

2012 DLI Researcher Convocation Panel Presentation

Mary Hermes and Mel Engman
Indigenous Language Immersion

THEME ONE: Program design and articulation & Student population/demographics

- What is known about program design and implementation for indigenous immersion schools?
- Design for revitalization, language proficiency, outside of school language use?
- What are special considerations (or different from dominant languages) for endangered and indigenous immersion program design?

Current Knowledge Base

Indigenous immersion programs are situated within the larger goal of language revitalization in communities and indigenous nations (Hermes, 2012; McCarty, 2003; Smith, 1999; Timutimu, 2009; Wilson & Kamanā, 2001), thus they are inherently political. Revitalization is deeply identity-driven. Some suggest post-colonial political dynamics, internalized oppression, and identity politics present the biggest ideological and emotional challenges to successful immersion programs (Bishop, 2002; Hermes, 2007; Johnson, 2002; May, in press; Warner, 1998; Wilson & Kamanā, 2011). The goal of revitalization is intergenerational transmission (Fishman, 1996; Hinton, 2011) – thereby deeply influencing program design (Wilson, 2002). The broader goal can also be thought of as community building (Fishman, 1996).

Program models

There is no evidence to suggest one immersion model is superior (Aguilera & LeCompte, 2007). Rough Rock (Navajo) started as a bilingual program (McCarty, 2008) and now consists of three immersion schools (May, 2012). Master-apprentice programs are in practice for smaller language communities, or informal learning environments (Hinton, 2011; McCarty, 2008). Information below refers to recent (past 10 years) start-ups, based on Hawaiian/Māori pre-school and school models. This includes Minnesota, Wisconsin local immersions (Hickey, 2011).

Many indigenous immersion programs have been modeled on the Hawaiian and Māori examples

Some common characteristics include: (1) programs that start as early, total immersion; (2) full one-way immersion with a tendency to add grades “up;” (3) programs started by families (not necessarily educators); (4) later introduction of English (3-5 grades) with wide variation – and these may be policy and test dependent, for example NCLB and standardized mandatory testing in English.

Certified and proficient teachers, funding, and materials tend to be central implementation problems.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS: Many indigenous immersion programs are not published or known. Literature is fairly limited in scope, only “researchers” are motivated to report in academic print. There is a dearth of empirical research. What kinds of research may be useful to move forward?

Little is known outside of Hawaiian and Māori context about revitalization as connected to immersion, that is, how does immersion as a strategy for revitalization work?

The US Census reported that Hawaiian use in the home grew from 14,315 in 1990 to 27,160 in 2000, a 90% growth, and peers are using Hawaiian among themselves as a social language (Wilson & Kamanā, 2011). Little is known about the cost of immersion and whether it can serve the entire population or only a small percent.

Similar for inside of school experience, should some of the Cherokee, Hawaiian, Māori research studies be replicated on language acquisition and academic achievement?

Can immersion-like experiences be applied in informal non-school settings that serve adults and other language learners?

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THEME TWO: Intercultural Competence and Bi/Multilingual and Cultural Identity

- What do language immersion schools do to strengthen modern indigenous identities?

Revitalization of cultural knowledge and identity are central goals to immersion schools.

Revitalization and restoration are goals in response to colonialism, genocide, boarding schools, monolingualism, racism (Johnston, 2002; May, 1999; Wilson & Kamanā, 2011).

Language influences Identity

Language exerts a strong effect on identity formation, regardless of the ethnic or racial identity. (Timutimu, Ormsby-Teki, & Ellis, 2009; Wilson & Kamanā, 2011).

Students report feelings of pride in their Native identities (Harrison, 2005), although some may find the burden of cultural and linguistic responsibility to be a lot to bear (Hinton, 2011; Luning & Yamauchi, 2010).

Tensions: Indigenous and Western Culture: (1) Weighing the goals of each program -- “academic achievement” (western standards) and language revitalization and community-building (Slaughter, 1997; Reyhner, 2010; Wilson & Kamanā, 2001); (2) Teacher certification (state-based) (Durie, 1998; Johnston, 2010); (3) Assessments need to be representative of specific languages and cultures (Peter, 2007; Peter & Hirata-Edds, 2009; Peter et al., 2003; Peter et al., 2008; Rau, 2005); (4) More has been written on student academic achievement than on student language acquisition, (*i.e., accounting for the impression that standards for success as most frequently described in the literature is the western idea of academic achievement*).

Broader effects of culture on community: (1) Ripple effect of student learning inspiring community enthusiasm (Luning & Yamauchi, 2010; McCarty, 2003); (2) Interconnected groups of parents supporting one another (Wilson, 2001); (3) Vertical language learning process is two-way transmission (Luning & Yamauchi, 2010).

Indigenous knowledge creation and production

Beyond western curricula in indigenous language and/or essentialized fragments of culture, programs seek *Indigenization of education system* (DeKorne, 2010; McCarty, 2005; Reyhner, 2010).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

What are deeper ways to understand and analyze culture in language? (e.g., participant structures)

What are ways of thinking about culture (theory) that could advance the idea of culture in and through language? (e.g., the process for construction of new words in indigenous languages)

What do the fields of Indigenous ecological knowledge (IEK) and Indigenous knowledge construction in immersion schools have to say to each other? Why is there such a persistent gap between the two?

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