

# ASSESSING FIRST NATIONS LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

by

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research project was to develop, trial, and improve a method for assessing levels of First Nations language proficiency. The work is based on a need identified by British Columbia First Nations language teachers for a means to determine student progress and achievement in courses involving the learning of First Nations language.

Borrowing liberally from existing language rating scales, assessment literature, First Nations language literature, personal experience in First Nations language curriculum development, and discussions with First Nations language teachers, a set of First Nations Language Benchmarks and check-lists were developed for trial. The research undertaken in this study, which involved extensive collaboration with 10 First Nations language teachers, was conducted in four First Nations languages (Interior Salish) and included participation by both public and Band-operated schools.

Following two, three-month trial periods and the resulting feedback from the participating language teachers, a culturally appropriate, easily administered, and teacher friendly method of assessing First Nations language has been established. One of the most significant outcomes of this research project is a handbook entitled *A Language Teacher's Guide to Assessing First Nations Language Proficiency*.

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**For my Mother:**

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## PREFACE

Colleagues of mine who have completed their doctoral studies and successfully written and defended their dissertations, have told me that one of the most difficult aspects of writing their thesis was completing the document to their satisfaction. I now believe what they have told me is true. I have found great difficulty getting to the point where I am satisfied that this document is finally complete and ready for scrutiny.

I suspect that most doctoral candidates want the thesis to be perfect, without flaws of any sort. Most of us come to the realization, after much consternation, that the thesis will never, ever be perfect and that at some point the writer has to be satisfied that the very best effort has been put forth and that it is time to “let it go.”

A song written and recorded by Leonard Cohen entitled “Anthem” (Cohen, 1992), tells it all in the *refrain*:

Ring the bells that still can ring.  
Forget your perfect offering.  
There is a crack in everything.  
That’s how the light gets in.

To all who read this: Please look for the cracks; in that way, perhaps some (reflected) light in the form of feedback will come my way!

# Chapter One

## Statement of Purpose

### *Introduction*

*“C’ken-m, sinci?”*

These were the first Nle?kepmxcin<sup>1</sup> words I remember hearing as a youngster of about five or six years of age. The question was posed by Louie, a member of the Lytton Indian Band, who frequently came into my father’s general store to purchase groceries. In later years Louie would become a respected and often quoted Band Elder. Literally, the question was “what is the matter little brother?” However it was used as a greeting, in much the same way that someone would greet a friend by saying “Hi, what’s happening?” My reply was always “C’ken-m, Louie?” Later, as I grew older, I learned more of the language from other Elders and my First Nations classmates and friends. It was the beginning of a fascination with languages that has endured to this day and that ultimately led me to pursue research that is directly connected to First Nations<sup>2</sup> language.

In retrospect, I now wish I had taken advantage of learning from the Elders who spoke to me in Nle?kepmxcin to learn more of the language when I was younger. During the time I was attending school in Lytton in the 1950’s, teaching the language in public schools was not even a remote consideration, most likely because at the nearby St. George’s Residential School, every effort was made to prevent First Nations students from speaking their language. Now, many years later, public school administrators, teachers, and First Nations language teachers are devoting time and directing energy toward the revitalization of many First Nations languages throughout British Columbia.

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<sup>1</sup> Nle?kepmxcin is the First Nations language spoken by the members of the Nle?kepmx Nation - an area extending from Ashcroft in the north to Mount Baker in the south, and from Lytton in the west to the Merritt area in the east. The non-native term for Nle?kepmx is Thompson, as most of the communities are located in the Thompson/Nicola/Fraser River areas. The Nle?kepmx Nation is part of the Interior Salish group of First Nations.

<sup>2</sup> The terms First Nations and Aboriginal are often used interchangeably to refer to the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. I will use the term First Nations most frequently, since this is the term most commonly used amongst First Nations people in the area of British Columbia where the research was conducted. I will use the term Aboriginal less frequently, and usually only when it is part of a quote or it is the word being used in the context of a citation or passage.

The challenges faced by First Nations language teachers are many, but one of the most significant is being able to carry out culturally appropriate and meaningful assessment of First Nations language proficiency. The lack of available assessment resources is exacerbated by a number of factors. First, although most First Nations language teachers are totally fluent and have an intimate understanding of their first language, many of them are not certified teachers, and as a result have not always had opportunities to receive pre-service or in-service training in language assessment and evaluation. Second, although some First Nations language groups have a provincially approved Integrated Resource Package (IRP) for their language, many of these IRPs do not contain specific and detailed methods of assessing language proficiency. Third, since First Nations language is rarely considered a core subject in the public school system, there is usually not a great deal of understanding within the education community regarding the need for appropriate methods of assessing, evaluating, and reporting on language proficiency. And finally, there has been very little curriculum development for the public school system that has addressed the need for culturally appropriate methods of assessing First Nations language proficiency. All of these factors highlight the gap between culturally appropriate determination of language proficiency and the requirement to report on student progress, and point to the very real need for the development of a culturally appropriate method of assessing First Nations language proficiency.

The teaching of First Nations language as a “second language” in public and Band-operated schools is a relatively new phenomenon. Recognition of First Nations languages as qualifying for Secondary School Graduation has been granted by the Ministry of Education for some First Nations languages, including those in this study. One of the areas where the IRPs have been found to be most lacking is the section entitled *Suggested Assessment Strategies*. Although suggestions are provided, they are very general in nature and contain insufficient detail for language teachers to be able to determine levels of language proficiency. As a result, many language teachers have had difficulty developing effective methods of assessing the language ability of their students.

Having previously developed language curriculum with First Nations language teachers, and having facilitated a number of First Nations Language Curriculum Development Workshops for the First Nations Education Steering Committee of B.C., I am convinced that the development of a means of assessing First Nations language proficiency will be of great value and assistance to most of the First Nations language teachers in the province. This conviction on my part has been confirmed by the many conversations I have had with practicing language teachers who are currently teaching in both Band-operated schools and in the public school system. While it is recognized that all aspects of teaching First Nations language are important, the increasing emphasis being placed on accountability for student achievement by the BC Minister of Education, means that the importance of being able to assess student performance accurately will receive even greater attention in the future. Therefore, through active collaboration with First Nations language teachers to trial and refine a prototype assessment device with their students, my basic assumption is that an effective, culturally appropriate method to assess First Nations language proficiency can be realized for use in the classroom.

By demonstrating an eagerness to participate, a willingness to trial early models of the assessment tool with their students, and the capacity to provide meaningful feedback to the researcher, the First Nation language teachers who were a part of this study have, by their participation, benefited all First Nations language teachers in the province. This research, which has been accomplished through direct collaboration with practicing language teachers, has resulted in the development of a more practical method of assessing First Nations language proficiency. The outcome has established the basis for an assessment method that is easily administered, culturally appropriate, and that should be considered for use in other First Nations language programs.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will present some additional background on this study, describe the context within which the research was conducted and state the research purpose. I will then emphasize the significance of the study by addressing what I consider to be the most important research questions, the answers to which will reveal what I have learned from this experience. Following that will be a statement of the

research “question” and the assumptions, delimitations, and limitations that characterized the study.

### ***Researcher’s Background***

Since 1992, I have been living and working in First Nations communities in the Central Interior of British Columbia. During that time I have worked as an Indian Band Administrator, as the Manager of a Band Education Department, as a Band-operated School principal, and as the Administrator for the First Nations Education Council of a provincial school district. Since beginning work in First Nations communities, I have become increasingly interested in First Nations pedagogy, more specifically in the development of First Nations Language curriculum. For the past six years, I have been a partner in SKeKe’Kya Consulting, a small group of Native and non-Native educators formed to develop First Nations language curriculum. We have developed language curriculum in the Nle?kepmx (Thompson) language for grades 5 to 11 for School District #58 (Nicola-Similkameen), grades K to 4 for the Lower Nicola Indian Band, and the HeadStart Program (ages 1 – 4), also for the Lower Nicola Indian Band. It is through my work with language curriculum that I became interested in developing methods of assessing First Nations language proficiency.

During the three years that I was principal of a Band-operated School, one of the most common observations that First Nations language teachers made to me was that there were no “off-the-shelf” language assessment tools available for use in the classroom. The language teachers wanted a culturally appropriate assessment tool that would provide an accurate measure of language proficiency, the results of which could then be used to report on student progress. Part of my interest in pursuing this study is as a result of working with language teachers and becoming increasingly more aware of their frustrations regarding the need for more effective, culturally appropriate, and “teacher friendly” methods of assessing student language proficiency.

### *Research Context*

As I will explain more completely in Chapter 4 - Methodology, this research project was carried out in collaboration with 10 First Nations language teachers from public and Band-operated schools in the area included in School Districts #58 (Nicola-Similkameen), #73 (Kamloops-Thompson), and #74 (Gold Trail). See the map contained in Appendix 7 for a complete view of the research area. Two trial periods of approximately 10 weeks each were conducted: October to December 2003, and February to March 2004. Participating language teachers were briefed on the intended research methods, with emphasis being placed on the intention that the research project be completely collaborative in nature, since the assessment method that would be developed would ultimately be used on a regular basis by themselves and other language teachers.

### *Defining Principles*

To assist in framing and focusing the work I was about to undertake, I established some defining principles that guided my research activities. The most important of these was collaboration. I encouraged active participation by language teachers and other educators in many aspects of research design, how the research was to be conducted, and determining how the results would be reported. I also strived for openness and transparency at all times. Members of the First Nations communities of the four language groups of the Interior Salish Nations - St'at'imc, (Lillooet), Nle?kepmx, (Thompson), Secwepemc (Shuswap), and Si'lx (Okanagan) – were encouraged to participate in the activities that were connected to this research project. Adherence to protocol was also an important consideration. It was essential for me, as a non-Native researcher, to ensure that I observed proper cultural protocols in all aspects of the research. Finally, I tried to ensure that the assessment process was seen by language teachers to be a user friendly assessment that would be culturally appropriate, developmental in nature, and had practicality of application as a basic tenet. These principles will be further explored in the chapters ahead.

### *Statement of Purpose*

The purpose of this research project was, through collaboration with practicing First Nations Language teachers, to develop and trial a “made for teachers” assessment tool that is culturally appropriate and easily administered, to determine levels of First Nations language proficiency,. The result will be a “set” of First Nations Language Benchmarks (FNLB) or *Benchmarks*

### *Significance of the Study*

The significance of this study can be characterized by the extent of the cooperation and interest I have received from First Nations communities and from First Nations language teachers. In spite of reluctance on the part of many First Nations people and organizations to eschew further study and research, many individuals and groups have come forward, eager to be a part of this project.

Brief responses to the following questions will serve to underline what I believe to have been the significance of this project.

#### **Why did I select this particular purpose?**

Working with language teachers over the past six years and having the experience of developing First Nations language curriculum for public schools, I became very much aware of the need for more “teacher friendly” language assessment tools. In attempting this research, I anticipated that through my access to a wide variety of academic resources, by collaborating with language teachers, and by combining and focusing our energy, we would be able to develop and refine a practical assessment tool for determining First Nations language proficiency.

### **What independent opinions existed about the need for this study?**

The voices of many language teachers (from public schools in School Districts #58 and #74, from Band-operated schools in the First Nations communities of Skeetchestn and Adams Lake) and district First Nations Education Coordinators (in School Districts #58, #73, and #74) sent a strong message – we need more resources, particularly in the area of assessment and evaluation, to help us teach First Nations language more effectively. We do not have the resources or time ourselves to be able to do this, so the direction you are taking with this research should prove to be beneficial for many of us.<sup>3</sup>

### **Will the results of this research revise, extend, or create new knowledge?**

The successful completion of this project *extends* the basic understanding of assessment contained in language IRPs. By utilizing materials from existing language proficiency rating scales, and applying cultural principles, a new set of assessment tools for the determination of language proficiency - a set of First Nations Benchmarks – has been created.

### **What has caused the problem?**

A lack of practical methods to assess First Nations language proficiency is the result of neglect and other reasons, most of which have been detailed in the first paragraph of this chapter.

### **Will the Benchmarks have theoretical and/or practical application?**

The research has been based on theoretical frameworks established by other groups for other languages. Much of the philosophy and many of the components of other models have been applied to the development of an appropriate model for use with First Nations languages. Further exploration and explanation of this will be forthcoming in Chapter 2.

