Inuit teacher discourse patterns resulted in “serious communicative difficulties for students in the classroom” (Eriks-Brophy & Crago, 2003, p. 413), although they also suggested these difficulties resolved over time with increasing student familiarity with the classroom routines of non-Inuit teachers. The impact of instructional discourse mismatches between students and teachers is discussed in more detail by Crago, Eriks-Brophy, Pesco and McAlpine (1997).

As stated previously, cultures are dynamic and change with time. Crago et al. (1993) have documented shifts in the way that young children are socialized in two Inuit communities in Northern Quebec. Specifically, they reported that some traditional socialization practices were being used less often if at all by younger as opposed to older mothers, such as employing Aqausiit (rhythmic chants using nonsense words) in interactions with children and excluding children from participation in adult-adult conversations until they were “mature enough” (p. 215).

Cultures have different beliefs, attitudes or “ethnotheories” that impact socialization practices such as beliefs about child development patterns, when and how to care for children, desirable and undesirable child behaviors, and familial roles and responsibilities in child rearing (Bornstein & Lansford, 2010). Studies of Indigenous parenting beliefs in Canada are sparse. One such study, Jonk (2009), reported that Dene mothers of 2 to 6-year-olds living in a Winnipeg community more often strongly agreed that their child’s spirituality was important, that children learned best through instruction, and that grandparents gave good advice in comparison to low-income mothers of Western origin. The Dene mothers were also less likely to agree that baby talk hurt their children and reported that they almost always followed their child’s topic of conversation, changed words to facilitate their child’s understanding, and asked their child to repeat when they did not understand.



**Figure 2:** Aboriginal language families in Canada from the 16th to 18th centuries. Reprinted with permission from: The Canadian Encyclopedia (including the Encyclopedia of Music in Canada) Retrieved from <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=Copyright&Params=A1>

## INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE USE

### Indigenous Languages in Canada

Estimates are that 6,000 or more languages are spoken in the world today (Crystal, 2002; Garry & Rubino, 2001). At the time of first contact with Europeans, it was estimated that approximately 450 Indigenous languages were spoken in North America. By 1992, Krauss estimated that only 187 remained. In Canada, between 50 and 60 Indigenous languages are currently spoken (McIvor, 2009; Norris, 1998).

By definition, different languages are not mutually intelligible. Each has its unique lexicon, morphology, syntax and pragmatics. Some languages, however, are more similar than others. This is in part because some languages share a common language origin and have developed from the same parent language. Language relationships can be thought of as branches on a tree. The closer two languages are represented on the tree, the more related they are structurally and the closer in time their historical connections. The tree itself represents a language family. For example, English is on the Germanic branch of the Indo-European family tree. German, Dutch and Gaelic are also on the Germanic branch. Therefore, English is considered historically closer to these languages than to, for example, French or Spanish which are on the Romance branch of the Indo-European family tree (Crystal, 1987).

Eleven Indigenous language families exist in Canada today: Algonquian, Athapaskan, the Inuit language (Eskimo-Aleut), Iroquoian, Salishan, Siouan, Tsimshian, Wakashan, Haidan, Kutenaiian, and Tlingit (Foster, 2007; Leavitt, 1997; Norris, 1998). The latter three families are considered “isolates”, meaning they are comprised of a single language (Norris, 1998). Figure 2 maps the

geographic boundaries of Indigenous language family use in Canada in the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. In a detailed study of language use conducted in 1993 by Statistics Canada, 36% of 388,900 Indigenous participants regularly spoke an Indigenous language and a further 17% did not speak, but understood, one. Table 1 presents the relative frequency of use of each language family in Canada in 1996 (Norris, 1998), with comparison data from 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2006). In 1996, the Algonquian language family was spoken most frequently in Canada, with Cree the language most frequently used. A similar distribution of use across major language families was observed in 2006 as in 1996: 69% of those who reported an Indigenous language as their mother tongue spoke an Algonquian language in 2006 (70% in 1996), 15% (compared to 13% in 1996) an Inuit language, and 9% (compared to 10% in 1996) an Athapaskan language. However, a general decline in the percentage of First Nations, Inuit and Métis who reported an Indigenous language as their home language occurred between 1996 and 2006. Thus, only 18% of First Nation, Inuit and Métis respondents to the Canadian census in 2006 identified an Indigenous language as their mother tongue (compared to 26% in 1996; Norris, 1998), while 73% reported English and 8% reported French as their mother tongue in 2006. Status First Nations people are the majority of the speakers of an Indigenous language (Norris, 1998) in Canada.

