

SAGAMOK LANGUAGE FORUM 2012

TOWARD A LONG-TERM STRATEGY FOR SAGAMOK ANISHNAABEMOWIN LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION AND PRESERVATION



A report on the outcome of a community language forum held in June 2012, a brief summary of selected best practice literature and a draft strategic action framework



Prepared by:
Four Worlds Centre for
Development Learning
Box 395, Cochrane,
Alberta Canada T4C 1A6
Ph. 403-932-0882; Fax 403-932-0883
www.fourworlds.ca;anyone@fourworlds.ca

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PARTICIPANTS IN THE LANGUAGE FORUM

Sagamok Language Committee Members

Sagamok Anishnaabemowin Program Staff

Sagamok Anishnaabemowin Program Contact Information

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Sagamok Anishnawbek community is at a very precarious crossroads related to our language and culture. With very few speakers of Anishnaabemowin under the age of 50 years, it is quite possible that in the span of a few decades, our language could become effectively lost to us. With that loss our deepest and strongest connection to the heart of our culture and our historical past would also be severed.

In addressing Native leaders in 1983 at the First Ministers conference that eventually led to enshrining Aboriginal rights within the Canadian constitution, Pierre Elliot Trudeau and Rene Levesque remarked “If you no longer speak your language and no longer practice your culture, then you have no right to demand Aboriginal rights from us because you are assimilated with the ruling power”.

The Sagamok Chief and Council clearly recognize the importance of this issue, and they have taken a number of very decisive steps in the past few years to head off the problem.

1. The Anishnaabemowin Language Strategy program was established in 2010, with funding for a full-time coordinator and many ongoing activities approved by Chief and Council (motion 10/12 #57)
2. Among these activities, mandatory language classes were established for Band staff, a language program in the Bidaabin School was given additional resources, evening classes for adults were set-up and a summer immersion program was developed.
3. In June 2011, a community survey revealed the following important results. Out of 283 respondents to the survey.
 - a. 62% rated their Anishnaabemowin speaking skills as “little”
 - b. 64% rated their understanding of Anishnaabemowin as “little”
 - c. 37% stated that Anishnaabemowin is “occasionally” spoken in their homes
 - d. 29% stated that they are “too busy” to learn the language
 - e. 20% said the language is “too difficult to learn”

And yet, in 2006, another community survey reported the following.

- 100% of respondents felt the language was important to their everyday lives and their identity as an Anishbabe
- 98% if respondents felt the language was important to achieving community wellness
- 100% agreed they would do whatever they could to share the language with community
- 100% believe that language fluency was attainable

These results show a strong commitment to language preservation, but it may be that in 2006 the reality of the hard work required in learning the language had not yet been experienced by many.

4. In the first year of its operations, the Anishnaabemowin program experienced both success and growing pains. On the one hand, language classes are in “full swing”, language skills are progressing well in students who attend classes regularly, and resources are being developed. Workshops held at community gatherings are well attended. The Anishnaabemowin Language Learning Centre is established.

On the other hand, attendance, particularly of staff, is sporadic. There is not enough time and human resources to develop needed materials. Participants in language classes are at very different levels, making teaching a “class” as one unit difficult, if not impossible. Community participation in classes is low. Evening youth participation is “0”.

5. In the summary report of the 2011 Language Survey, the authors wrote the following warning. “Maintaining the language may be a race against time if active efforts are not pursued to increase the learning opportunities for the community. A language without learners is in great jeopardy of being lost. Creating language learning opportunities for all community members is critical for language and cultural survival.”

Toward a Comprehensive Long-term Language Strategy for Sagamok

In May 2012, the Anisnaabemovin Language Committee received approval on a proposal to engage Sagamok community members, staff and leadership in a comprehensive planning process focused on language revitalization, preservation and promotion.

With the support of the Four Worlds Centre for Development Learning, an open community consultation was held in June 2012, which included some 200 participants.

This Document

This document reports on the outcomes of that community consultation, and goes on to present a first rough draft of a Comprehensive Strategy for community consideration that is based on both what was learned from the process of community engagement, and also on best practices in Indigenous language programming across North America and beyond.

PART ONE: THE PRESENT CHALLENGE

Current Realities

1. Our language is alive, but it is not well. A generation ago Anishnaabemowin was our first language and English came a distant second. Our English was broken, but our own language was strong.

Today the reverse is true. We speak “Ojiberish” (broken Ojibwe) and “Oj-English” (English mixed with Ojibwe). English is now our first language. Almost all of us speak it. Most of us think in English, and we struggle to understand Anishnaabemowin.

2. Older generations speak Ojibwe fluently, the next generation uses Ojibwe and English, and the younger generation does not speak Ojibwe at all.
3. In the past, children beginning school only spoke Ojibwe. Today children starting school only speak English and they are being taught how to speak and write Ojibwe as a second language.
4. Today Ojibwe is used to exclude non-speakers from knowing what is being talked about.
5. In the past, parents and grandparents were the first teachers of the language. Today the language is being taught in the school.
6. Many present day Anishnaabemowin speakers don't know the real language very well. They speak a form of slang and mispronounce words. Many have very low confidence in themselves when they attempt to speak in the language.
7. In the past, our people were embarrassed to speak in English. They would feel they were “unable to convey properly” their real meaning. Now we are embarrassed not being able to speak Ojibwe.
8. There is some confusion over dialects (Odawa vs. Potawatami vs. Ojibwe).
9. Today the language is used when communicating with elders, for prayers and ceremonies, for story telling (sometimes) and to start off presentations. Mostly we all soon slide back into English because most of us are more comfortable there.
10. Some children can speak the language, but they can't read it.
11. Pa'ne gii nishnaabemowin-miidaash maada ga ni bnaabzyin.
12. The language today is used in singular words such as commands or scolding, but rarely in full sentences. “Nsaknan shkwaadem”, “gewa”, “wiisida”, “minogijzhgat”, or pleasantries such as “Aanii”, baamaapii”, “miinah”, or “mino-gijzhgat”.
13. Today it's difficult to learn the “true” form of the language because of the prevalence of slang.
14. Today life is difficult for those who do not speak English.

What are the Historical Factors that Weakened our Connection to the Language or Brought us to the Present Situation?

1. Government of Canada official policy was to totally assimilate Native people, i.e., disconnect them from their language, culture, identity, history and past heritage.