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<sup>3</sup> These comments were made by First Nations language teachers with whom I have worked over the years and were echoed by the First Nations language teachers and District First Nations Co-ordinators I spoke with prior to the start of this research project.

### **Will the use of the Benchmarks go beyond the counting stage of research?**

Yes. Based on feedback from language teachers at the end of each of two trial periods, a practical, “teacher friendly”, culturally appropriate tool for assessing First Nations language proficiency has been developed. The end result of this project has gone beyond simply trialing an assessment prototype. Formative evaluations by the researcher and the participating teachers following the first trial has rendered the assessment tool more effective for use in the second trial and further evaluation following the second trial has resulted in further refinement of the tool. This progressive, collaborative, and developmental process has resulted in proficiency benchmarks that will be generalizable for use with other First Nations languages.

### **To what extent have the findings justified generalization?**

This has been determined in two ways. First, the research was conducted in four First Nations language groups. Determination of generalization will be stated based on the relative success of applicability of the assessment method across all four language groups. Further generalization could be inferred, but will only be conclusively determined by conducting trials in other First Nations languages, where some cultural adjustments will obviously have to be made.

### ***The Research Question***

Because this research is a project based on a “purpose” as outlined earlier, a research question and sub-questions are not necessarily appropriate. Instead, the main research purpose was to develop and trial a “made for teachers” method of identifying levels of language proficiency that is culturally appropriate and easily administered. This is probably more properly stated as a **goal** of the research, which had the following objectives:

- ◆ trial a language proficiency assessment tool developed by the researcher;
- ◆ improve the quality of the assessment tool through a series of trials and refinements based on teacher use and feedback; and

- ◆ produce a more refined, culturally appropriate and easily administered assessment tool to determine First Nations language proficiency.

### *Assumptions*

In addition to the basic assumption stated earlier in this chapter, the principal assumptions made regarding this study were:

- ◆ that sufficient language teachers in the proposed study area would be willing to participate in order to provide a representative sample of student work with which to estimate language proficiency;
- ◆ that sufficient time would be available for language teachers to work individually with students using the prototype assessment tool to provide sufficient data across grades and abilities; and
- ◆ that existing proficiency rating scales for other languages would provide sufficient material that would be useful in constructing and refining proficiency rating scales that would be appropriate for use with First Nations languages.

### *Delimitations*

This study was limited to language teachers and their students in School Districts #58, 73, and 74 and selected Band-operated schools in the south-central interior of British Columbia and included the following four language groups of the Interior Salish nations – St'at'imc, (Lillooet); Nle?kepmx, (Thompson); Secwepemc, (Shuswap); and Si'lx, (Okanagan).

### *Limitations*

Because of cultural differences inherent in languages from outside of the south-central interior region of British Columbia, the assessment tool developed through this research

project may not be generalizable. However, with some minor cultural modifications, the results may be adapted for use in other First Nations language programs and hopefully will be beneficial to other language teachers elsewhere in the province and North America.

### ***Concluding Information***

Working collaboratively with First Nations language teachers from public and Band-operated schools, the intended outcome of this research project was to develop, trial, and refine for use by First Nations language teachers, a culturally appropriate, practical, and effective method that could be used to assess First Nations language proficiency.

# Chapter Two

## *Review of the Literature*

### *Introduction*

**The purpose of this research project was to develop and trial an assessment tool to determine levels of First Nations language proficiency.** The result of this qualitative study, achieved through collaboration with practicing First Nations language teachers, is a “set” of First Nations language *Benchmarks*<sup>4</sup> that is “teacher friendly”, practical, culturally appropriate and easily administered.

Writing this chapter of the thesis has been the most difficult aspect of the entire research project. Not only has it been difficult to rationalize and pull together two diametrically opposed types of literature – literature dealing with assessment and measure of language proficiency and literature dealing with First Nations language – but the literature specific to both has been exceedingly difficult to find. Most of the work around assessing language proficiency has been done in English and European languages, while the current literature on Aboriginal language has dealt mostly with the preservation of those languages and the economic, political, spiritual, and other impacts on the preservation processes. In addition, much of the scholarly work that has been done in the specific area in which I carried out my research has been done in New Zealand and Australia, and even in this era of high-speed internet connectivity, it has been very difficult accessing information that I deemed appropriate to my research. Nonetheless, the available literature has been reviewed in support of my research and has been documented in the following pages.

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<sup>4</sup> The assessment tool/device that has been developed for this research and modified and improved during and following the two trial periods, is call the First Nations Language Benchmarks (FNLB). For purposes of brevity, they will be referred to as FNLB or the *Benchmarks*.

The **rationale** for conducting this study has been addressed in chapter one, but to summarize, First Nations language teachers have long been effective in teaching their language to students, but have not been provided with the appropriate tools to determine levels of student language proficiency. Through my discussions with many First Nations language teachers, I found that neither time nor resources have been provided for them to attend professional development opportunities designed to provide additional knowledge and understanding of assessment, nor have sufficient resources been allocated to the development of appropriate assessment tools for use in their classrooms.

Within this Chapter, a review of the literature will be accomplished by first providing an overview of the pertinent assessment terminology, followed by a detailed look at some of the current British Columbia Ministry of Education Integrated Resource Packages (IRPs) for First Nations languages, an examination of Language Proficiency Rating Scales that have served as the foundation for the development of the First Nations language *Benchmarks*, an acknowledgement of the existing First Nations language assessment literature, and finally, a few concluding remarks.

### ***Terminology***

In writing this section, I have limited the examination of terminology to those concepts that I have encountered during the conduct of this research project. As the research progressed and the *Benchmarks* were developed and refined, I found that further clarification of terms was needed and this information has been included in the chapter.

### **Assessment**

Ward and Murray-Ward (1999) define assessment as "...a synonym for educational measurement" (p. 69); Popham (2002) says that "Assessment is a ... description of the kinds of educational measuring that teachers do..." (p. 5); and Brindley (2001) says "The term *assessment* refers to a variety of ways of collecting information on a learner's language ability..." (p. 137). Various authors have extended this basic notion of

gathering information to include the processes of evaluation, interpretation, and judgment in their definitions (Lynch, 2001; McMillan, 2001; and Payne, 1997). Still others have more succinctly defined *educational assessment* as the gathering of information, the purpose of which is to make informed decisions about student performance (Johnson and Johnson, 2002; and Popham, 2002).

It is my opinion that the concept of assessment should be focused on the act of gathering information. I support the notion that the purpose of gathering information is to ultimately use it to advise and help make decisions about the value and worth of that information (evaluation), but assessment itself is the act of gathering. This is an important distinction since the core of the research that I am undertaking has to do with assessment of First Nations language proficiency and involves the gathering of information using a check-list that will ultimately help the language teacher to make decisions about the levels of language proficiency attained by students. In addition, in dealing with language teachers who participated in this project, I attempted to keep the concepts of assessment and evaluation separate. As described by Genesee and Upshur (1996), evaluation is a four step process – “...identifying purposes, collecting information, interpreting it, and making a decision....” (p. 36)

As I was trying to find the most culturally appropriate way to define the terms associated with language assessment, it occurred to me that the word “gathering” has a very significant place in Aboriginal history and culture. Peoples of the Interior Salish were hunters and gatherers and the gathering of food and other necessities of life played and still plays an important part in everyday life. I felt that it was important to make this connection when discussing how the process of language assessment was intended to work for the purposes of this project. To this end, I wrote a gathering metaphor which I used when I first met with participating language teachers:

### Gathering

The act of gathering things, whether it be food or other necessities of life, has and continues to play an important role in the lives of First Nations people, particularly those of the Interior Salish communities.

For example, the gathering of wood for fires was important in a number of ways. The fire may have been for warmth in the winter home, it may have been for cooking, either on an open fire or in a pit oven, it may have been for smoking food, it may have been for part of the tanning process when making buckskin, or it may have been for ceremonial reasons such as a sweat lodge. In each of these cases, the type and quality of wood required would likely have been different. Sometimes heat without smoke was required, sometimes smoke was desired, sometimes fast burning wood was desirable, while at other times a more slowly burning wood was better. Based on the experience of the gatherer, the appropriate type of wood would have been collected, and yet, the real proof of whether or not this was the right wood would only be evident when it actually began to burn.

This brief metaphor has been prepared to illustrate the difference between *assessment* and *evaluation*. The simple act of gathering wood is closely aligned with assessment which is the collection of information (about students), while the burning of the wood, at which time the worth of wood is determined, is illustrative of the concept of evaluation which, through a process of judgment, places a certain value on the information or data that has been collected.

### Criterion-Referenced and Norm-Referenced Assessment

One of the many dichotomies associated with language testing is norm-referenced and criterion-referenced assessment. The main distinction between these two, as identified by Cohen (1994), is that “norm-referenced assessment provides a broad indication of relative standing, while criterion-referenced assessment produces information that is more descriptive and addresses absolute decisions with respect to the instructional goal.” (p.25)

Thus, norm-referenced assessment compares a student’s result against the scores attained by other students, while criterion-referenced assessment compares an individual’s results against a criterion or standard established prior to the beginning of instruction. According to Bachman and Palmer (1996), “The primary advantage of criterion-referenced scales is that they allow us to make inferences about how much language ability a test taker has, and not merely how well she performs relative to other individuals, including native speakers. (p. 212). Based on this information, which I read early in the development and conduct of my research, I felt that criterion-referenced assessment would be the most appropriate type of instrument to develop. And, as

identified by Brown and Hudson (2002), further delineation of criterion-referenced assessment into *objectives-referenced*, *domain-referenced*, and even *individual-referenced* assessment convinced me at the time that the results of my research and development would result in a criterion-referenced form of assessment device. Based on my knowledge of how most of the First Nations language teachers I have met approached their instruction, I did not feel that a norm-referenced assessment device in which student achievement would be compared to other students would be appropriate. Moreover, the statement made by Brown and Hudson (2002), "Current criterion-referenced language testing has... moved from strict interpretation of behaviors to the underlying constructs of language performance. The focus is generally directed more at developing test instruments that reveal cognitive language proficiency and sociolinguistic ability." (p. 5), convinced me that I was headed in the right direction.

Subsequent re-examination of Brown (1996), however, has shed new light on whether the *Benchmarks* should be considered to be a criterion-referenced or a norm-referenced instrument. According to Brown, proficiency type tests, which he classifies as norm-referenced, usually focus on general skills, have a spread of scores and are usually used to determine "entry" or "exit" scores. Achievement type tests, which Brown classifies as criterion-referenced tests, usually are more specific, are usually connected directly to course objectives, and attempt to determine the degree of learning for advancement or graduation (p. 9).

My intent, in developing the *Benchmarks*, was to provide language teachers with an instrument that would give them the means to determine language proficiency through a process of continual observation of their students. The level of language proficiency of each student would be determined by comparing their ability to listen, speak, read, and write their native language in comparison to a set of "standards" which described various levels of language proficiency. Although the level of student language proficiency is determined by comparing each student's ability against a set of standards, each individual student's results are not necessarily being compared to the results of other students. In addition, the level of proficiency attained by any given student is not necessarily

dependent upon any predetermined course objectives that the language teacher may have established. Student achievement is based on the degree to which they are able to listen, speak, read, and write the language at a given point in time – some will exceed the course objectives, while others will fall short, but their level of proficiency will be measured in descriptive terms based on their own level and not based on success or failure to meet a pre-determined set of objectives. So, the *Benchmarks* are norm-referenced in that a student's level of proficiency can be measured in more general terms and usually at the beginning of a unit or course to determine current abilities or at the beginning and end to determine progress, and will usually represent a good "spread" of scores across the class, and they could be considered to be criterion-referenced in that levels of proficiency are based on comparison of a student's level of proficiency against a set of criteria (the benchmarks that have been established) and could be used to determine the degree of learning for advancement or graduation – does the student meet an established "minimum" level of language proficiency to progress to the next level or does the level of proficiency meet the secondary school language criteria established for graduation. So, are the checklists that have evolved out of the *Benchmarks* examples of norm-referenced assessment or criterion-referenced assessment? The answer is yes, a little of both!