It is clear that there is a diversity of language experiences and knowledge among Indigenous people in Canada. An individual may be monolingual, bilingual or multilingual. If a single language is spoken, the language may be an Indigenous language or not. If two languages are spoken, both languages may be experienced from birth (simultaneous bilingualism or bilingual first), or input may have been received in one language in the home prior to exposure to a second language, typically in daycare or school (sequential bilingualism or second language learning). The home language of sequential bilinguals could be an Indigenous language or another language, usually English or French. Many Inuit children, who are first exposed to English in third grade, are sequential bilinguals (English Language Learners), although the frequency of early exposure to English is increasing. With language revitalization efforts, many children are acquiring an Indigenous language as their second language. Even when an individual speaks only one language, they may speak a distinctive dialect of that language.

## DIALECTS

Dialects are mutually intelligible variants of a single language. The distinction between languages and dialects is one of degree and it is not always clear where the line

**Table 1**

Number and percentage of persons who reported speaking an Indigenous language as their mother tongue in the 1996 and 2006 census, by family and languages within family.

Language families Languages	1996 Number of Speakers	1996%	2006%
<b>Total speakers</b>	208,610	26%	18%
Algonquian	146,635	70%	69%
Cree	87,555		
Ojibway	25,885		
Montagnais-Naskapi	9,070		
Mi'kmaq	7,310		
Oji-Cree	5,400		
Attikamek	3,995		
Blackfoot	4,145		
Algonquin	2,275		
Malecite	655		
Algonquian	350		
Athapaskan (Na-Dene)	20,090	10%	9%
Den	9,000		
South Slave	2,620		
Dogrib	2,085		
Carrier	2,190		
Chipewyan	1,455		
Athapaskan	1,310		
Chilcotin	705		
Kutchin-Gwich'in	430		
North Slave	290		
The Inuit language	27,780	13%	15%
Iroquoian	590		
Mohawk	350		
Iroquoian	235		
Salishan	3,200		
Salish	1,850		
Shuswap	745		
Thompson	595		
Siouan	4,295		
Tsimshian	2,460		
Gitksan	1,200		
Nishga	795		
Tsimshian	465		
Wakashan	1,650		
Wakashan	1,070		
Nootka	590		
Haidan	240		
Kutenaiian	120		
Tlingit	145		
Other Aboriginal Languages	1,405		

Notes: 1996 data is from Norris (1998); 2006 data is from Statistics Canada, 2006; \* = % of self-identified First Nations, Inuit and Métis who speak an Indigenous language as their home language.

should be drawn. For example, Mandarin and Cantonese, while often referred to as dialects, are distinctive enough to be considered two different languages by many scholars. In Canada, perhaps the best recognized vernacular English dialect patterns are those found in Newfoundland, where distinct varieties of English have been documented between small outposts in close proximity but historically linked only by boat. Dialects can vary in their pronunciation of words and in the words and phrases that are used. Vowels are typically more variable than consonants; morphology and syntax can also vary across dialects (Small, 2005; Wolfram, 1986; e.g., “I gets to go”), and pragmatic rules vary, resulting in language use patterns that can be quite dissimilar.

Pragmatic aspects of language use that can vary across dialects include pitch and intensity shifts, the frequency and length of speech overlaps, the frequency of interruptions, persistence in seeking a turn, talking speed, and the pause times between turns (Tannen, 1985). Scollon and Scollon (1989) discussed poignantly how pragmatic dialect differences can lead to misinterpretations of speaker intent and subsequently, negative views of a conversational partner. They analyzed interactions between dyads where one speaker was of Athapaskan, the other of European descent. To illustrate with a simple example, the Athapaskan speakers required longer pause times than the persons of European descent to pragmatically signal a turn transition point in conversation. In conversation this mismatch in pragmatic rules resulted in Athabaskan speakers taking fewer turns and being interrupted more frequently with the consequence that Athabaskan speakers felt they were not provided enough opportunities to talk. The speakers of European descent, on the other hand, felt that when they offered a turn to talk (through pause cues) the offer was not accepted and consequently they were being required to carry too much of the conversational load. Both conversational partners, perceived the other as acting rudely and in an uncooperative manner. This example illustrates the degree to which we are unaware of the pragmatic rules we use and how they may differ across cultures. When we do not take such differences into account in our interactions, miscommunications occur.