2. Forced English residential schooling broke the parent-child-community-language connection.
3. Intergenerational trauma, leading to heavy patterns of addictions, abuse and family and community breakdowns further broke the language in us.
4. Generations of English schooling, radio, T.V., etc. contributed to language loss.
5. A linguistic and cultural split occurred between fluent speakers of the language (i.e., elders) and first and second generation residential school survivors. Many of those returning from school didn't know the language, or simply refused to speak it to their children. It was believed that the future was English and parents thought they were doing the best for their children by not passing on the language.
6. Some missionaries thought that all things cultural (and by inference, even the language) were from Satan or evil. Some families were influenced to choose to embrace English for religious reasons.
7. Some families moved to cities to get work, and lost connection to the language that way.
8. Colonization by English Canada disempowered our people culturally, spiritually, politically and economically. We lost much of our identity, our lands and our way of life, and we traded them for something that has never really become fully ours. We are still made to feel like second-class citizens, ashamed of our history and our language and still unable to participate fully in the Canadian dream.
9. Our ceremonies were outlawed, further alienating us from the foundation of who we are as Anishnabe people.
10. We have lost many of our strong elders who were rooted firmly in the language and the culture.
11. Residential schools created cultural self-hatred. We stopped believing in our culture and language. We became suspicious of fluent speakers of the language. We had a wedge driven between ourselves and our hearts.
12. Punishment in day schools and residential schools for speaking Ojibwe became internalized. We didn't want our children to speak the language. Also we wanted to protect our children from the cruel treatment of mainstream society toward culturally "different" Native people.

Barriers to Language Revitalization

1. The entire linguistic world we live in has shifted to English. We are surrounded with English at home, at work, on T.V., at school, and among friends. English is now our "mother" tongue in that it is the comfortable home base most of us have learned to trust and depend on. Anishnaabemowin is now (almost) a "foreign" language.
2. Technology, especially social media, is mostly English dominated, and we all use it.
3. Today, most parents cannot help their children with the language because they don't know it themselves.
4. Many novice speakers of the language have experienced criticism for their poor pronunciation or vocabulary choices and have become discouraged to even try to speak.

5. Shyness and underconfidence are a definite barrier to some and this may be related to experience of past abuse, in which case healing is needed.
6. While language classes for staff are officially categorized as “mandatory”, in practice attendance has been poor and sporadic, and there are no consequences. Nothing is enforced. There are many “reasons” and “exceptions” for missing classes.
7. While some resources (people and money) were committed to the language program, it is not really enough to do the job that is required.
8. Community patterns of addictions and other social issues are definite barriers to language revitalization.
9. Those who have been traumatized have a hard time to learn and pass on the language.
10. The school hires non-language speakers to teach in the early grades where immersion programs could be focused if we had teachers who are also fluent speakers.
11. The school needs visiting grandmothers or other fluent speakers. We really don't have enough fluent speakers who are engaged in passing the language on.
12. Some people simply don't want to learn.
13. There is tension (conflict) between the goals of Ojibwe language learning for children in school and the goals of getting good academic testing results in English. Some children are able to read and write Ojibwe, but are struggling to read English.
14. For some, basic literacy levels are barriers to learning.
15. In high school the language is taught in only one semester out of the whole high school experience.
16. Ojibwe is a very complex language to learn to speak well.
17. A focus on the written form of the language may actually be a barrier to achieving fluency. Language acquisition in childhood naturally flows from oral understanding to speaking, and only after considerable oral fluency is achieved do we try to teach the child to read and write the language. Maybe we should concentrate on oral mastery before writing.
18. The lack of classroom space for adult learning is a barrier.
19. Community events disrupt classes.
20. Classroom learning needs to be reinforced by speaking at home, but there's not enough of the language spoken in homes.
21. Many of us don't realize the importance of our language, and what could be lost if we lost our Anishnaabemowin.
22. Language learning should begin in the 0-6 years. We start too late.

What Strengths do we Have to Build on? What are we Already Doing?

1. Sagamok has more fluent speakers of the language than many other Anishnawbek communities. Most are baby boomers and older.
2. We have already begun teaching in the language in the school and in our daycare.

3. Our leadership has recognized the importance of the challenge of language revitalization, and has funded the language program.
4. Community forums such as this one (the language revitalization forum) can strengthen our understanding of the issue and can lead to a stronger program.
5. We have experiences with full immersion programming. At one time (2005-2010) Biidaabin school had a comprehensive full immersion program, which included junior kindergarten, senior kindergarten and grades 1-3, with learning materials partially developed for grades 4-5.

New leadership of the school decided to tackle low English literacy and numeracy levels by cutting out most of the language and culture programming and focusing on English reading and math improvement.

All the materials still exist, as do capable teachers who could help to restore the immersion program. [Note: Global research on Indigenous language preservation is exceedingly clear that nothing has been found to really work in Native language learning and revitalization without a strong immersion component.]

6. Many community members are willing to learn.
7. We have done a lot of work in community development to build upon personal healing and recovery from addictions and dependency.
8. Biidaabin Kinoomaagemgamitc – our school continues to work on strengthening its programs.
9. We have many knowledgeable community members who can engage youngsters in practical activities for learning; i.e., nature walks, learning plants and their uses, language camps, etc.
10. We have some qualified language teachers. We need more, especially younger ones.
11. With high-speed Internet, there are more resources on-line such as mysmart simulations.
12. We have a language strategy and we continue to strengthen it.
13. Ojibwe language use is increasing between students and staff in the school.
14. We have a language strategy, a language commission and an already ongoing effort to revitalize the language. We need to build on what we have.
15. LRI incorporates language into land use and infrastructure (“Naagabzain” sign and “Ednakmigak” Centre).
16. Some parents are trying to learn the language with their children. Other families try to use the language as much as possible: commands, greetings, food and object names, animals, colours, verbs, etc.)
17. We have our own school, and we have the opportunity and the power to create our own curriculum.
18. Children have pride in the language and are using it more.
19. Daycare students know songs, numbers, and basic vocabulary.
20. Immersion students retain a lot, but are not using it in daily life very much.