### Assessing Language Ability

There are a number of issues associated with assessing language ability, not the least of which is the ever-increasing number of terms that have been coined in an attempt to describe how language ability is best determined. The more common terms used to describe language ability, *fluency* and *proficiency*, have been supplanted by more descriptive and technical terms such as *communicative language ability*, *communicative competence*, *grammatical competence*, *real-life approach*, *authentic assessment* and *integrative testing*, to name just a few. An examination of the meaning and use of some of these terms is necessary to ensure the complete understanding of both the context and the substance of my research.

## *Proficiency*

To begin with, it is important to define proficiency and to identify how it differs from fluency, since I am trying to develop and trial a method of determining levels of *proficiency* in First Nations language. There is not necessarily universal agreement on the definition of proficiency as it relates to language. Nunan (1992) quotes Richards (1985, p. 5), as stating “When we speak of proficiency, ... we are referring to a performance, or that is, to observable or measurable behavior,” (p. 34), and “Proficiency is always described in terms of real-world tasks, being defined with reference to specific situations, settings, purposes, activities, and so on.” (p. 34). In Nunan’s own terms, “...proficiency, simply put, refers to the ability to perform real-world tasks with a pre-specified degree of skill.” (1992, p. 35). Brown and Hudson (2002) first state “...that the underlying assumptions of proficiency directly relate to whether or not individual language components can be specified and tested validly and meaningfully.” (p. 16). They then say, “On the other hand, the general proficiency approach is based on the belief that individuals differ basically in the measurable amounts of some indivisible body of competence they possess.” (p. 17). For me, levels of *proficiency* can best be described as incremental progress toward the achievement of a high degree of knowledge or skill that implies a certain level of competence based on prior learning experiences. As opposed to *fluency* which is a much more nebulous concept that involves a broader description of the smoothness, ease, and readiness with which one is able to express themselves in a given language.

## *Proficiency Tests*

There seem to be two schools of thought on the definitive purpose of language proficiency tests. There are those who insist that proficiency tests ‘...measure how well a learner can use a language relative to a specific purpose...’ (Richards 1990, p. 16), while most others point to the general nature of such tests. Hughes (1989) says “Proficiency tests are designed to measure people’s ability in a language regardless of any training they may have had in the language.” (p. 9). Brown (1996) agrees, stating that

[proficiency tests] "...are very general in nature, and cannot be related to the goals and objectives of any particular language program." (p. 10). Brown and Hudson (2002) confirm that "Such proficiency tests can provide information about students' overall abilities in a particular language...." (p. 30); and Brindley (2001) states that "proficiency assessment refers to the assessment of general language abilities that the learner has acquired independently of any particular course of study." (p. 137) Further discussion of language proficiency assessment/testing and the implications for this research study will be included later in this chapter when language proficiency scales are addressed.

### *Communicative Competence*

The concept of *communicative competence* is one that is seen to encompass many more specific terms relating to language ability. According to Weir (1990), "Language competence is composed of the specific knowledge and skills required for operating the language systems, for establishing the meanings of utterances, for employing language appropriate to the context and for operating through language beyond the level of the sentence." (p. 8), while Hymes (1972), is quoted by Weir as insisting that "...communicative competence [includes] the ability to use the language, as well as having the knowledge which underlay actual performance." (p. 9). The most definitive work in this area, however, has been done by Brown and Hudson (2002), and according to them,

For at least the past twenty years, ...a primary emphasis has been placed on the use of communicative competence and how to assess it. This emphasis on testing communicative competence has grown from the theories of language use and the instructional methodologies that have emerged to address the concepts of communicative competence as a component of language. (p.18)

However, Brown and Hudson do have two concerns in this regard, "First, measuring functional language ability, communicative competence, or communicative language ability has become the focus of much discussion in language education, a concern which has affected language testing at many levels (Alderson and Hughes, 1981; Bachman, 1990; Bachman and Palmer, 1996; Bachman and Savignon, 1986; Hughes and Porter,

1983; McNamara, 1996; and others).” (p. 14), and, “A second concern is the application of criterion-referenced testing to testing language proficiency (Bachman, 1990; Brown, 1984, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1992, 1993, 1995a, 1995b, 1996; Carter, 1968; Cziko, 1982, 1983, 1984; Delamere, 1985; Hudson, 1989a, 1989b; Hudson and Lynch, 1984; and Henning, 1987). That is, as language testers have attempted to measure more contextualized language ability, earlier rather simplistic views of language ability have been abandoned.” (p. 14). These two concerns expressed by Brown and Hudson would seem to indicate that they are worried about the ever-increasing complexity being attached to the assessment of communicative language proficiency. This is not all negative, however, since they contend that “...frameworks of communicative competence, as noted by Bachman and Savignon (1986), extended the definition of knowledge necessary to include knowledge of language functions, and knowledge of language contexts, in addition to knowledge of grammar. Language testing methods have naturally begun to take these concerns into account.” (p. 18). Finally, Brown and Hudson (2002) contend that there are several models of communicative competence that are competing with each other for recognition. For Canale and Swain (1979), communicative competence includes “... grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence.” For Bachman (1990) “...communicative language ability was seen to include organizational competence (made up of illocutionary and sociolinguistic competencies).” And yet another concept relating to communicative competence takes into consideration the fact that “...language takes place in a setting and occurs for a purpose.” (p. 19). The implication here is that with all of these differing approaches to communicative competence and communicative language ability, the result is a variety of views of how the assessment of language proficiency can best be determined. The implications for my intended research is that rather than trying to completely re-invent the wheel, at least some adaptation of existing models would be advisable.

### *Integrative Testing*

Integrative language testing is another concept that corresponds to communicative language ability or communicative competence and may well have some implications for my research. Integrative tests are so-called by researchers because, according to Brown and Hudson (2002), they integrate or link "...two or more of the language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), two or more of the linguistic aspects of the language (like grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary), as well as less-well-understood aspects of the language (like cohesion and coherence, suprasegmentals, paralinguistics, kinesics, proxemics, pragmatics, and culture) in ways that testers [do] not precisely understand." (p. 75) Genesee and Upshur (1996) are more general in their description of integrative tests ("tests that call on a number of sub skills operating in concert") as opposed to discrete-point test which "...focus on one specific aspect of language." (p. 152). And Brown (1996), describes discrete-point and integrative tests as being at or near opposite ends of the language testing continuum, characterizing discrete-point tests as "... those which measure the small bits and pieces of a language..." and integrative tests as "...those designed to use several skills at one time, or more precisely, to employ different channels and/or modes of the language simultaneously and in the context of extended text or discourse." (p. 30). The First Nations Language Benchmarks have been developed to aid in the assessment of language proficiency in the discrete language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In addition, by using the actual wording of the descriptors, language teachers should be able to determine grammar use, pronunciation, coherence and vocabulary. Therefore, the way in which language proficiency is assessed through use of the *Benchmarks* may well fall somewhere in between communicative competence and integrative language use, since the *Benchmark* checklist contains elements that are designed to assess both.

### *Authenticity*

Another concept that deserves at least a cursory mention is authentic assessment as it relates to determining language ability or communicative competence. According to

Brown and Hudson (2002), “The differing views of communicative competence and communicative language ability produce differing views of how language tests can best assess the communicative abilities of examinees. In terms of language testing, many of the arguments basically revolve around the question of the authenticity of the test, the authenticity of the language samples used in the test, and the extent to which the test measures ‘ability to use’ (Shohamy, 1995)” (p. 19). They go on to say

The association of language ability with authenticity of language use and setting, raise[s] real issues regarding the relationship of competence and performance, given that competence can only be inferred via some sample of performance (Shohamy, 1995). The underlying assumptions here relate to considerations of the degree to which the test is an assessment of competence or an assessment of performance, in the...sense that competence refers to knowledge or ability in the language and performance refers to actual language use (Canale & Swain, 1980). (p. 19).

Brown and Hudson (2002) add, “... the growing focus on authentic performance of language fits well with a growing interest in direct performance assessment in general measurement outside of language testing circles.” (p. 22).

The concerns around the authenticity of language assessment in the research that I have undertaken is more related to the authenticity of the assessment tool and, in my opinion, depends to a great extent on the cultural appropriateness of the measurement tool. This issue will be addressed later in this chapter when I look at First Nations language assessment literature.

### *Individual – referenced Assessment*

As a final item under the heading of “terminology”, consideration of what has been called “individual-referenced assessment” is warranted. Fauss (2001) advocates the use of this type of assessment as an alternative to the more traditional criterion-referenced and norm-referenced assessment methods. He defines this method as a means by which “...each student is assessed strictly on the basis of his or her individual progress in [language] proficiency during the course, without reference to a class-wide single proficiency

standard set by the teacher or to the relative proficiencies of classmates.” (p. 1). This “method” of assessing student language proficiency, although described only in this one article, appears to me to be much more appropriate in trying to describe the research work that I have done. Since there has been significant variation in the levels of student language proficiency that have been used as “samples” for the purposes of refining the *Benchmarks*, it would make sense not to make reference to a single proficiency standard or course objectives nor to be compared with the relative proficiency of classmates. However, until more research is done in this area, “individual-referenced assessment” is yet another term coined by yet another author that may have implications for the type of assessment advocated by the *Benchmarks*, but does not necessarily completely define what I have accomplished in the design, development, and use of the *Benchmarks*.

### ***First Nations Language Integrated Resource Packages (IRPs)***

Important to the consideration of the assessment of First Nations language proficiency is reference to, and use of, provincial Integrated Resource Packages (IRPs). These publications, developed and published by the British Columbia Ministry of Education and available in most public and Band-operated schools, represent the “required” content for each curriculum subject area. They have been developed by practicing teachers as guides for classroom teachers to use in the preparation of unit and lesson plans and contain prescribed learning outcomes, suggested instructional strategies, suggested assessment strategies, and recommended resources. For most of the language IRPs developed by the Ministry of Education, the French Language IRP has been used as a template.

### **The Nle?kepmxcin (Thompson Language) IRP**

The aim of this IRP for grades 5 to 12, as stated in the introduction to the manual, is “... to enable all learners to communicate in Nle?kepmxcin and to develop an openness towards cultural diversity.” (p. 1). Also stated is “The focus of instruction and evaluation is the use of the language to perform communicative tasks, to share ideas, to acquire information, and to get things done.” Regarding assessment of Nle?kepmxcin,

according to the IRP, “In grades 5 to 7, assessment should place equal emphasis on three of the four major communication skills: listening, speaking, and reading. In grades 8 to 12, the fourth skill – writing – should be added to the list of skills assessed.: (p. 4). Further, assessment is defined as “...the systematic process of gathering information about students’ learning in order to describe what they know, what they are able to do, and what they are working towards. From the evidence and information collected in assessments, teachers describe each student’s learning and performance.” While on the surface, this statement seems straight-forward enough, for most First Nations language teachers, the question is, How do I do that? A further sample of the instructions provided for Nle?kepmxcin teachers, is the following excerpt from the IRP:

Teachers determine the purpose, aspects, or attributes of learning on which to focus the assessment. They also decide when to collect the evidence and which assessment methods, tools, or techniques are most appropriate to use. Since the emphasis is on communication, teachers should use a variety of strategies to assess emerging skills in this area. (p. 5).

Once again, there is little quarrel about the intent of these instructions. However, given the teaching qualifications and lack of opportunity to gain additional skills through regular professional development for many of the participating language teachers, these would seem to be rather onerous and overwhelming tasks and make the assessment of communicative language competence an unrealistic goal at this time.

Further examples, taken from the *Suggested Assessment Strategies* section of the Nle?kepmxcin IRP, show the complexity of the suggestions and the degree to which the onus is placed on the language teachers to understand, develop, and use assessment tools to assess and evaluate student language ability.