### Dynamic nature of language

Both language internal forces (i.e., tendencies towards regularization, generalization and redundancy reduction) and language external forces (social) lead to language change as well as dialect differentiation (Wolfram, 1986). The social history of a speech community has strong explanatory power. Some dialects are more socially favored than others (Wolfram, 2007). Power elites institutionalize their own dialect, and the dialect, in turn, becomes socially favored and “standard”. These

are the dialects heard most frequently in the media and typically taught in the schools. Power differentials between Indigenous and English communities and pressure towards integration or segregation shapes attitudes and beliefs about Indigenous English dialects and Indigenous languages, in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities (Wolfram, 1986; 2004; Wolfram & Shilling-Estes, 2006). Speakers of both mainstream and non-mainstream dialects have been socialized to view speakers of vernacular (non-mainstream) forms as having “bad speech” or linguistically inferior ways of talking (Wolfram, 2004). Despite social pressures of this type, language variation is both natural and legitimate—and no dialect should be considered inherently better or more correct than another (Wolfram, 2004).

### Dialects of Indigenous languages

Many Indigenous languages have dialectal variants. Cree, for example, has at least six dialects that are spoken in Canada, each separated by geographic region and speaker group (Foster, 2009). In Manitoba, the predominant Cree dialects are Swampy Cree and Woods Cree (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2007). The other Cree dialects are Plains, Moose-Eastern Swampy, Western Swampy, and Attikarnek. Ojibway (Chippewyan) has at least seven dialects, spoken primarily in central Canada while the Inuit language has at least six, all spoken in the far north (Aivilik, South Baffin, Tarramiut, North Baffin-Iglulik, Itivimmiut, and Labrador). Other examples of Indigenous languages with dialect variants are: Blackfoot (2), Gwich'in (2), Slavey (3), Cayuga (2), Bella Coola (3), and Mohawk (Foster, 2009). Only a single dialect of some Indigenous languages is spoken in Canada (e.g., Delaware and Siouan), although these same languages have additional varieties spoken in the US. Some Canadian Indigenous languages, typically those spoken by a small number of people in a geographically limited area, have only a single recognized variety.

### Indigenous dialects of English and French

Indigenous English and Indigenous French dialects are also spoken in Canada, either as a first or a second language. Ball and Bernhardt (2008) trace the history of Indigenous English dialects to pidgins which emerged in the early period of contact with English speakers to support communication between language communities. A common pidgin (derived probably from English and Cree) is thought to have been used quite broadly across Canada as the language of trade. Over time, the pidgin creolized and then standardized to become much more similar to current mainstream forms of Canadian English. This history may account, in part, for a considerable similarity in

Indigenous English usage currently observed across Canada. Another factor that may have contributed to this homogenization of Indigenous English dialects was the policy of residential schooling that was widespread in the 1800 to 1900's. Typically, instruction in residential schools was in English and use of Indigenous language(s) was forbidden and punished. As well, children from a variety of language backgrounds were brought together in the same school. Thus, the language of communication was necessarily English. These factors, combined with the young ages at which children were compelled to enter the residential school system, resulted in a convergence of the types of English spoken. Other convergent forces such as the expansion of communication and transportation networks (Wolfram & Shilling-Estes, 2006) and the standardization of educational practices are likely to be contributing to further reductions in dialect variation in recent years. Despite these influences, several factors have a divergent effect on Indigenous English (or French) dialects. Most notably, typological differences in Indigenous languages that are in contact with English or French will result in phonological, morpho-syntactic and lexical variations in the English and French dialect, and language-specific usage will result in pragmatic variation in the English and French dialect as well.