21. In school, “Oh-Canada” and opening prayers are in the language.
22. We have some immersion program still operating in the school, but far less than a few years ago.
23. We have language instruction from daycare to grade eight.
24. In the workplace, staff members are mandated to take Ojibwe classes, but attendance has been sporadic.
25. Some Anishnaabemowin signage in the workplace.
26. Language identified as “an asset” for job postings.
27. In the community, we have Anishnaabemowin street signs and building names.
28. Some people are changing their last names to Anishnaabemowin names.
29. The language is sometimes used in churches.
30. We have Anishnaabe themes for community events.
31. Newsletters have the month written in the language.
32. The language is used not only to communicate, but also to convey cultural teachings that are infused in the language.
33. The majority of Chief and Council are Anishnaabemowin speakers. Still, the language is used minimally during Council meetings.
34. Language is taken as a priority by all levels of government (local, union, AFN)
35. Program staff are trying to incorporate a language component into programs and services.
36. We have a language summer program for kids.

Teaching and Learning Issues

1. Oral and written language is taught to children in school. Should more emphasis be placed on oral?
2. Biidaabin uses the double vowel system of writing. The High school uses the instructor’s own spelling.
3. We are combining dialects (Ojibwe, Odawa, Potawanami).
4. Is Anishnaabemowin language immersion actually **causing** children to have poor English test results and learning outcomes later?
5. Should more emphasis be placed on immersion in the 0-6 years (like the Maori language nest model)?
6. Not enough certified younger language teachers, and not enough young fluent speakers engaged in helping people learn. Many families have no fluent speakers.
7. EHS only has one semester of Ojibwe language. Student’s connection to ongoing instruction after grade eight is lost.
8. Standardization of how words are spelled is an issue.
9. How correcting is done so as not to discourage learning can be an issue. Poking fun at easily made mistakes can definitely cause discouragement.
10. Web resources like “my-smart” requires access to the Internet which many families don’t have.

PART TWO: A VISION FOR FUTURE LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

This part of the report summarizes and reflects on the vision that forum participants shared related to the future of Anishnaabemowin in Sagamok. Please note that not all the statements agree with each other, but this part of the report reflects the range of views expressed during the forum.

General Vision

1. In the future, all generations in the community will be fluent in the language.
2. Programs and resources will be readily available to ensure that all future generations are fluent, so that the language is not lost.
3. Our **first** language, the one we speak at home, with friends, at work and in community gatherings will be Anishnaabemowin.
4. Instead of having OSL (Ojibwe as a second language) classes our people will require ESL (English as a second language) classes.
5. Ojibwe will be the language of our workplaces and government.
6. Biidaabin School will have a full immersion program for all, and English academics will be gradually introduced as well taught.
7. Our youth will be proud and capable speakers of our language and they will be proficient in English. We will have mastery in both languages. We will be bilingual and biliterate.
8. Our cultural history will be known and told and written in Anishnaabemowin.
9. We will speak in full and complete sentences, not just single words.
10. A literature, theatre, movies, plays and music will be developed in the language and a vigorous cultural life will emerge within and between all Anishnaabe speaking communities.
11. We will have a resource and research base to aid other communities in language learning.
12. There will be a social expectation among us that we should communicate in the language.

Proposed Strategies

Primary Strategies

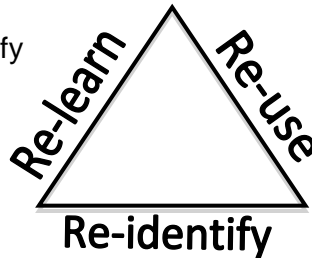
1. The **Establishment of a Sagamok Language and Cultural Institute**, with staff secure funding and a suitable dedicated space to do the important work of leading language and cultural education in the community. This Centre would also have a publication arm, historical archives, a living cultural museum, as well as lots of interactive programs for language and cultural learning. The Centre will be used for the education of our people, as a tourist attraction that will tell the story of our people, as well as a Centre of learning for all those interested in Anishnaabek culture and language. *[Note: Within this proposed strategy, the space is a critical component. The current program has been handicapped by lack of viable space to operate.]*

2. Return to full immersion programs in Biidaabin School from JK to grades 3-4, 50/50 English/Nish instruction in grades 5-6 and 80/20 in grades 7-8.
3. We need a focused strategy for **training a solid core of 20-30 younger people** (ages 28-35) to fluency in the language and linking their training to real economic opportunities (tourism, research, education, business, the arts, etc.)
4. **Develop and pass a community language and cultural preservation declaration/resolution** that states “Anishnaabemowin is our first language” and that we want our leadership to dedicate significant resources (people, money, infrastructure) to ensuring that the priority is successfully addressed.

Supportive Strategies

1. Language learning should be connected to practical-real world learning. We need to move away from the paper and pencil school style learning for adults. Adult learning needs to be fun, interesting and practical.
2. Language learning should be rooted in learning about our Anishnaabe culture, values, philosophy and way of life that is embedded deep **within** the language.
3. English literacy **and** Anishnaabemowin literacy **both** need to be taught. You can't expect students to just “pick-up” or “absorb” academic English just because they speak it outside school.
4. Produce audio-books in the language. Use stories.
5. Have beginner, intermediate and advanced levels/classes for adult learners. Don't try to lump them all together.
6. Start Anishnaabemowin language learning (immersion) in daycare, so by the time children hit JK and SK they already have a child's normal mastery of the language **before** you try to teach them to read and write it.
7. Every child should have grandparents or some other fluent speaker that is a regular part of the child's life, and that speaks to the child only in the language.
8. Language learning needs to be connected to the real world (beyond paper and pencil) through exercises, story telling and legends, environmental/nature learning, etc. The language should also be used to teach other school subjects such as math's, sciences, social studies, etc.
9. Immersion learning is a necessary part of mastering the language for adults as well as children, so we should have staff cohorts go on 10-20 day immersions 3-4 times a year.
10. We should learn from what works in other First Nations.
11. Sagamok should adapt one consistent dialect that is our “official” Anishnaabemowin.
12. We need an **Anishnaabemowin Action Plan** for implementation over the next 5-10 years. This plan should be developed in consultation with our community and once approved, it should be supported for the long-term by Chief and Council.
13. We need to develop a business component of our language strategy that will make the program capable of generating some income to help sustain the long-term program effort.
14. Offering scholarships to community members who want to become Native language teachers or to work in the language and culture area (museum, tourism, etc.).