- ◆ Discuss assessment criteria with students before they present the dialogues they have practiced. Point out that communicating meaning is most important, all criteria are related to whether or not the dialogue successfully conveys a message. These criteria could be the basis for a checklist or rating scale for teacher, peer, and self-assessment. (p. 34)

- ◆ Collaborate with students to develop a short checklist or chart showing the information skills they are developing. They can choose a way of tracking their progress on each skill (e.g. a simple rating scale, symbols, recording the date they accomplish each item). (p. 44)
  
- ◆ In written presentations, look for evidence of features such as:
  - clear and relevant information;
  - varied vocabulary, more specific word choice; appropriate structures;
  - simple sentences with increasing detail
  - surface features (e.g. letter formation, spelling) do not obscure meaning (p. 42)

In the above example, the concern is not that the language teacher would not be able to perform the assessment (gathering of the information), but what frame of reference does the teacher use to evaluate the quality and worth of this information? I do not mean to be overly critical of the contents of the IRPs – there has been much effort and dedication put into producing this publication – but what I am concerned about is the lack of specific direction and offering of specific means of conducting meaningful assessment that will yield tangible results for both teachers and students. What is needed by the majority of First Nations language teachers are practical assessment tools; tools that will allow those teachers to more easily collect the information they need to make informed decisions about the language proficiency of their students. It is the purpose of this research project to provide such a system for First Nations language teachers.

### ***Language Proficiency Rating Scales***

Some authors, including Brown (1996), have pondered in their writing about whether to adopt, develop, or adapt language assessment devices when faced with a situation in which they have to assess language ability or competence. Brown (1996) for example, indicates that there are a number of factors that will determine whether or not a language teacher will develop a test, adopt an existing test, or adapt an existing test to suit the circumstances in which the information is being gathered. Brown (1996) has divided these factors into “theoretical issues” such as language teaching methodology, skills-based issues, the competence/performance issue, and the discrete-point/integrative issue

(previously addressed in this chapter), (pp 22-32); and “practical issues” – such as cost, fairness, and logistical issues – ease of test construction, ease of test administration, and ease of test scoring. (pp. 31-35). For the purposes of my research, because it is taking place in a First Nations environment and because there are no available assessment tools that will precisely meet the needs of the language teachers participating in this study, it is most appropriate to “borrow” formats and procedures from existing language assessment devices and adapt them to this project. I will be using some of the following models to develop an appropriate assessment tool.

### ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines

American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines, first developed in 1986, along with the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI), have been described as “the cornerstone of the proficiency movement.” (Cardenas 2003 unpublished). The ACTFL (speaking) proficiency guidelines were amended in 1999, and identify, by means of descriptive benchmarks, levels of proficiency labeled as *superior*, *advanced* (low, medium, and high), *intermediate* (low, medium, and high), and *novice* (low, medium, and high), for a total of 10 different levels of proficiency.

### ALTE Framework

The Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) was conceived in 1989 by the University of Cambridge (England) and the University of Salamanca (Spain) in an attempt to establish common levels of proficiency and standards which would be recognized in Europe. The *ALTE Framework* published in the *ALTE Handbook of European Language Examinations and Examination Systems*, (ALTE, 1998), consists of five different levels of proficiency, namely, *waystage user*, *threshold user*, *independent user*, *competent user*, and *good user*. Each of these levels of proficiency is described first, in general terms, and then in terms of “productive skills”. This scale, although well conceived, is not, in my opinion, as appropriate for the First Nations context as the

ACTFL *Proficiency Guidelines* are, and therefore might be somewhat less useful for language teachers.

### ILR Language Skill Level Descriptions

The Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Language skill Descriptions were in existence prior to the establishment of the ACTFL *Proficiency Guidelines* and in fact were used in the adaptive process to develop the ACTFL guidelines. The ILR descriptions include 11 different levels of proficiency from “no proficiency” at 0 to functional native proficiency at 5.

### CLB

The Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) were established in 2000 by the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks and are described as “a descriptive scale of communicative proficiency in English as a Second Language (ESL) expressed as 12 benchmarks or reference points.” (Pawlikowska-Smith, 2000; p. XI). The CLB consist of three stages, stage 1 – basic, stage 2 – intermediate, and stage 3 – advanced, with four benchmarks within each of the stages that are called *initial*, *developing*, *adequate*, and *fluent*, making 12 levels in each of speaking, listening, writing, and reading. These stages and benchmarks are well laid out and evenly progressive from stage to stage, and this is one of the models I used in a process of adaptation of other language assessment tools to produce an appropriate model for use with First Nations language teachers in my study. Table 1 (p. 28) provides a comparison of the *ILR Language Skill Level Descriptions*, the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines*, the *ALTE Framework*, and *Canadian Language Benchmarks*. Table 2 (p. 29) illustrates the First Nations Language Benchmarks as compared to the four other scales previously described and presented in Table 1.

The language proficiency frameworks of the four rating scales represent guidelines established by reputable national and international organizations. These scales have been used and proven over the years to provide reliable means of determining levels of

language proficiency. The scales all contain multiple levels of language proficiency discrimination, with the average number of levels being between 9 and 10. For the purposes of this research project, I used the Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000 scale as the one most appropriate to borrow from. Obviously being Canadian was a factor in my decision to use the CLB framework, but equally important was the fact that it was the most recently published material and had been developed using other rating scales to guide the work of the writers. In the final analysis, the prototype of the FNLB was designed to identify nine levels of language proficiency (3 stages with 3 levels within each stage). Illustration 1 (p. 30) is a graphic representation of the First Nations Language Benchmarks.

### ***First Nations Language Assessment***

#### First Nations Language Assessment Literature

This has been the most frustrating aspect of the research I have been engaged in. There is very little to report in the way of First Nations literature in this field, perhaps underlining the importance of undertaking research on the assessment of First Nations language proficiency. Over the past three years, I have found virtually no literature specifically relating to the research I have done. There may well be others who are progressing on a journey that is not unlike mine, but like me, they have not yet published their results nor have they publicized their work in this area. As my research continues beyond the completion of this thesis and I come in contact with more and more people interested in the assessment of First Nations language proficiency, perhaps more documentation of this specific type of language assessment will become available. As of this writing, most of the literature around First Nations language deals with preserving native languages and with development of resources necessary to teach the language in schools and in First Nations communities. (Battiste & Barman, 1995; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; FNEESC, 1998; Hampton, 1993; and Kipp, 2000). There has most likely been other research in this area, but to date I have been unable to locate it.

**Table 1. – Comparison of Proficiency Rating Scales**

<b>ILR</b>	<b>ACTFL</b>	<b>ALTE</b>	<b>CLB</b>
5			
Functional Native Proficiency			Advanced – Fluent
4+		5 – Good User	Advanced - Adequate
4	Superior		Advanced – Developing
Advanced Professional Proficiency			
3+		4 – Competent User	Advanced Initial
3			
General Professional Proficiency			Intermediate – Fluent
2+	Advanced - High		
	Advanced - Mid	3 – Independent User	Intermediate – Adequate
2			Intermediate – Developing
Limited Working Proficiency	Advanced - Low		
			Intermediate – Initial
1+	Intermediate - High		
	Intermediate - Mid	2 - Threshold User	Basic – Fluent
1			
Elementary Proficiency	Intermediate - Low		Basic - Adequate
0+	Novice – High		Basic – Developing
	Novice - Mid	1 – Waystage user	Basic – Initial
0 – No Proficiency	Novice - Low		

**Table 2. – Comparison of Proficiency Rating Scales (First Nations Language Benchmarks – FNLB- added)**

ILR	ACTFL	FNLB	ALTE	CLB
5				
Functional Native Proficiency				Advanced – Fluent
		Stage 3 - Accomplished		
4+			5 - Good User	
				Advanced - Adequate
4		Stage 3 - Progression		
Advanced Professional Proficiency	Superior			Advanced – Developing
		Stage 3 - Developmental		
3+			4 - Competent User	
				Advanced Initial
3		Stage 2 - Accomplished		
General Professional Proficiency				Intermediate – Fluent
	Advanced High	Stage 2 - Progression		
2+			3 - Independent User	Intermediate – Adequate
	Advanced Mid			
2		Stage 2 - Developmental		Intermediate – Developing
Limited Working Proficiency	Advanced - Low			
				Intermediate – Initial
	Intermediate - High	Stage 1 - Accomplished		
1+			2 - Threshold User	
	Intermediate - Mid			Basic – Fluent
1		Stage 1 - Progression		
Elementary Proficiency	Intermediate Low			Basic - Adequate
	Novice – High	Stage 1 - Developmental		Basic – Developing
0+			1 - Waystage user	
	Novice - Low			Basic – Initial
0 – No Proficiency	Novice - Low			

**Illustration 1**

**FIRST NATIONS LANGUAGE BENCHMARKS**

Stage I

Stage II

Stage III

	Stage I			Stage II			Stage III		
	Developmental	Progression	Accomplished	Developmental	Progression	Accomplished	Developmental	Progression	Accomplished
Speaking									
Listening									
Writing									
Reading									

Benchmarks

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

Stages:

- I Basic
- II Intermediate
- II Advanced

Proficiency Levels:

- 1 Developmental
- 2 Progression
- 3 Accomplished

## Cultural Appropriateness

There are a number of factors around cultural appropriateness that I have taken into consideration. The cultural appropriateness of the research methodologies (to be addressed in the next chapter) has been assured; the cultural appropriateness of the actual assessment tool(s) that were developed to carry out the research was assured; and the cultural appropriateness of the approach to the entire research project by this non-Native researcher have been taken in consideration. The issue of attempting to fit traditional methods of assessing First Nations language proficiency into the current public and Band-operated school “systems” of assessment, evaluation, and reporting is also one that has been factored into the research and is more fully discussed in Chapter 4.

As a non-native researcher who was undertaking collaborative work with First Nations language teachers, I learned much from the work of Haig-Brown (1988), and Haig-Brown and Archibald (1996). In her doctoral thesis, *Resistance and Renewal: Surviving the Indian Residential School*, (1988), Haig-Brown was in a similar situation and devoted an entire appendix to discussion of the implications of her study, one of which is the way in which research is carried out in First Nations communities by non-native researchers. She stressed that “Listening and learning must form the basis for cross-cultural research.” (p. 162). And, “Acceptance of all people’s experience as legitimate and the sharing of perceptions and biases in true efforts to arrive at common understanding create the possibility for fruitful action.” (p. 162). In the same way, it was important for me to respect the knowledge and abilities of all of the First Nations language teachers who participated in this research project and to honour the methods they employed in teaching the language and in assessing and evaluating student progress.

Along with a collaborative approach to try and ensure that the entire research project was culturally grounded, I tried to focus on the cultural appropriateness of the actual assessment tool itself. Although there is extensive literature dealing with the development of language assessment devices, for example Brown (1996) and Bachman and Palmer (2000), both deal extensively with the development of language tests, The

examples they use deal primarily with English as a second language and with other languages that traditionally have had a written and spoken component. Much of the work of Brown and Bachman & Palmer on test construction is informative, but there is a negligible amount of information that deals with the development of culturally appropriate language testing devices for predominantly oral languages. Further exploration of work done by Brindley (1986 and 1995) with Aboriginal people in Australia is warranted, however much of the published work is not readily available in Canada and although most likely quite appropriate, has been largely unavailable during the research process.

Finally, trying to reconcile the substantial differences between how First Nations languages were traditionally taught and assessed and how English is currently taught and assessed was a vital concern. As indicated by Leavitt (1991), "For teachers, the most significant differences between English and the Indian and Inuit languages are to be found in their ways of conceptualizing, preserving, and transmitting knowledge." (p. 269). The dilemma that I faced was how to develop a culturally appropriate assessment tool that, by utilizing traditional methods of First Nations language instruction and assessment, that would provide results that were meaningful to language teachers and students and that were reportable in a non-traditional manner. Whether or not this was successful is discussed more fully in Chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis.

### ***Concluding Material***

In summary, the purpose of this research project has been to develop and trial a "made for teachers" assessment tool to determine levels of First Nations language proficiency. The pre-research intent was that the assessment tool would be culturally appropriate and easily administered. The end result is a "set" of First Nations language *Benchmarks* that hopefully will have wider applicability in other First Nations languages.

Having worked with language teachers over the past years and having the experience of developing First Nations language curriculum for public schools, I have become aware of

the need for more “teacher friendly” methods of assessing language ability. By accessing a wide variety of scholarly resources, by collaborating with language teachers, and by combining and focusing our energy, we have been able to develop and refine a practical assessment tool that bridges the gap between teacher knowledge and understanding of language assessment and the materials and resources currently “provided” in the language IRPs.