There are currently very few published descriptions of Indigenous English dialects in Canada although there have been some analyses of Native American language influenced dialects of English from the United States (Ball & Bernhardt, 2008; Peltier, 2009; Sterzuk, 2008). Ball and Bernhardt (2008) provided a useful demonstration of how the phonological features of an Indigenous language could be used to predict spoken English patterns. For example, Plains Cree has fewer consonants than English, with no voiced-voiceless cognates and no liquids /r/ and /l/ and fewer fricatives (e.g., /f, v, θ, δ, and ʃ/ are absent). Therefore, Ball and Bernhardt predicted that: (a) Plains Cree-influenced English would have a smaller phonetic inventory; (b) English fricatives that did not exist in Plains Cree would be substituted by stops; and (c) voicing would vary with phonetic context. These English production differences would be evident in speakers of English whose first language is Plains Cree, but could also come to define the English dialect spoken in Plains Cree communities. Rosen (2008) referred to these points of language difference as "conflict sites", and also suggested they were probable sources of dialectal variation. Ball & Bernhardt (2008) used information that emerged from two fora held in British Columbia to begin to explore "First Nations dialects and their implications for speech-language pathology" (p. 575) to illustrate a number of conflict sites and their potential English dialectal consequences, at

phonological, morpho-syntactic and pragmatic levels.

## LANGUAGE LOSS, LANGUAGE DEATH

While new languages are still being identified around the world (Garry & Rubino, 2001), the actual number of spoken languages is declining. Indeed, language death is occurring at an alarming rate, especially in Indigenous communities (Crystal, 2002), including those in Canada (Ball & Bernhardt, 2008; McIvor, 2009; Norris, 1998, 2007). Health of a language is difficult to quantify, but is impacted by a variety of interacting factors such as the size of the geographic area where a language is spoken, the number of speakers of that language, the average age of the speakers, where the language was learned (e.g., home, school), from whom the language was learned (e.g., parent, grandparent, teacher), and the language proficiency of the speaker. In general, languages that are spoken in "isolated or well-organized communities" (Norris, 1998, p. 16), by a larger number of speakers, by more proficient speakers, by a younger cohort of speakers, and by speakers who have learned the language in the home from older family members tend to be healthier languages (Crystal, 2002; Norris, 1998).

When comparing Indigenous language use in Canada from 1981 to 1996, Norris (1998) found that language vitality (the ratio of the number of people who speak a language at home to the number of people who learned the language at home) declined over the period of study while the average age of speakers who reported an Indigenous language to be their mother tongue increased. Moreover, the average age of speakers who had an Indigenous language as their mother tongue was high. Only about 18% of children between 0 – 4 years of age were reported to have an Indigenous language as their mother tongue, while approximately 50% of adults between the ages of 80 and 84 years did. Norris documented a shift in the languages used at home by the same speakers over time. Individuals who were children in 1981 tended to speak Indigenous languages less as adolescents in 1996, and women who were young adults (20 to 24 years of age) in 1981 had reduced the frequency of their use of Indigenous languages in their homes by 1996 (35 to 39 years of age). Norris (1998) concluded that Indigenous languages in Canada are some of the most endangered in the world, with the health of many Indigenous languages declining rapidly. She argued that only three of the fifty Indigenous languages she studied exhibited healthy profiles of use. These were Inuktitut, Cree, and Ojibway, and even these relatively flourishing languages showed declines in language vitality over time (Norris, 1998).

## LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION

In response to the decline in use of Indigenous languages, considerable efforts are currently focusing on language maintenance and revitalization within Indigenous communities (Ball & Bernhardt, 2008; Kirmayer, Simpson, & Cargo, 2003; McIvor, 2007; Norris, 2007). McIvor (2007) reviewed preservation and revitalization work in North America, Australia and New Zealand and identified four major strategies that are being implemented in this regard:

1. **Documentation and preservation of languages, dialects, and cultures.** These efforts include researching, describing, collecting, and cataloging Indigenous languages. One notable example is First Voices (<http://www.firstvoices.com>). This on-line project archives Indigenous languages across Canada. Information about the speakers of a language and their culture is provided along with written and spoken words, phrases, stories and songs in each language.
2. **Language Engineering.** Includes the development or expansion of written systems for existing languages as well as the modernization of Indigenous languages (e.g., creation of modern words in an Indigenous language).
3. **Educational programs.** These include culture and/or language classes at all educational levels (early childhood, elementary, secondary and post-secondary). Models include immersion, bilingual and core language programs, with current evidence suggesting that immersion models are the most effective for language revitalization. As mentioned in the education section, curricula and materials to meet these educational goals are being developed. Teacher training programs are also being created to enhance the quality of Indigenous language teaching.
4. **Policy.** Efforts to develop legislation at the provincial and national levels to preserve, revitalize and promote Indigenous languages are on-going across Canada. Notably, Indigenous languages are now official languages in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