15. Increase Ojibwe signage in the community, including Ojibwe street names.
16. Find ways to recognize and honour the efforts of those who are working hard to learn the language or to help others to learn.
17. Rename Sagamok departments with Ojibwe names, such as “Sagamok Beesh”, “Sagamok Wigwaman”, “Sagamok Sconewin”, “Sagamok Naanwedjige gamik” N.O.T., CWD, “Sagamok Eskiniigejik”, etc.
18. Phone and reception greetings in the language.
19. Increase staff learning time to ½ day per week.
20. Designate one day per week as Anishnaabemowin and conduct all community business in the language.
21. Re-learn; re-use; re-identify



22. Linking language learning about our history and culture, and also to learning our traditional knowledge about the land, plants and animals, weather and seasons, and daily household life.

Barriers to Achieving our Vision

1. We lack real commitment. We **say** we are all committed, and that want 100% fluency in “the future”, but we don’t **do** what it takes to really get there.
2. If we were really committed as a community, then as individuals we would show up to our language classes every time, and we would do the hard work it takes to really learn (practice, practice, practice), but we don’t. If the administration were really committed it would insist that mandated classes are given high priority and well attended.
3. A lot of us are more committed to two things money and a better economic future than we are to preserving and revitalizing language and culture (as if these things are mutually exclusive). While we don’t say it out loud, we really think that we are too busy and we don’t have the time and energy for learning the language.
4. We don’t realize what will be lost if the language is lost. If we really thought about it, we would see that our unique status in Canada as Native people, our treaty rights, our ability to file land claims and receive just settlement; all of it is dependent on us remaining truly Anishnawbek. If we don’t use it, we will lose it.
5. If we as a community are really committed to revitalizing and preserving our beautiful language and culture and our identity as Anishnawbek people, we will find the resources we need and we will follow through with our big ideas and great plans such as “Zagamok Waaseyaankaan Teg” (Language and Cultural Centre), “Zagamok Wasseyaaakaan Sanjgon” (Living Museum) and “Zagamok Wasseyaaakaan Anishinaabebiigewin” (Publishing House). We would not let these important ideas die because some government funding program didn’t work out for

us, or because we became distracted by something else. We would build what we need with our own hands if that's what it took.

6. Our values have really changed. It wasn't many generations ago that our people would have never even considered getting white government money when they wanted to do something. They would just do it by working together and helping each other. If we did that now we would be bringing back a strong and important part of our culture that we have almost completely lost.
7. Low self-esteem, painful memories of past trauma, addictions and other kinds of wellness issues are direct blocks for some in learning the language, or even in making any effort on their own behalf, or for the community.
8. Elders and culture are now competing with Snooki and reality T.V.
9. Paper and pencil language learning methods that seem too much like school are a turn-off to many of us who didn't do so great in school. We need learning to be fun, practical and experiential. Not just abstract talking, but lots of doing.
10. Underconfidence is a real barrier. We're afraid to say the wrong thing and be laughed at.
11. It is mostly older people who are fluent speakers and younger ones who are not. This is not only a language gap. It's a generational gap too, and we need to overcome that part of the problem.
12. We still think in "black and white". It's either western ways or Anishnaabe ways. That's false thinking. We can and we must balance these two so we can become 21st century, media savvy, successful Anishnaabe people; entrepreneurs, scientists, leaders of thought in the world, and still 100% ourselves—Anishnaabe.
13. We almost completely shut down our immersion program in the school because we thought it was making our children perform poorly in English academic outcomes. Other communities manage to balance these and make them both work. Why can't we? We need to have mastery in both English and Anishnaabemowin languages.
14. Some of us ask, "Why do we need the language out there in the wider world"? That's the wrong question. We need our culture and our language "here" (inside our hearts and minds—our identity) and "here" in our community. We need it here.

PART THREE: A BRIEF BEST PRACTICE REVIEW

This very brief and rapid review of key points from best practice literature from around the world really focuses on the pertinent question of what works in Indigenous language preservation, revitalization and education, especially in contexts where the dominant language of the wider society is English.

Observation One

Nothing replaces immersion. It is the only thing that really works in Native language learning to achieve fluency and language mastery.

This was the main finding of the “stone circle” group in a 2011 study finding advising Mama-Weswen on language revitalization in North Shore Ontario communities. The study refers to Maori (New Zealand) language nests, master apprentice programs and k-8 immersion schools as examples. Following are a few model programs.

Pūnana Leo

(Hawaiian: "nest of voices"; often translated as "language nest") are private, non-profit preschools run by families, in which the Hawaiian language is the language of instruction and administration. Initially opened illegally, the first Pūnana Leo opened in 1984 in Kekaha, Kaua'i. Based on the practices of 19th century Hawaiian-language schools, as well as the Kohanga reo Māori language kindergartens in New Zealand, the Pūnana Leo was the first indigenous language immersion preschool project in the United States (Wilson 1999b:4; Calica & Rawlins 1999:1). Graduates from the Pūnana Leo schools have achieved several measures of academic success in later life. As of 2006, there were a total of 11 Pūnana Leo preschools, with locations on five of the Hawaiian islands.

Skahwatsi:ra Mohawk Language Program (from 2012 Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education)

Mohawk language is a vital part of our culture, and the need to preserve it is evident. To address this need to promote the learning of our language, the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Board of Education first implemented its original Mohawk (Kanien'keha) immersion program in 1995. **This initial immersion program concentrated on Kanien'keha language acquisition in the early primary grades, pre-Kindergarten to Grade 3, and successfully produced AMBE's first full immersion Mohawk classrooms. Building on this success, AMBE developed the Skahwatsi:ra (One Family) Program.** Skahwatsi:ra based its curriculum on the restructuring of the full immersion program, developing the model to reate a more holistic and culturally based classroom setting. Because the Mohawk culture has a strong oral history, the Skahwatsi:ra program is designed to focus more on creating functional fluency among the students, compared to the initial full immersion program, with less time on reading and writing the Mohawk language.

The AMBE Kanien'keha Specialist has developed a program called “Ronta:tis Kenh ne Kanien'keha ? (Do They Speak Mohawk), which assesses Kanien'keha fluency using rubrics & AMBE Kanien'keha Program requirements. The program requirements are comprised of lesson plans that guide Kanien'keha instructors to teach within four categories of language acquisition: conversational, recitation, announcing and introduction. Using the Ohen:ton Karihwaterhkwen, or Thanksgiving Address, and the

yearly ceremonial cycle, as their thematic outline, the students complete their lessons in Kanien'keha.