Although an attempt has been made to define some of the terminology associated with language assessment, and to some extent that has been accomplished, the determination or quantification of First Nations language *ability/proficiency/competence* remains a difficult concept for this researcher and First Nations language teachers to fully comprehend. And even if First Nations language proficiency is appropriately defined, how can it be assessed? But then, this is the reason that I undertook research in First Nations language assessment in the first place – to develop a more culturally appropriate method of *assessing language proficiency*. Details on how successful this research was are contained in succeeding Chapters 4, 5, and 6

# *Chapter Three*

## *Conducting Research in a First Nations Educational Context*

### *Introduction*

The contents of this chapter will address a wide range of important issues relevant to conducting research in a First Nations educational context. Specifically, I will discuss the issues associated with carrying out collaborative research with First Nations language teachers, the purpose of which is to develop a means to assess First Nations language proficiency. The discussion will also encompass broader issues of researching within the First Nations community and touch on historical, political, social, cultural, and economic issues associated with the manner in which this collaborative research has been organized and managed.

One of the most compelling reasons for the development of a means of assessing First Nations language proficiency is that I have identified the need based on my own involvement in the development of First Nations language curriculum. However, it is important to emphasize that this research project is based on the needs of First Nations language teachers as they themselves have identified those needs. Why I consider this to be so important will be discussed later in this chapter.

Additionally, another purpose of this chapter will be to bridge the gap between Chapter 2 (Literature Review) and Chapter 4 (Methodology). In *Chapter 2*, relevant items that provide links between what has been established by a thorough review of the literature and the importance of conducting research in a First Nations educational context, include: the cultural appropriateness of gathering (p. 13); defining language proficiency (p. 15); communicative competence in a First Nations educational context (p. 16); authentic assessment in a First Nations educational context (p. 19); cultural appropriateness of research (p. 26); and the lack of First Nations assessment literature (p. 26). This latter item may stem from the fact that all Aboriginal languages in Canada were, prior to contact with

Europeans, based on oral traditions, and until the advent of re-learning their language in an academic setting, there was not a reason nor a need to measure levels or degrees of proficiency in the language – you either spoke and understood the language and could engage in communication in a meaningful way or you could not. Other reasons for the lack of literature which focuses specifically on the assessment of language proficiency is that a great deal of emphasis has been placed on preserving Native languages, developing language curricula for re-teaching First Nations language, and developing teaching resources to deliver the language curriculum. As in many other circumstances, assessment and evaluation are either ignored or left for others to carry out as “a necessary evil”.

The content contained in this chapter will link with a number of items in *Chapter 4*, namely: guiding principles of the research methodology - collaborative research, openness and transparency, and contextual appropriateness (cultural basis) (p. 32); measuring language proficiency (the research purpose) (p. 35); adaptation of existing models to determine language proficiency (p. 36); and the collection of the data – working with First Nations language teachers (p. 47).

### ***Researching in a First Nations Context***

For purposes of this thesis, I define research in a First Nations context as working with First Nations language teachers who are teaching their (local) First Nations language to students from kindergarten to grade 12. The context is educational in nature, as all teaching occurs in an educational setting in a variety of different types of schools and educational jurisdictions. These include public elementary, middle, and secondary schools, Band-operated elementary and secondary schools, and language immersion programs that are both community-based and school-based.

The following is a description of the three types of educational contexts in which First Nations language is being taught and where collaborative research with First Nations language teachers is being conducted for this study.

### Public Schools

All of the primary, intermediate, and secondary public schools in School Districts No. 58 (Merritt/Similkameen), No. 73 (Kamloops/Thompson), and No. 74 (Gold Trail) come under Provincial jurisdiction and are guided by British Columbia Ministry of Education laws, regulations, and guidelines. Some of these regulations and guidelines include: the mandatory teaching of a “second” language in grades 5 to 8 inclusive; certain minimum requirements of the number of hours of instruction per week in the intermediate grades; and the inclusion of several First Nations languages as meeting the second language requirement for graduation from Secondary School.<sup>5</sup> In all of the schools in which research is being carried out, the First Nations language is not spoken exclusively in the classroom (English is often used to give more complex instructions) and much of the content of the language courses is cultural activity such as the preparation of food, the design and creation of crafts, and discussion of customs and traditions from both the traditional and contemporary perspectives.

### Band-operated Schools

In Band-operated schools,<sup>6</sup> which are organized and administered under guidelines established by the Federal Government (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada), First Nations language and culture programs are one of the mainstays of the curriculum. Although the language programs operate much the same as in the public school system, it is usually taught more frequently (normally 4-5 days per week) and it is much more an integral part of the total curriculum than it is in the public school system. Moreover, one of the main reasons for the establishment of Band-operated schools is the political will and community spirit to preserve their own language and culture and is therefore considered a more important component of school life than in the public system. Language programs at Band-

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<sup>5</sup> Currently there are seven First Nations languages recognized by the British Columbia Ministry of Education as part of the prescribed curriculum: Heiltsuk, Okanagan, Secwepemctsin, Shashishalhem, Sim'algaḅhl Nisga'a, Sm'algyax (Algyagm Ts'msyen), and Upper St'at'imcets. All 7 of these languages are accepted as credit toward secondary school graduation.

<sup>6</sup> As of the 2003/2004 school year, there are 126 Band-operated schools in British Columbia. (First Nations Schools Association)

operated schools are also characterized by a greater degree of parental and Elder participation in the program and this tends to make these programs more authentic.

### First Nations Language Immersion Programs

First Nations language immersion programs, which includes “language nests”, make up the third type of school language program being researched. A full immersion program means that all of the subjects in the curriculum are being taught in the First Nations language (except for English language arts). Language nests are community-based programs that are structured like a nursery/daycare with a pre-school component. These language nests are staffed with fluent language speakers (teachers and Elders) who speak only the First Nations language to participating children, usually in the age range of 1 to 4 years of age. There is definitely a greater degree of community and political will required for these types of programs, since the schools must be staffed with certified teachers who are also fluent in their language – something which is quite rare in the First Nations communities in which the research is being conducted. There is only one known full immersion program in British Columbia, that being Chief Atahm School of the Adams Lake Band near Chase, British Columbia. Obviously, in these types of programs, language and culture are highly integrated into the curriculum and provide students with opportunities to learn their native language and culture in an appropriate educational setting. The one shortfall in these programs is that students are not often able to reinforce their learning of the language at home since, for a variety of reasons, most of the parents/guardians of the students do not speak the language.

### The Teaching Environment

The teaching environments in which this project has taken place represent a wide range of grade levels in both the public school system and in Band-operated schools. In Lillooet the two participating First Nations language teachers are teaching in two elementary schools in classrooms ranging from kindergarten to grade 7; in Chase, in the secondary school, grades 8 to 12 are represented and in the Band-operated school of the Adams Lake Indian Band, kindergarten to grade 10 in a language immersion program as well as a “language nest”

program for pre-schoolers represents a wide scope; and in Merritt, there are three First Nations language teachers, one teaches grades 4 to 7 in two elementary schools, one teaches grades 8 – 10 in a middle school, and the other teaches grades 11 and 12 in a senior secondary school. As can be seen, this represents the complete spectrum of students from kindergarten to grade 12 as well as both the public school system and a Band-operated immersion school, and underlines the practicality of using the *Benchmarks* in all grades in all types of schools.

### Teaching versus Learning First Nations Language

As progress has been made on the development and piloting of a device to assess First Nations language proficiency, a question about teaching and learning a First Nations language has arisen. Are “teaching a First Nations language” and “learning a First Nations language” the same or are they two different issues? It would seem to me that the intent on someone’s part to *teach* the language may have its roots in political and/or community will, which could involve issues such as culture, economy, and language preservation, while someone who is *learning* the language may look at the process more from a pragmatic neo-moralistic perspective – pragmatic in that it is one of the practical ways to be able to continue to communicate with Elders and other fluent speakers in the community, and moralistic in the sense that some First Nations people may feel that they have a moral responsibility to learn the language as a way of strengthening their culture and identity and preserving a way of life.

### ***Indigenous Research***

There are a number of issues that impact research in the First Nations educational context, including historical, political, social, cultural, spiritual, and economic – to name only a few. Each of these will be examined in turn, in order to place the research in the appropriate context.

### Political and Historical Issues

The political issues around First Nations language are many and varied. “Aboriginal Elders who speak their languages, [and] younger people who mourn their loss, point to the connection of Aboriginal languages with culture, and with one’s roots and identity.” (Ignace 1998, p. 24). In this regard, language *is* culture (neither is mutually exclusive of the other) and if Canada’s First Nations people are to retain their identity in the face of government attempts at assimilation, preservation of language is an essential component of any strategy to establish and maintain a presence in the fabric of Canadian life. As the late Secwepemc Elder Nellie Taylor said, “without your language you’re nothing, you are like a white person, lost and without a home.” (Ignace 1998, p. 24) Many First Nations language programs have political origins, both in Band-operated and public schools, and serve as one of the many means to retain cultural identity. Chiefs and Councillors, the political representatives of their communities, usually stand behind any initiative from within the community to promote programs to preserve or revitalize their native language and as stated by Ignace (1998), “Canadian aboriginal peoples see their ancestral languages as a right protected in the Constitution, in Treaties (where they exist), and in international law.” (p. 24). Thus, the political and legal connections to the teaching and learning of First Nations language are strong and are essential to the continued expansion of language education programs in schools where there are First Nations students. Although obvious, the strong historical importance of revitalizing First Nations languages through teaching in public and Band-operated schools will be further emphasized in the next section.

### Social, Cultural, and Spiritual Issues

A sense of the strength, necessity, and urgency of the social, cultural, and spiritual issues around teaching and learning First Nations languages is central to a statement made by the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) in 1993:

The Aboriginal languages were given by the Creator as an integral part of life. Embodied in Aboriginal languages is our unique relationship to the Creator, our attitudes, our beliefs, values, and the fundamental notion of what is truth. Aboriginal language is an asset to one’s own education, formal and in-

formal. Aboriginal language contributes to greater pride in the history and culture of the community; greater involvement and interest of the parents in the education of their children, and greater respect for Elders. Language is the principal means by which culture is accumulated, shared and transmitted from generation to generation. The key to identity and retention of culture is one's ancestral language.

(Cited in Ignace 1998, p. 25)

Other indicators of the importance of social, cultural, and spiritual aspects of teaching and learning First Nations language are contained in the following statements that emphasize the positive effects of learning an Aboriginal language on personal well-being:

The ability to speak one's language has a positive impact on personal and collective self-esteem, identity, and sense of cultural and personal belonging.

[Language programs] must be linked to the improvement or restoration of spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional wholeness of the community and its members.

Aboriginal people in British Columbia will best be able to develop their individual potential and contribute to a healthy society and a prosperous and sustainable national economy if they are able to retain and revitalize their aboriginal languages which connect them to their roots and identity.

(Ignace, 1998, p. 25)

Still further evidence of connections between spirituality and the learning and teaching of First Nations language has been collected through discussion with a variety of First Nations people, most of whom are experienced educators and language teachers. A discussion about the relationship between spirituality and teaching/learning a First Nations language is not easily supported by research and certainly from my own non-First Nations perspective, it is even difficult to determine what the appropriate questions are to ask about this relationship. I began by speaking with Verna Miller, a member of the Cooks Ferry Band and Nle?kepmx Nation about her understanding of the connections between spirituality and

First Nations language and culture. The following three quotes are taken from that discussion:

Because of the 'life-ways' of First Nations people (a holistic view of life), nothing is mutually exclusive and therefore it is inappropriate to isolate any aspect of life from language and culture.

For example, some aspects of the 'life process', like a naming ceremony, are not meaningful in a second language. This emphasizes the importance of learning and knowing a First Nations language in a spiritual context.