Language is a central and integral component of culture. For both individuals and communities, cultural experiences are mediated by, framed within, and to a certain extent formed by the languages we speak. Clearly, language loss negatively impacts cultural integrity and efforts to stem the tide are critical to the well-being of Indigenous communities.

## Speech-language pathology services to First Nations, Inuit and Métis

In general, First Nations, Inuit and Métis people typically have less contact with health professionals than the larger Canadian community. Access to any professional is lower on than off reserve and diminishes with increasing distance from a large city centre (Statistics Canada, 2007). By extension, access to speech-language pathology services is impacted by these same factors. In 2006, the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) estimated that there were 6,661 speech-language pathologists (S-LPs) in Canada. To date, however, there is little information available regarding the extent to which speech-language pathology services are available to Indigenous peoples, especially for adults with communication disorders. A recent survey of speech-language pathologists and audiologists conducted by CASLPA (CASLPA, 2011) identified over 500 respondents who had provided some service to First Nations, Inuit or Metis individuals between the ages of 0 to 6 years over the past five years. However, the survey did not capture the extent to which Indigenous individuals were receiving services. Only a very small percentage of these S-LPs served First Nations, Inuit and Métis people on Indigenous lands or within Aboriginal Head Start settings (which would be ideal locations for collaborating with local professionals and families). Not surprisingly, given the challenges of providing services in remote settings, the more remote the setting, the less access First Nations, Inuit and Métis appeared to have to S-LP and audiology services (CASLPA, 2010) and the services that were provided were often itinerate in nature. In an informal survey of S-LPs in professional organizations across the country conducted by this author (Kay-Raining Bird, unpublished), many S-LPs stated that they were mandated to serve Indigenous people, but often reported that they have no First Nations, Inuit or Métis clients on their case loads. Issues of jurisdiction (who pays), fundability (are S-LP services designated services?), accessibility (distance, no phone), exclusionary policies (e.g., “three strikes and you are out”, a policy in which clients are dropped from caseload after they have missed three sessions) all complicate access to S-LPs by Indigenous peoples, especially on reserve or in Northern communities. In a survey of 70 S-LPs who had a minimum of 2 years experience working with Indigenous clients, Ball (this issue) identified a need for more S-LPs across Canada as well as a fundamental change to the way current service delivery is conceptualized.

The cultural and linguistic diversity of First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities presents additional challenges to S-LP service delivery. Guidance regarding provision of appropriate services to culturally and

linguistically diverse populations can be found in the 1997 CASLPA position paper entitled “Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology in the Multicultural, Multilingual Context” (Westernoff & Crago, 1997). The position paper states that speech or language disorders are optimally diagnosed through careful assessment of an individual’s first (home or dominant) language, as well as their second language. The implication is that all languages must be considered in the assessment of a multilingual individual. Optimally, treatment would be provided in the first language, with bilingual interventions also supported. As well, diagnosis and intervention must take into account the particular dialect of each language that is spoken to avoid pathologizing non-standard usages. Further, the cultural beliefs and practices of individuals and specific communities must be understood and used to construct appropriate assessments and interventions (Johnston & Wong, 2002; van Kleeck, 1994). Practices that violate cultural beliefs will not yield valid results, will not result in “buy-in” or “up-take”, and will not accurately distinguish speech and language disorders from speech and language differences. Zeidler (this issue) stresses the importance of collaboration in order for speech-language pathologists to develop sensitivity and the deep understanding necessary to act appropriately and effectively with individuals and within a community. Perhaps above all, flexibility is needed, as optimal practices in Indigenous communities and for Indigenous people in Canada are still not well researched or understood and are largely still to be developed.

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## ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup>In this article the term “Indigenous” is used to refer collectively to individuals across Canada who are descendents of the country’s original inhabitants. The term “Aboriginal” is considered objectionable by some, because of its colonial roots, and is therefore not used.

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