Lessons of this type teach learners to dialogue with one another, how to recite basic speeches, how to announce during social gatherings, and how to introduce themselves citing their names, age, grade, clan, Nation, family and place of residence. Teachers assess the students' fluency using rubrics, or scaled grading, which looks at the level of their speaking skills rather than by grade level.

The Skahwatsi:ra Program, in its second year of restructuring, has proven to be successful because the students are meeting the Kanien'keha requirements according to functional fluency expectations as opposed to grade-level reading and writing assessments.

Chief Atahm School Tselce' wtqen Cile'qme'ltn (from 2005 Chief Atahm School)

This full immersion school near Chase, B.C. is rooted in an in-depth culturally based philosophy of operation. Here are only a few excerpts from that mandate/philosophy statement.

Foundational Belief

In the spirit of *etsxe*, or vision quest, we believe that:

- Everyone has a gift
- The family, school and community all have a responsibility to foster and develop each child's gift
- An individual must train to develop their potential. It is an individual responsibility to maintain the hard work and discipline necessary for growth

Principle 1: We are all related

Practice

- Continuous and daily exposure/experience with the natural world
- Develop knowledge of the natural world: its patterns and cycles, systems, interconnectedness
- Storytelling (animism, all earth consists of sentient beings)
- Establish learning outcomes that contribute to real life issues and that assist in the continuation of Secwepemc traditions

Practical Application

Language Nests

The Language Nest provides a setting to totally immerse the learners in Secwepmectsin. The children range in age from new born babies to age 3 years. There are two fluent speakers in the Nest with a coordinator who is learning the language.

Early childhood language acquisition:

1. The language nest provides a home-like atmosphere with many opportunities for language experience.
2. Multi-age groups accelerate learning.
3. Many bonuses to language nests
 - Develops natural speakers
 - Promotes family language
 - Ensures intergenerational transmission of language

Primary K-3

Grades 1, 2, and 3 are taught in Secwepemctsin

All course content is taught using the target language, Secwepemctsin. Students are immersed in the language throughout each school day. With more input of language the children are able to understand and speak with ease.

Staffing

There are teachers and Fluent Elders in each classroom. Many classrooms use a team teaching approach that links certified teachers learning the language with fluent elders.

Intermediate

The intermediate program curriculum and instruction follows the Chief Atahm School Vision statement.

Bilingual Program

The Intermediate English program includes: English, Math, Science, Technology and Art.

Courses taught in Secwepemctsin include First Nations Studies, Music, Traditional Dance, Secwepemctsin, and Carpentry.

High School 8-10

High School Program

The high school curriculum and instruction follows the Chief Atahm School Vision statement.

English Program

The Highschool English program includes: English, Math, Science, Technology, First Nations Studies, Career Awareness, and Art.

Language Program

The Highschool language program is mandatory for all students and consists of 4 hours per week.

TPR Level 1

An Accredited 10-day institute designed for Teachers of First Nations Languages.

The Program

The Total Physical Response Methodology for second language teaching has been successfully implemented in language classrooms worldwide. This action-based methodology quickly develops a working vocabulary for students in a fun, creative way. To assist in building successful language programs, Chief Atahm School has developed an intensive training program to help Aboriginal language teachers master the steps of TPR. During this institute each participant will be provided with training through lectures, modeling, activities, and multimedia presentations to help develop skills specific to TPR.

This course is available for credit through the Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, B.C.

Master Apprentice (from First Peoples' Cultural Council)

The Master-Apprentice program was developed in California so that young adults – teachers and young parents, who are so crucial to language transmission – could become proficient in their language.

The strategy features a one-on-one learning relationship between a “master” (elder, speaker) and an “apprentice” (language learner), who work together intensively for between twenty and forty hours per week, speaking only a First Nations / Aboriginal language.

The program is based on the concept that people learn a language best by being immersed in it for significant amounts of time, without translation to English. The master and apprentice go about their daily lives in their language – working together at home, around the community, or wherever they want, and doing everyday or special activities together.

The FPCC supported a language mentoring program for adult students who were at an intermediate level in their language and had a good level of understanding already. Students were paired one-on-one with fluent speakers of the language, and each pair met at least once a week for a total of 75 hours over 25 weeks. The sessions were full immersion, with only the First Nations language being spoken. This focus on oral fluency will enable the adult speakers to pass the language on to younger generations.

In addition, the FPCC has recently supported a pilot Master-Apprentice program. The pilot community also expects the apprentices will become an important component of language revitalization, since they will work with their families to teach the younger generations.

Ten Points for Successful Language Learning

This useful summary was adapted from Leanne Hinton (2002) *How to Keep Your Language Alive*. Berkeley: Heyday Books. Refer to Chapter 2, pages 7-19) by the First Peoples’ Heritage, Language and Cultural Council of British Columbia.

1. Leave English Behind

Try to communicate ONLY in your language.

Basic questions: Early on, the apprentice should learn how to ask questions in the languages, such as:

How do you say ?

What is this? What is that?

What am I doing? What are you doing? What shall I do now?

Reminding each other: in the beginning, it will be hard to stop using English, but keep reminding each other. Some useful phrases you should learn:

Now say that in our language.

Please speak to me in our language.

Tell me a story.

Tell me what's in this picture.

2. Make Yourself Understood with Nonverbal Communication

Instead of switching to English, use actions, gestures, and facial expressions to act out what you are trying to say. Use pictures, books and magazines as well as objects around you to help convey your meaning, and to talk together about what you see.

Some ideas: Watch TV with the sound turned off, and talk in your language about what is going on. Use a photo album or a children’s story book to tell a story in your language.

3. Teach in Full Sentences

An apprentice needs to hear a word many different times in many different situations to be able to understand and remember it.

Example: when teaching the word for "door", instead of just pointing at the door and saying the word, you can say things like:

This is a door.

Where is the door?

Now I am going to open the door.

I'm knocking on the door.

Go out the door.

Close the door.

etc.

4. Aim for Real Communication in Your Language

Try to do everything in your language. Don't think of your language as something you do only during lessons, but as the everyday-language of your community.

5. Language is Also Culture

Your language is not just a translation of English. There may be important culture-specific points to keep in mind when you say certain things. For example, we talked about the apprentice learning to ask questions, but it may be impolite to ask certain questions in your language. Or, certain stories may be restricted to a certain time of year. The apprentice needs to learn these things too.