A teacher's understanding of the language and how to assess proficiency would seem to me to be particularly important in a spiritual context and would depend upon their own spiritual perspective. (Verna Miller, Dec. 16, 2003)

I have initiated similar discussions with other First Nations teachers and educators on the topic of the relationship between spirituality and learning/teaching First Nations language and their responses contain many of the same concepts. In a discussion in December, 2003 with 3 First Nations educators, the following sentiments were expressed:

The way we feel about something is communicated differently in a First Nations language than in English – it is almost as if there is a spiritual connection between the [native] language and one's senses – the taste, smell, touch of something seems to have a different meaning in the [native] language. Also, when you learn a new word from an Elder – it's as if there is an inter-generational connection in the learning process and this gives a greater degree of understanding and a spiritual connection with that person. (Kathy Michel, Dec. 30, 2003)

It is important when talking about place names to actually be there to experience what that place is like because of the [spiritual] connection to the land. It is much different than looking at a place on a map, which is really just a representation of the actual place and carries with it no "feeling" for what the place is like. When you are learning new words at a specific location like that, it is as if you are also being connected to all others who have been there and experienced that location. This gives learning a language a spiritual meaning. (Robert Matthew, Dec. 30, 2003)

When you hear an Elder saying a word, it gives it a special meaning. In my opinion, First Nations people 'process' words and meanings in a different manner – they don't process it directly through the intellect, but rather it is processed through body and spirit, based on who said it. This makes

learning a First Nations language a very special and spiritual experience, particularly for the older learners. (Jean York, Dec. 30, 2003)

There is also a spiritual connection to language through the 'root' of various words. Even when a new word is made up in a First Nations language, it is derived from an older root word and this often results in a spiritual connection to the object or action. (Kathy Michel, Dec. 30, 2003)

As noted by Ignace (1998), a 1991 report produced by the First Nations Congress titled *First Nations Aboriginal Languages Policy and Program Considerations*, provides a fitting quote which, in my opinion, summarizes the spiritual aspect of First Nations languages. "To speak your Aboriginal language means more than just speaking. Our languages are tied to knowing who you are in the core of your soul." (p. 24)

Traditional and contemporary economic issues associated with language programs in public and Band-operated schools are more difficult to identify. From a traditional economic perspective, it makes a great deal of sense for students to have a good working knowledge of their language. Such activities as hunting, fishing, and gathering, combined with trade and bartering are still practiced by many First Nations people. The use of First Nations language, particularly when dealing with Elders and other fluent speakers, gives First Nations students a much closer connection to the appropriateness and authenticity of the activities they are engaging in than if they were using English. Although many First Nations communities have resolved to make their own language the language of everyday business, this is currently neither feasible nor practical, since the majority of adults in First Nations workplaces do not speak or understand their language well enough to conduct complex and demanding business communications on a daily basis. From a contemporary economic perspective, with the growing tourism and eco-tourism business opportunities within British Columbia, there will undoubtedly be Aboriginal business ventures that will require a language and culture component as an integral part of the business plan. For this reason alone, the importance of ensuring that the current generation of First Nations students have the opportunity to learn to understand and speak their own language cannot be overstated.

### Non-Native Researcher Involved in First Nations Research

One of the most troubling aspects of developing and conducting this Indigenous research project is the fact that I am non-Native. Although I have worked in First Nations communities and in the field of First Nations education for over 10 years, that alone cannot compensate for or change the fact that I am a non-Native person carrying out research amongst First Nations people. Smith (2001) states “When undertaking research, either across cultures or within a minority culture, it is critical that researchers recognize the power dynamic which is embedded in the relationship with their subjects.” (p. 176) This concern about a power differential, whether real or perceived, is an important one for my research. As a non-Native academic who has in the recent past been a School Trustee, I must be particularly vigilant about any possible power differentials, since the relationship that I have with the language teachers is one that must be based on mutual trust if the collection of data is to be effective, meaningful, and authentic.

Graham Smith, (1992) has proposed four models through which culturally appropriate research can be carried out by non-Native researchers. These models are: “*the mentoring model*, in which authoritative [Native people] guide and sponsor the research; *the adoption model* in which ... the researcher is incorporated into the daily life of [Native] people; *the ‘power sharing model’* where researchers ‘seek the assistance of the community to meaningfully support the development of a research enterprise’; and *the ‘empowering outcomes’ model* which addresses the sorts of questions ... people want to know and which has beneficial outcomes.” (p. 177) Hopefully through a collaborative approach with First Nations language teachers, a basic knowledge and understanding of the culture and languages of those I am working with, and through an understanding of the need for a means to determine language proficiency expressed by many language teachers, I will be working in the ‘empowering outcomes model’ to address the needs of First Nations language teachers and to produce results that will be beneficial to them and other First Nations language teachers as well.

Haig-Brown (1988) writes “...non-Native people in general and academics in particular have often been rightfully accused of approaching Native culture and experience in an

insensitive and exploitive way....”, and that after having consulted with members of the Secwepemc Cultural Education Society about her intended research, she “...felt more confident that [her] work would not simply be an ethnocentric academic exercise, but that it might prove useful and enlightening to the Shuswap in the work for positive education for their people.” (p. 155) I can only hope that by having had previous contact with many of the language teachers, and by seeking permission from Band Chiefs and Councils, School Districts, and school staffs, that the intents and processes of my research are accepted as a genuine desire to assist language teachers to effectively assess First Nations language proficiency.

In spite of the fact that I have known many of the teachers for a number of years and am comfortable working with them, I am not fluent in any of the languages that are represented in the study and I am not currently working in any of the schools in which the language is being taught. My contact with the language teachers, therefore, is quite infrequent and has not typically involved contact with their students, although on one or two occasions, I have been invited by the language teacher to visit his or her class. I have struggled with the fact that I have initiated this research and although I have been able to discuss aspects of the research with the language teachers and have received confirmation from them that this is indeed a project that has merit and that a means of assessing First Nations language proficiency is needed, there have been times when I have felt like I was “an intruder” in their world and in their culture. I am not sure this is the case; nonetheless, I do have this concern and I have the feeling that somehow the relationship I have with the language teachers may be one that could have some effect on the results of this research. It is possible that when I was collecting the final data from the teachers that they were telling me “what I wanted to hear” rather than telling me forthrightly what they actually thought about the research project and the usefulness of the *Benchmarks* as a device suitable for the assessment of First Nations language proficiency. Likewise, I am also perplexed by the statement made by Karen Swisher in her essay “Why Indian People Should Be the Ones to Write about Indian Education” (In Mihesuah, 1998) where she states “If non-Indian educators have been involved in Indian education because they believe in Indian people and want them to be empowered, they must now demonstrate that belief by stepping aside.”

While on a philosophical level I agree with the statement, on a pragmatic level, I feel that this research project has merit and that the results, based on a collaborative approach, are as valid as if the project had been undertaken by a Native researcher. Other researchers have expressed quite different views on this topic. Duane Champagne (1998) for example, states “To say that only Indians can study Indians goes too far toward excluding American Indian culture and history from the rest of human history and culture. One does not have to be a member of a culture to understand what culture means or to interrupt a culture in a meaningful way.” (p. 182) And Smith (2001) states “Culturally sensitive approaches to research cover a wide range of attempts to take heed of the problems and issues which concern the people involved in the research. For [native people] this has involved efforts by researchers to inform the ‘researched’ about themselves in a way which respects people.” (p.176) This principle, too, is one that has informed me about how to conduct the research, how to collect data from the language teachers, how to report on what the research has revealed, and about the most effective way to present the recommendations that I have made about the future use of this method of assessing First Nations language proficiency.

### ***Local First Nations Language and Education History***

At the centre of many of the current difficulties associated with First Nations education and with the revitalization of First Nations language and culture is the legacy left by Indian Residential schools. As stated by Haig-Brown (1988), “the federal government saw the schools as essential to educating the Indian to an agrarian lifestyle and ultimately to assimilation into a ‘superior’ European society.” (p.29). Another telling quote, made by Prentice and Houston (1975) from *The Province of Canada*, a report published in 1847 based on the ideas of Egerton Ryerson, was one of a number of recommendations which were to form the basis for future policy directions regarding Indian education:

Their education must consist not merely of the training of the mind, but of weaning from the habits and feelings of their ancestors, and the acquirements of the language, arts and customs of civilized life.  
(Haig-Brown, 1988 p. 29)

By stating that students must acquire "...language, arts and customs of civilized life.", the Federal Government, by establishing the Indian Residential School system was indirectly suggesting that First Nations language, art, and customs were not civilized and therefore should be extinguished. This has been aptly stated by Randy Fred: "The elimination of language has always been a primary stage in a process of cultural genocide. This was the primary function of the residential school." (from Foreword in Haig-Brown (1988), p. 15)

This deliberate attempt to extinguish the language and culture of the students who attended residential schools in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, unfortunately did not stop with those students. The effects on those who attended residential school is still being felt by today's students, largely through the influence it had on their great-grandparents, grandparents, and parents. The abusive behaviour of residential school principals, staff, and teachers toward First Nations students and the severe disciplinary measures taken for even the most minor transgressions has been well documented. One of the disciplinary actions reported by Randy Fred as being inflicted on his father for speaking his native language, was to push "... sewing needles through his tongue, a routine punishment for language offenders." (Haig-Brown 1988, p. 16) There can be little doubt that these and other such punishments are responsible for the fact that most First Nations adults cannot speak their primary language and why many First Nations people are still not very comfortable about participating in contemporary educational activities. In fact, many First Nations adults who are primary or secondary recipients of the residential school legacy, still do not feel at ease when venturing into most public schools.

The many and far-reaching impacts that Indian Residential Schools have had on the language and education of First Nations people have been well documented elsewhere, in particular by Haig-Brown (1988), The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), Chrisjohn, (1997) and Young-Ing, (1999). But what has happened since the closure of the Indian residential schools in British Columbia? Before the advent of Band-operated schools, most First Nations students attended elementary and secondary school in the public school system (some attended private day schools). This has by no means been an easy transition, and in many jurisdictions the public school system has failed to learn from

the residential school experience of First Nations students. In areas of the province where there are significant percentages of First Nations students attending public schools, the sheer numbers of First Nations students has forced local school boards, administrators and teachers to become more aware of the needs of First Nations students. And many of these groups have begun to listen to First Nations parents, Elders, and political representatives of First Nations communities regarding the educational needs of their children.

In many school districts First Nations Education Councils have been formed to oversee the expenditures of provincial government funding targeted for educational programs that support First Nations students. This has led to emphasis on First Nations language and culture programs in schools where there are significant First Nations populations and has begun to produce more favourable success rates for First Nations students because of the extra educational support that the targeted funding provides. In School District #73 (Kamloops/Thompson) for example, based on Annual Reports from the District First Nations Education Council and recent Enhancement Agreements with the Provincial Ministry of Education, there have been steady increases in First Nations student performance and decreases in student drop-out rates over the past 8 years. Also based on the leadership of First Nations Education Councils, First Nations language programs have begun to flourish in many areas. This has resulted in First Nations language programs being recognized by the British Columbia Ministry of Education and institutions of higher learning, as bona fide credits for secondary school graduation and acceptance into college and university.

Band-operated schools across Canada began to be established approximately thirty years ago as a result of the *Indian Control of Indian Education* Policy Paper (1972). The primary source of financial support for these schools comes from the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and not the Provincial Ministry of Education. The main purpose behind the establishment of such schools was to include local language and culture as a prominent part of the curriculum, while at the same time satisfying the requirement to teach the components of the provincial curriculum. Although there have been some instances where Band-operated schools have failed to flourish, there are many examples of

successes and in most of those cases, the language and culture programs have been sustaining elements of the curriculum.

### ***Language-based Education***

Inclusion of First Nations language and culture in the curriculum of public and Band-operated schools is an essential component in the revitalization of First Nations language and culture. In a 1992 Assembly of First Nations Report cited by Ignace (1998), 95% of the First Nations languages in British Columbia are either declining, endangered, or critical.<sup>7</sup> (p. 12) The report also found “an important relationship between whether a language was flourishing, declining, endangered, or critical and the amount of use it had in public within the community.” (Ignace 1998, p. 12) These basic facts about the state of First Nations languages in British Columbia emphasize the importance of including First Nations language classes in both public and Band-operated schools.

Many of the First Nations language teachers and educators that I have spoken with during this research project have stated that it is a good thing that First Nations language is being taught in public and Band-operated schools. However, they also say that being exposed to the language three to four times per week for 30 – 45 minutes at a time is insufficient to achieve a level of proficiency that will ensure the preservation of their language. The language programs that do exist are certainly better than having no instruction in the language at all. Learning enough of the language to be able to understand some of what fluent speakers are saying, most likely gives First Nations students increased pride in their culture and heritage. However, if First Nations languages are to be truly revitalized so that sufficient numbers of people in each of the language groups are fluent enough in the language to teach their children to speak their native language, more emphasis will have to be placed on school and community language immersion programs. Darrell Kipp, a *Pikuni*

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<sup>7</sup> A ***declining*** language is one in which at least 50% of the adult population and a lesser percentage of young people are speakers of the language; an ***endangered*** language is one in which fewer than 50% of the adult population speak the language and there are few, if any, young speakers, or although over 80% of the older population speak the language, there are no identified speakers under 45 years old; and a ***critical*** language is described as having less than 10 speakers or there are no known speakers living in the community. (Ignace, 1998, p. 12)

of the Blackfoot Nation and a Director of the Piegan Institute (a full immersion school in Browning, Montana), is a strong advocate of language immersion education. Concerned about the *Pikuni* becoming the next indigenous culture to lose their language and thus their connection to their ancestors, he describes in *Indigenous Educational Models for Contemporary Practice*, (Ah Nee-Benham, 2000), that what was required was "...an indigenous educational model to establish a covenant between the school and the community to promote Native language, culture, and tribal protocol instruction." (p. 61) He further described this model as one in which "...a critical, language-based curriculum ... is taught by Native teachers in a supportive, nurturing, educational environment." (p.62) A local example of a community-based language immersion program is located at the Adams Lake Band in Chase, B.C. The Chief Atahm School is an immersion school that includes grades K to 10 where instruction of the British Columbia curriculum is delivered in the Secwepemc language. The teachers are certified teachers who are either fluent in the language or are in advanced stages of re-learning their native language. The community has also begun to develop "language nests" where infants from the age of 1 year to 4 years are immersed fully in Secwepemc language three times per week for an entire day. If the First Nations people of British Columbia are to avoid extinction of their native languages, more communities will have to investigate the feasibility of beginning their own language immersion programs.

From a cultural perspective, it would be difficult to find anyone who would argue against language preservation. However, in a contemporary context there are questions that could reasonably be asked about the utility of learning a First Nations language. Questions such as "What will the language be used for?" "How can the language be made relevant for students?" "How can the language be further developed to include modern concepts such as computers, printers, and other technological advances?" These questions are not easily answered, nor will the answers be the same for each community or nation. "What will the language be used for?" may be answered as simply as "To be able to communicate with the Elders." Or, it could be as involved and complex as "It will be used to make a detailed analysis of all of the important geographical and spiritual locations within a nation's

traditional territory, taking into consideration who used the locations, what time of year they were used, and what sort of protocols were observed.”

“How can the language be made relevant for students?” could also be answered in a number of different ways depending upon local circumstances. Based on Darrell Kipp’s assertion that “all learning and teaching must be both ‘a mirror to the past and a torch to the future,’” (Ah Nee-Benham 2000, p. 62), the relevancy of the language must be directly connected to traditional and contemporary aspects of First Nations culture, spirituality, and life-ways. How this is actually accomplished in the educational setting is up to the curriculum developers and the language teachers and will depend in large part on their creativity and the degree to which they are in touch with student needs.

All languages, First Nations languages included, evolve with the times. The question “How can the language be further developed to include modern concepts such as computers, printers, and other technological advances?” might be best answered by using an example from Kipp (2000), in which he tells of some teenage students in his school who asked (in their native language) to be permitted to take a field trip to “Pizza Hut” in the nearby town. Kipp told the students that the words “Pizza Hut” did not exist in their language and that if they wanted to go there, they should “invent” a word for the place. The next day the students had decided that the Pizza Hut looked like a house with a roof that resembled a rose hip. The students knew the words for “house” and “rose hips” and so the “Pizza Hut” became the “Rose Hip House” in their language. The students were rewarded for the efforts by a field trip to the “Rose Hip House”! Similarly, new words can be added to any First Nations language using similar methods of invention, innovation, and creativity, all within the cultural context of the language.

Another factor that should be considered in the teaching of First Nations language, is observance of First Nations traditional “ways of doing things”, including teaching and learning. Haig-Brown (1998) quotes Rita Jack as saying that the Secwepemc people “...saw childhood and schooling as an inseparable part of the on-going process of life and living.” and “The methods used to teach skills for everyday living and to instill values and

principles were participation and example.” (p. 37) Likewise she quotes Mary Ashworth, who speaks about traditional education amongst tribal groups in British Columbia:

Education was the responsibility of all and it was a continuous process. Parent, grandparents, and other relatives naturally played a major role, but other members of the tribe, particularly the Elders, helped to shape the young people. (p. 37)

Although teaching First Nations language in this manner may not be feasible in a public school system, it would seem that getting students to participate actively in the learning process, teachers setting the example for students, and involving Elders and community members in the instructional process, will all help to contribute to a greater degree of acceptance on the part of students of the relevancy and utility of their language.

Similarly, as an integral part of the teaching of First Nations language, the assessment of language proficiency must also be culturally relevant and appropriate for the circumstance under which the students are being taught. Sam Suina, a Cochiti Pueblo educator, has proposed “...eight educational goals that can help us build healthy communities and raise healthy children.” Goal number 7 is stated as: “Develop teaching practices that follow traditional methods and develop evaluation processes that are non-judgemental.” (Ah Nee-Benham 2000, p. 99) Although Sam Suina may not have been directing this goal specifically at teaching and learning a native language, in my opinion it fits perfectly in that context. Since language and culture are so closely connected, the use of traditional methods to teach a First Nations language, combined with proven contemporary strategies, can only help to make instruction and learning for both teachers and students more relevant. The second half of goal number 7, which suggests that evaluation processes be non-judgemental, is at the heart of what I consider to be one of the most important aspects of assessing First Nations language proficiency. That is, it should be free of bias and be a true reflection, based on teacher observation, of student’s ability to understand and speak the language. I consider this aspect of language assessment to be extremely important and this precept will serve as one of the foundations upon which I will build the First Nations language benchmarks.

There would appear to be a strong and vital connection between the land (*Tmixw* in both the Nle?kepmx and St'at'imc languages) and the educational empowerment achieved through learning and knowing one's native language. As most Indigenous cultures are very holistic in nature, this connection between the people, the land, and the language is an intimate one. It goes without saying, then, that a sound knowledge and understanding of the language cannot be achieved without knowledge and understanding of the history of one's own territory and one's community within that territory. Kalena Silva states (in Ah Nee-Benham 2000, p. 71), that "... the land is connected to community building, Native language preservation, and cultural revitalization." The following quote from Ah Nee-Benham (2000) expands on this notion:

The passion of each Native leader is to seek official recognition of their Native language, to create policy that integrates Native language into schooling and governance, and to develop Native-based teacher education, leadership, and curriculum and instruction.  
(p. 36)

To successfully blend the importance of land, community, culture, and language requires both the political will of those responsible for community governance and the will of the community members to empower themselves and their children. Future generations of First Nations children can only be expected to learn to understand and speak their own language if all the members of their community act together with positive energy to ensure that language and culture programs in Band-operated and public schools receive the highest priority for resources.

### ***Conducting Research with First Nations Language Teachers***

I have made previous reference to the fact that I am a non-native person working with First Nations language teachers in a First Nations educational context and that this issue is of continuing concern to me. This likely begs the questions, "Whose agenda is this, anyway?" and from the language teachers' perspective, "What's in it for me?" These are two very

legitimate questions which must be addressed not only to assure the culture appropriateness of the research methodology, but also to ensure that the outcomes and any “finished products” resulting from the research are readily available, not only for those First Nations language teachers participating in the project, but also for other educators as well.

There is little doubt that the idea for this research project came about through my previous contact with First Nations language teachers in my work as a school principal and in my role as a First Nations language curriculum developer and workshop facilitator. On numerous occasions, language teachers have told me that they need assistance with the assessment component of teaching First Nations language, that there is insufficient detail in the language Integrated Resource Package, that they do not have very much experience with assessment and evaluation and that some method of determining and reporting on levels of language proficiency is urgently needed for classroom use. Following initial discussions with those First Nations language teachers who agreed to be a part of this research project, I now feel that this is not just *my* research project, but rather it is *our* research project and the resulting refinement of an assessment device that will be used by many other First Nations language teachers will be the result of a collaborative effort.

Intellectual property rights have, in recent years, become a contentious topic of discussion in many First Nations communities. First Nations people are tired of having non-native researchers amongst them, asking them questions about their knowledge and understanding of various aspects of their traditional life-ways, and then, without permission of either individuals or of the community, using that information to their own advantage, often without even acknowledging where or from whom the information came. Many First Nations people have begun to make public complaints about these practices and as a result researchers are finally beginning to become sensitized to the issues associated with Indigenous intellectual knowledge and property rights and other similar concerns. Although First Nations language cannot be considered the “intellectual property” of any one individual person, it is an integral part of the culture and lives of those community members who are fluent speakers and particularly those who teach their language. For this reason, care must be taken to ensure that no aspect of the knowledge of the language, the

way it is used, or the way in which it is taught can or should in any way be “taken” from First Nations language teachers without prior consultation and agreement on how that information will be used in this research project. This is particularly true with respect to teaching resources. Most First Nations language teachers have developed a great many language teaching resources over the years. They have, for the most part, had to develop their own resources because in most cases, they were the first to teach the language, there were no other resources available and they had to make their own. Again, care will be taken not to misuse or misappropriate any of the teaching resources that are the rightful property of the language teachers. Finally, following completion of the research project, the resulting assessment device will be made available to all First Nations language teachers who wish to use it, as well as any other educators who wish to make reference to it or use it in their teaching. Likewise, all of the contributions of participating First Nations language teachers will be duly recognized and acknowledged.

As mentioned in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the First Nations language teachers with whom I am working represent 4 different nations and 4 different language groups within the Interior Salish First Nations – St’at’imc (Lillooet), Nle?kepmx (Thompson), Secwepemc (Shuswap), and Si’lx (Okanagan). Although there are a great many cultural and linguistic similarities amongst these four Nations, there are also many differences in language grammar and use, in cultural protocols, in their view of spirituality, etc. The most difficult aspect of these differences for me as the researcher was to remember the differences in protocol for the initial meetings and discussions with the First Nations language teachers who indicated a willingness to participate. I will elaborate on how I dealt with this later in Chapter 4. Using the device itself has presented very few problems, since it is written in English and requires translation/interpretation in the First Nations language being taught – something that has ably been carried out by participating First Nations language teachers. Nor has making the wording of the assessment device “culturally appropriate” been much of a problem, since there are enough cultural similarities between Nations to make this relatively easy. One of the most important aspects of the use of appropriate wording in the benchmarks was to make it appropriate for classroom use and this was accomplished prior to the second trial.

### ***Concluding Material***

Why have I chosen to add this “transition chapter” to the thesis? Despite the fact that I have addressed many of the issues and concerns elsewhere, there were some that deserved more attention and more thorough explanation than I was able to accomplish in the other chapters. It is very important for the reader to appreciate the added complexity of researching in a First Nations educational context and to understand some of the obstacles that must be overcome when conducting research with First Nations people. Some of the political, historical, social, cultural, and economic issues have been addressed and the spiritual connections associated with teaching a First Nations language, a topic not easily defined, has been highlighted.

This chapter was also designed to make more meaningful connections between the information that has been gathered through a review of the literature with the details of the research methodology used in this research project. Researching in a First Nations educational context is unique and providing details about the importance of various factors involved in that research is essential to the thorough understanding of that uniqueness. By providing an insight into the language and education issues confronting First Nations people, it is hoped that the reader now is better prepared to understand the variations on the methodological theme which is to follow.

# *Chapter Four*

## *Research Methodology*

### *Introduction*

The purpose of this chapter is to present a detailed account of the research that has been undertaken. The contents of the chapter will address the following items: an overall description of the project, including a recapitulation of the research purpose; theoretical constructs and principles that guided the research; the research paradigm (which will include a justification of and academic support for why the research methods I used are most appropriate); a description of the research locations; population and sample descriptions, and the rationale for how and why the sample was drawn; a detailed description of how the assessment device was developed, how it was used, and how data were gathered and recorded; details of data collection; actual timelines for the project; and some concluding comments.

The writing of this chapter will serve to confirm the contract between my Advisory Committee as the agent of UBC, the institution governing the execution of an approved dissertation project, and me as the graduate student. It is also my intention that through the process of writing this chapter, the problems and issues associated with the design, implementation, and collection of research data will be addressed.