6. Focus on Listening and Speaking

Some apprentices are eager to learn to write and learn about the grammar of their language, and this can be helpful, but in order to become a fluent speaker of your language, your MAIN FOCUS NEEDS TO BE ON LISTENING AND SPEAKING. We can't stress this enough!

7. Learn and Teach the Language Through Activities

Live your daily life together. Don't think of this time together as outside of your normal patterns of living. For example, do you have to cook supper? Do it, and talk about what you're doing in your language. There are many more good ideas on pages 16-17 of the book.

8. Use Audiotaping and Videotaping

This is useful to help the apprentice practice, and it creates a record for the master's family as well.

9. Be an Active Learner

The master is the language expert, but s/he does not always have to take charge of deciding what, how, and when to teach. The apprentice should feel free to help guide his/her learning experience as much as possible.

10. Be Sensitive to Each Other's Needs; Be Patient and proud of Each Other and Yourselves

"If you start to get discouraged, always remember that you are doing the best you can, and you deserve to be proud. You are making a heroic commitment to a wonderful cause by working together to bring your language back out into the air where it belongs."
(Hinton 2002:19)

Observation Two

Immersion language programs do not cause poor English academic outcomes in Native schools.

Four Worlds has had very close engagement with many Native schools across Canada. We are currently working with two; one large one in Manitoba and one small one in Ontario.

Both of these have abysmal English reading and writing, math and general academic outcomes. In both, by the time children reach grade 5-6 roughly 75% of them are 2-3 years behind when compared to their Provincial counterparts. This is in fact fairly universal in most on-reserve schools we know of.

Neither of the two schools in this example have Native language programs at all, let alone immersion programs. In both communities, grassroots pressure is mounting to introduce such programming.

It is therefore clear that language and cultural programs cannot be the culprit (i.e., the cause of poor English academic outcomes).

Analysis in both of these communities about the causes of poor school performance runs as follows.

1. High levels of addictions, intergenerational trauma, violence, abuse, neglect and chaos in some 70 plus percent of homes where children live is a major factor.
2. Parental literacy support (i.e., parents reading to kids), and volume reading and learning in the early years is absent.
3. Developmental delays, FASD, ASHD and other cognitive deficits are a contributing factor that the school has not learned to deal with effectively (or even recognize), and for which there are no resources.
4. Teachers are poorly trained for the learning context (i.e., kids coming to school with problems, developmental delays, lack of parental support, etc.).
5. Gross underfunding by the Department of Indian Affairs (usually about 50% of what Provincial schools get) make it nearly impossible to mount special education and remedial programs, which are badly needed.
6. Children have unresolved healing needs (from the trauma at home) and these constitute a real barrier to learning success.
7. The curriculum tends to mimic the official provincial curriculum which: a) does not sufficiently target basic literacy and numeracy at all levels, b) assumes a developmental path and pacing that is not appropriate for the context, c) is not grounded in the social, cultural and identity reality of Native on-reserve students, and d) does not effectively address culturally preferred learning styles.

What does the literature say?

Maori language immersion programs have been going on for more than two decades in the context of English dominated New Zealand. A review of New Zealand and international literature on bilingual immersion education with a focus on what works best for Aotearoa (the Maori word for the island of New Zealand) is summarized by the authors in the following paragraphs.

1. The research clearly shows that the most effective bilingual schools are also those with the highest level of immersion (i.e., Level 1 programmes, where a lot of the teaching is in Māori). However, the research also shows that partial immersion schools can also be effective, as long as at least 50% of the teaching is in Māori (i.e., Level 2 programmes).
2. The research shows there are significant benefits from having higher levels of immersion. This is because of a key principle in the research called “language interdependence”. This principle is based on the idea that the stronger a child becomes in one language – particularly, if they learn to read and write in that language – the more likely they are to successfully learn another language. Being strong in one language means being strong in another.
3. This is important to understand because many parents and whānau think that two to three years of kōhanga is enough and then it is better to transfer to English-medium schooling. However, transferring after a relatively short time will mean that students will still just only be beginning to speak te reo Māori, and will not yet have had time to learn how to read and write fully in Māori.
4. The same applies to parents thinking that one or two years is enough in a kura. There is a feeling that “too much” Māori may undermine the learning of English. However, because of the principle of language interdependence, it is actually the opposite that is true. Learning to speak, read and write in Māori means that students are more likely to succeed academically in both Māori and English. The skills students learn for Māori will also help them with their English.
5. Leaving Māori-medium education too early means students are more likely to fail in school. They will not yet know enough Māori, and will then be starting again, and trying to catch up, in English-medium schools.

There is a difference between being able to hold a conversation in a second language (what the research calls conversational competence) and knowing the language well enough to be able to learn academic subjects successfully (called “academic language proficiency”). The students may be able to hold a conversation in Māori after two or three years in kura but they need higher levels of language skills to be able to succeed in academic subjects. This requires knowing how to read and write well in Māori

6. It also takes longer to learn an academic subject when it is being taught in your second language, and the research shows students need to stay in the bilingual programme for at least six years to know enough to be able to cope well academically. That is, there is a “second language learning delay”, which means students are below their grade level for a subject when they start learning in their second language (in this case, Māori) but then they start to catch up.
7. This means that at primary school level, a student needs to be in Māori-medium education (e.g., a kura or bilingual unit) for at least six, and preferably eight years, and they need to be “taught Māori” as well as being “taught in” Māori.
8. If students do not have good basic literacy skills in Māori they will struggle with academic English and with learning more generally; this is why it is so important to allow sufficient time for students to master te reo Māori first.
9. This difference between conversational and academic language also applies to learning English. Knowing how to speak English is not the same as being able to

use classroom or academic English successfully. So, just like academic Māori, academic English also needs to be taught. This is why even very high level immersion programmes – where most of the teaching is in Māori – should also teach English at some point. Language learning will not just “take care of itself”. Students need to be taught how to read and write in English – they do not just “pick up” these skills automatically, even though English is spoken widely outside the school.

10. Teaching academic English helps students to understand how this is different from ordinary conversational English. It also helps students to understand more clearly the similarities and differences between Māori and English.
11. One way of ensuring students become fluent in Māori and in English is to start their primary schooling with a split of 90% of teaching in Māori and 10% in English and to move this to a 50/50 split over four to six years. This is a common approach overseas. Another way is to begin with a 100% immersion in Māori, but to introduce English as a subject a few years later.
12. There is no set year for starting English language instruction, although most bilingual schools outside of Aotearoa/New Zealand start in Years 4 or 5. Some Māori-medium programmes start English at this level for one to two hours a week, others leave it to Year 7 and 8.

From S. May, R. Hill and S. Tiakiwai, Bi-lingual Education in Aotearoa/New Zealand, pp.2-3 “Education Counts” 2012.

PART FOUR: A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR LONG-TERM ACTION

This section will put forward a six-part framework toward a long-term Anishnaabemowin revitalization and preservation strategy. This is not a plan. It is ideas toward a plan. The plan itself needs to be developed by Sagamok people through in-depth consultation as has been proposed for phase two of this language plan development process. Each of the proposed strategies to follow are dependent on and interlinked with one-another. Success in one will help to foster success in the others. Similarly, failure to act in one could undermine the success of the others. This strategy consists of the following lines of action: 1) community engagement, 2) restoring the school immersion program, 3) establish a Sagamok Language and Cultural Centre, 4) adult education, 5) training a new generation of language and cultural priority, and 6) economic sustainability.

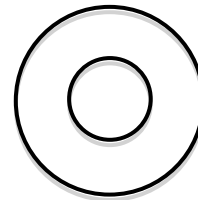
I. Community Engagement

Strengthen and expand the group of core actors who are promoting the strategy by establishing a **Sagamok Community Language Council** consisting of all community members who are committed to revitalizing and preserving the language.

a. This Council would be the principal bundle holder for the community language strategy.

b. The structure of the council would be a circle within a circle.

The larger circle is all members. The smaller circle is an elected executive that focuses on implementing the decisions of the Council.



c. The Council would be the authority to which Anishnaabemowin Language Programs would answer and report.

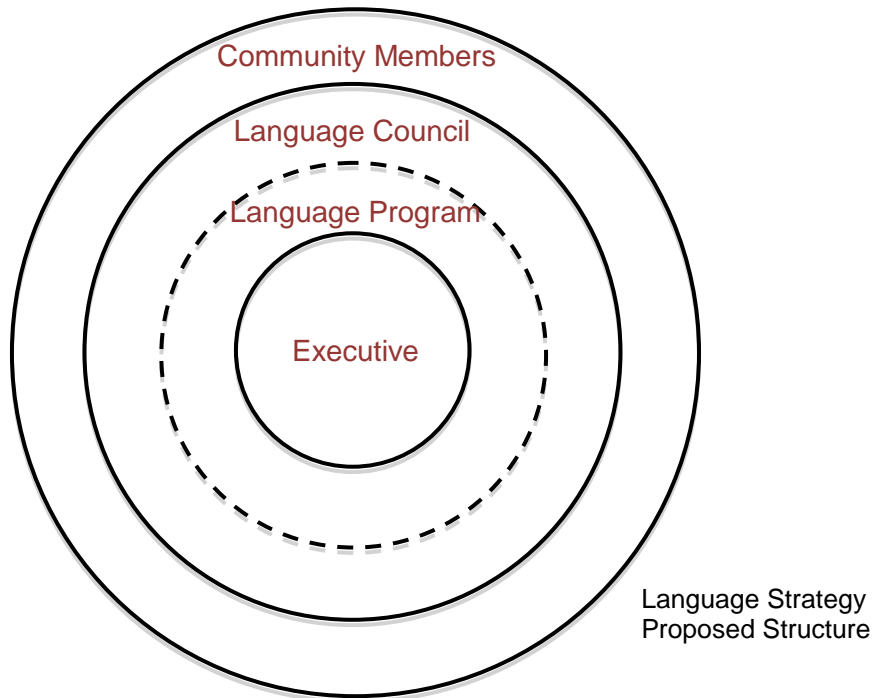
d. Decision making of the Council would be by consensus of those participating in Council meetings

e. The Council Executive would be parallel to (not under) the School Committee.

Activities

The Council would meet quarterly for an immersion retreat to: a) reconnect the members to the vision, b) create a safe, warm and inviting community atmosphere in which to learn and practice the language with old and new members, c) to discuss and make decisions about actions to be taken, and d) to review the progress on the language strategy from time to time.

The Executive of the Council would meet monthly with the Coordinator of the Language Program to review progress.



Getting Clear on the Goals; a Challenge for Decision Making

Should the main goal of the Council and the strategy be to promote Anishnawbe language dominance? The Quebec language laws seek to extinguish English in favour of French. Is that what we want for Anishnaabemowin? **Or should the goal be a healthy bilingualism in which mastery of both languages is encouraged and promoted?** If the goal is mastery of both languages there are still several larger questions to answer.

Is the goal *academic literacy in Anishnaabemowin* equal to the level of academic literacy required for school success in English? Does reading and writing Anishnaabe have a strong functional usage in the Sagamok of the future? How? In what context exactly?

Or is the Ahkwesahsne Mohawk Solution (as cited below) one that Sagamok should pursue? (See Part Three of this report, pages 13-15)

“Because the Mohawk culture has a strong oral history, the Skahwatsi:ra program (restructured in the new full immersion program) is designed to focus more on creating functional oral fluency among the students...with less time on reading and writing the Mohawk language...lesson plans...teach with four categories of language acquisition: conversational, recitation, announcing and introduction.”
[This] “has proven to be successful because the students are meeting the Kanien’keka requirements according to functional fluency expectations as approved to grade-level reading and writing assignments.”

Is it the oral use of the language in the context of culturally based family and community life that is the goal? (I think from what we have heard in the forum it is.) But do the teaching and learning strategies now being used to get that goal (if that is the goal) actually lead to that outcome?

Both the literature and Sagamok’s own community development experience is clear. **You can’t build a successful community strategy of any kind without fully**

engaging the community.

This first line of action is about truly engaging the community in dialogue about fundamental issues such as those outlined above. **What is needed is to come to one heart and one mind over what the vision and goals really are, and what strategies are needed to get there.**

Getting Started

Hold a series of community dialogue meetings on key issues related to language and cultural revitalization and preservation. Be sure each topic is clearly defined and focused, and that one topic leads naturally to the next.

II. Restore School Immersion Programming

The Maori and Hawaiian experiences among many others demonstrate that Indigenous language learning can be successfully promoted in younger generations through school-based immersion programs. Essentially “immersion” can be defined as a high percentage of instruction and engagement occurring in the language.

The following pattern is proposed for immersion in Sagamok.

Daycare	100%	Immersion (using the language nest model)
JK	100%	Immersion (using the language nest model)
SK	100%	Immersion (using the language nest model)
Grades 1	70 %	Nish (mostly oral)
2		
3	30%	English literacy (with occasional Nish phrases)
Grades 4	50%	Nish (mostly oral)
5		
6	50%	English literacy (with occasional Nish phrases)
Grades 7	30%	Nish (oral)
8	70%	English (oral)

Additionally, immersion experiences out of the school are very important. Family camps, special retreats and excursions (like a nature walk or a trip to a special place) can also be immersion experiences.

Curriculum Requirements

This proposed shift in the approach toward immersion favouring oral communication, (and if Sagamok follows the Ashkwasasne model, recitation, and other culturally appropriate oral uses such as clan speaking in consultation? Ceremonies?) would require a renewed investment in curriculum development and teacher refresher training.

Family Involvement

A strong component of family involvement needs to be built into the curriculum. Even if family members simply encourage oral mastery (without learning it themselves), this has been shown to bolster children’s learning outcomes.

Why Make this Shift?

1. The traditional use of the language was oral, not written. There are certainly important

uses for a written version of the language, and some students can and should go on to learn it (language teachers, etc.), but most Sagamok people only need to be able to understand fluent speech and to speak fluently. Why confront children with the daunting task of trying to learn to understand and speak a second language while also learning to read and write in that language? Why not let them acquire a strong oral foundation first?

2. World-wide education literature is clear that children should learn to read and write in their first language before they learn to read and write in a second language. English is really the first language of most (if not all) Sagamok children today. Trying to learn to read and write in a second language while still learning to speak it, and without having consolidated first language literacy has been shown to cause learning interference, and to delay learning in both languages (according to the research). Once literacy is acquired in the first language, literacy in the second one will be easier to learn (transference). The proposed approach places a very strong emphasis on oral competency and only introduces the written version of the language incidentally within the context of English literacy. Written Anishnaabemowin could be introduced as an elective in grades 7-8 or beyond.

[Four Worlds Note: We realize that we are proposing a shift, and that the Language Committee may not agree with this proposed approach. We have done our best to propose a path that meets the demands and goals of the community (as expressed in the Forum), reflect what is being learned from best practice and literature, and also strike a balance in terms of community realities and needs.]

3. That serious attempts to teach the written form of the language be reserved for advanced speakers who have already acquired oral fluency.

III. Establish a Sagamok Language and Cultural Centre (Zagamok Wassegaankaan Teg)

There is a vital need to provide the language and cultural revitalization and preservation work a *viable and secure space* in which to operate. We propose the following possible strategies for consideration.

1. Rename the new office “Zagamok Wassegaankaan Teg”, i.e., Sagamok Language and Cultural Centre and let it be known that this is only the temporary centre.
2. Develop a renewed version of the 2006 “Zagamok Wassegaankaan Teg” proposal (including the living museum, archives and publishing house components) and seek funding to begin a phased site development process.
3. Develop a traditional “cultural centre” space from logs that is built by volunteer community labour. This could be a fairly large (possibly 8-sided, i.e., roundish) building with a hooded firepit in the center that could be used for classes, gatherings, ceremonies and retreats. While this centre is being built, put up large tents to accommodate outdoor classes and activities as weather permits.

[Note: The upshot of these proposed ideas is that the Sagamok Language Council take a pro-active stance toward acquiring the space needed to do its important work. The more the community is engaged in this space development effort, the more they will own the process and identify with its work. Passively waiting for government funding is definitely counter to the spirit of enterprise and self-reliance at the heart of Anishnawbek cultural teachings.]

IV. Adult Learning

Adult language learning, like all good adult education, needs to be self-directed by the adult learners and oriented to very practical application. We therefore propose that:

1. Adult classes focus on: a) oral comprehension and b) oral communication.
2. That the written form of the language be introduced mostly as a learning and memory aid.
3. That language learning be strongly rooted in cultural and historical learning.
4. That adults who are learning be connected to children who are learning.
5. That activities (i.e., doing things) be incorporated as a primary learning approach for adults. By “doing things” we mean practical hands-on experience that have application for daily life.
6. That adult classes be arranged according to levels of competency already acquired such as “beginner”, “intermediate” and “advanced”.
7. That a system of workplace incentives be developed to support staff language learning.
8. That staff learners be encouraged and aided to develop a vocabulary and oral competence related to their field of work.

V. Training a New Generation of Language and Cultural Promoters

It is proposed that a career track be identified and developed through which 20-30 Sagamok youth and younger adults (age 18-35) are: 1) provided scholarships, 2) offered a 2-3 year training program in Anishnaabe language, history and culture, and 3) in cooperation with Sagamok Development Corporation (SDC) that this training culminates in a one-year training opportunity in a range of fields, including language teachers, museum curator, historical research and archives, cultural tourism development, and living Anishnaabe arts (theatre, writing, dance, music, sculpture, painting, traditional arts and crafts, etc.)

VI. Economic Sustainability

It is proposed that (in cooperation with SDC) the Sagamok Language and Cultural Centre develop a business component of its programming, through which at least some of the cost of the centre’s operations can be offset.

Initial possibilities include marketing of curriculum and learning materials already developed to other Anishnaabe speaking First Nations, developing one or more tourist products such as a cultural show on an historical tour for the summer months, brokering Anishnaabe arts and crafts sales, and developing cultural and historical immersion experiences for schools that could be marketed to regional school boards.

Financial Viability

Part of a full-blown long-term plan is a projected cost analysis. The expansion and shifting of activities needs to be reflected in accurate costing for staff, facilities, materials, events and investments in new programs and initiatives.

Chief and Council, as well senior staff of the Centre will need a realistic budget forecast, so that funding can be sought.

One mechanism for long-term sustainability is a Trust Fund. It is proposed that Sagamok Chief and Council establish a **Sagamok Language and Culture Trust Fund**, with an initial goal of 5 million dollars. This fund would be contributed to through the terms of future IBA's, through private and government donors, through the earnings of various Sagamok enterprises, and through further land claim settlements. The purpose of this trust fund is to provide sustainable (minimum) core funding for Sagamok Language and Cultural revitalization and preservation activities in perpetuity. A trust fund of this size would need to be managed by a professional investment manager with previous experience in working with Aboriginal Trust Funds.