As a reminder, the purpose of this research project is, through collaboration with practicing First Nations language teachers, to develop and trial a “made for teachers” assessment tool to determine levels of First Nations language proficiency. The resulting assessment tool will be culturally appropriate and easily administered in the classroom. The intended result will be a “set” of First Nations Language Benchmarks (FNLB).

### *Research Questions*

As previously stated, this study is more properly described as a research *project* and has a purpose as opposed to a central question around which the research would be conducted.

In this respect, the purpose has been restated in the introduction of this chapter and the sub-questions that could be posed as part of the greater research purpose have been previously stated in Chapter One. Further repetition of the purpose and re-examination of questions related to the research are not considered necessary here.

### ***Theoretical Constructs and Principles***

#### Theoretical Constructs

The information gathered by the First Nations language teachers during periods of student observation, was intended to assist in the determination of levels of First Nations language proficiency. As has already been discussed in Chapter Two, assessment involves the gathering of information (pp. 12 and 13), with which to make decisions about student achievement and progress. Measuring language proficiency has also become much more complicated in recent years with terms such as *functional language ability*, *communicative competence*, and *communicative language ability* coming into more common use in language testing circles (Chapter Two, p. 18). Undoubtedly the subtle differences in nuance in these various terms are appropriate and all have their place within the context that their use was intended by their authors. However, for the purposes of this study, I will use the term *language proficiency* to describe the measure of competency in First Nations language being determined by the participating language teachers. Attempting to use other synonymous terminology (that essentially mean the same thing) will only serve to complicate what is already a potentially challenging task for the teachers.

#### Language Proficiency Models

There are also numerous language proficiency scales (some examples are detailed in Table 1, p. 26) that have been developed specifically to provide language testers with guidelines for the determination of various levels of communicative language ability or

proficiency. All of these models for determining levels of language proficiency have been well documented in the literature and detailed in Chapter Two.

To summarize, the development of the First Nations Language Benchmarks (FNLB) has been based on the theoretical constructs that have been established in the literature review, trialed within the cultural context of the First Nations language classroom, modified and refined based on feedback received through collaboration with First Nations language teachers, and published as a *Teacher's Handbook for Assessing First Nations Language Proficiency* that will contain:

- ◆ a set of First Nations Language Benchmarks, complete with descriptions of the levels of proficiency in each of listening, speaking, reading, and writing;
- ◆ culturally appropriate examples of listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities at each of the levels of proficiency; and
- ◆ a check-list for teachers to use as a reference in determining levels of proficiency.

There will be further elaboration of this model later in this chapter.

### Guiding Principles

This research project has been governed by three guiding principles. These principles, which were established by the researcher prior to beginning the research, include a commitment to collaborative research (active and ongoing collaboration with First Nations teachers and other educators in the schools where the assessment device is trialed), a commitment to openness and transparency throughout the project, and a continual striving for contextual appropriateness. Each of these principles will be addressed in turn.

### *Collaborative Research*

One of the essential aspects of this research project has been to develop, amend, refine, and publish a culturally appropriate assessment handbook (containing the FNLB) that is “language teacher friendly” and practical for classroom use. This could not have been

accomplished without the total involvement of the language teachers who volunteered their time and efforts to be a part of the developmental process. Collaboration with participating language teachers has been essential to the ultimate success of this project. For this reason, I endeavoured to involve the teachers in as many aspects of the project as possible, from including them in some initial planning around the development of the proficiency rating scales, asking for feedback on the cultural appropriateness of the language used in the descriptors, asking them to provide additional examples of words and phrases to be used in the samples provided, and seeking feedback on the check-list that was used in assessing language proficiency.

In speaking about collaborative research, others, including Tom (1996) have reported, "the [positive] impact was ... in the ways consulting group members had an investment in talking and thinking about the research and in the ways these individuals had a deeper understanding of the purposes of the project." (p. 358). I am also of the opinion that if a greater number of language teachers from different schools and districts had been available to participate, the more powerful would have been the synergy that was developed by the group and the more wide-reaching could have been the benefits derived from improved models of the FNLB. In addition, including other educators in the collaborative collective, may have lent further credibility to the research methods as well as to the final results.

Prior to beginning the actual research, I had felt that there might be some resistance to using a collaborative approach. I drew strength, however, from the story told by Eber Hampton (1993) about the old man who showed Eber (close up) a cardboard box and asked him how many sides he could see. From the close view, Eber could only see one side and told the man so. The man then adjusted the box, showing Eber a corner view and asked him how many sides he could see now. Hampton replied that he could now see three sides. The old man, looking from his side of the box said, "I can also see three sides and together we can see all six sides of the box," implying that together, two people had a much more complete view of the box than one person could ever have. (p. 306).

This example, is for me, one that illustrates the power of a collaborative approach to conducting research, and I used this story to help me illustrate to language teachers the power of their participation in developing the research methods and having a voice in how our results are reported.

### *Openness and Transparency*

Openness, transparency, and accountability are all current “politically correct” buzz words that are used by many, particularly in educational circles. So in order not to offend any of the people or educational authorities I worked with over the past 18 months, I tried to insure that openness and transparency were observed in all aspects of this research. I shared all of the information with many stakeholders, including First Nations community members who showed an interest and/or wished to have access to any of the information (that is not of a confidential nature, such as student records) that was in any way connected to this project. Of course it was also important to be open to questions and requests for information from any of the educational institutions I was connected with, other individuals who may have had an interest in the project, and any media who showed an interest in the research. Once the results have been published, it is my intention to provide the information to anyone who is interested in using the First Nations Language Benchmarks in their practice. This includes both school and community-based language teachers, others involved in First Nations language research, curriculum developers, and the Ministry of Education.

### *Contextual Appropriateness*

By contextual appropriateness, I mean ensuring that the cultural context within which the research was conducted and the educational environment in the First Nations language classroom be given primary consideration. The issues around cultural appropriateness have already been dealt with in Chapter Two. The other issue around contextual appropriateness was keeping the practical aspects of this research, that is, the development, trialing, and refinement of the FNLB, at a very practical and pragmatic

level. Although the project is well supported by the learned work of linguists and other academics, the classroom-based research and the resulting teacher's assessment *Handbook*, will only be meaningful if they are aimed at the needs of First Nations language teachers. To do otherwise would have jeopardized further use of this assessment device by First Nations language teachers in other districts or nations.

### ***Research Paradigm***

The conduct of the research consisted of three main components: 1) the development of the First Nations Language Benchmarks; 2) trials of the Benchmarks by practicing language teachers; and 3) amendment, refinement and publishing of the final form of the FNLB based on feedback received from the language teachers. Details of each of these components follows.

#### Assessment Device Development:

The First Nations Language Benchmarks that were used and then modified as the result of feedback from First Nations language teachers was adapted from several existing models, but draws most heavily on the *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000* (Pawlikowska-Smith, Grazyna, 2000), and to a lesser degree, on other proficiency scales such as the *ILR Language Skill Level Descriptions*, the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines*, and the *ALTE Framework*. (from a review by Cardenas, 2000). In the initial stages of developing the assessment device, (this work was embarked upon well before I was admitted to the Education Doctoral program in 2001), I made frequent reference to the *General Second Official Language Qualifications* (Public Service of Canada, undated). My first prototype had only three levels of competency (simply called levels 1, 2, and 3) and three categories of *performance, oral interaction, reading, and writing*. (See *Appendix 1*). The major shortcomings of this model were that it did not discriminate between listening and speaking and with only three levels of competency, did not provide a large enough range of competencies to allow the language teacher to determine a very accurate estimate of the proficiency level of the student. That first prototype was

modified to include four categories of language performance; listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and a greater number (nine) of proficiency levels within each of the categories. These modifications were based, in part, on input from participating language teachers during preliminary discussions, and have undergone further amendments based on feedback from the teachers following trial one in 2003 and trial two in 2004.

#### Trials of the Assessment Device:

As stated above, there were two trials conducted. The first trial period began in late September 2003, after the participating First Nations language teachers had been briefed on the research details and they had signed a letter consenting to participate in the study. The first trial lasted for approximately 8 - 10 weeks, until each teacher had sufficient time to trial the FNLB with the students who had been selected for assessment. After using the assessment device with their students, each of the teachers was asked for their feedback on the process of gathering information using the device, what the strong points were and what difficulties they encountered during the trial. Some of the participating teachers were either unavailable to meet with the researcher or had not taken the time to complete the Benchmark checklist on students. The information that was provided by the participating teachers was gathered together, analyzed by the researcher, and necessary amendments were made to some of the language in the Benchmarks and a new format for the checklist (see *Appendix 4*) was developed. The analysis of feedback and amendments to the *Benchmarks* and check-lists was completed by the middle of January, 2004. Further details about participant reaction to and feedback regarding the use of the *Benchmarks* and check-lists will be provided in Chapter 5.

The second trial period, which entailed essentially the same procedures as the first trial, began in late January/early February 2004 and was completed by the end of March 2004. Once again, teachers were asked for their feedback based on the second trial and the FNLB was amended accordingly. Also during the feedback discussions with individual or small groups of language teachers, the researcher asked for overall comments on the experience and solicited other pertinent feedback from the teachers that could have had

an impact on the final data analysis and on the publication of information arising out of this research. Once the final amendments were made to the FNLB following the second trial, the *Handbook*, in its final draft form (see *Appendix 5*), was circulated to the participants for final comments. This process was completed by mid-May, 2004.

#### Amendments, Refinements, and Publication:

As outlined in the previous section, participants were asked for feedback on their experiences in using the FNLB to determine proficiency levels of their students. Once all of the information was assembled and analyzed, final amendments were made to the First Nations Language Benchmarks and to the *Handbook*. Most of the amendments were around the clarity and cultural appropriateness of the wording used to describe the levels of proficiency in each of the four categories (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). There were also some adjustments made to the check-list to make it easier to use, and examples that teachers provided were added to those already included in the assessment device. Once the final amendments were made and the teachers had one final look at the format and content of the *Teacher's handbook for Assessing First Nations Language Proficiency*, it was deemed ready for inclusion in the thesis and for publication so that all of the participants and other language teachers would be able to use them in their language teaching practice.

#### Adaptation of Existing Models

As previously mentioned (Chapter 2), the primary purpose for the development of this assessment device is to provide a practical means of determining First Nations language proficiency. Since this has involved gathering evidence to assist in determining the language ability of students enrolled in First Nations language courses (in order to report on student achievement and progress), the use of a proficiency rating scale similar to others already in use made good sense. The intent was not to “re-invent the wheel”, but rather to adapt existing proficiency rating scales into a culturally appropriate form that was easy for the language teachers to administer. As previously documented in Chapter

Two (pp. 23-24), Brown (1996) recommends, for practical reasons, adapting existing scales for use in other situations.

### Academic Support for this Model

Earlier in this section (p. 36), I have indicated how the research has supported the notion of adapting existing language proficiency scales for use in the First Nations context. I have also stipulated, both in Chapter 2 (p. 17) and in this Chapter (p. 32) that there is growing research and academic writing to suggest that the use of language proficiency rating scales is most appropriate for the determination of communicative language ability. Using a language proficiency rating scale has also been appropriate for the purposes of this study, since such scales do not normally have to be based on the goals, objectives, or learning outcomes for a specific unit or course of study. Thus, the FNLB, as a newly developed rating scale, can be used to estimate levels of First Nations language proficiency based on current general language abilities of the students. (Hughes, 1989; Brown, 1996; Brindley, 2001; and Brown and Hudson, 2002). This means that the language proficiency information that was gathered on selected students by the participating First Nations language teachers (although not necessarily based on pre-established learning outcomes), should still yield meaningful results.

### ***Research Locations***

Prior to the commencement of research, confirmation/authorization letters had been received from three school districts – SD #58 (Nicola-Similkameen), SD #73 (Kamloops-Thompson), and SD #74 (Gold Trail) and this represented a potential total of 12 language teachers in four Interior Salish languages. There was also the potential for three teachers from Band-operated schools in the same geographical area. For the first trial period, the actual number of participating First Nations language teachers was six from the three school districts and one from a Band-operated school. In the second trial, a total of eight teachers in public schools and 2 in Band-operated schools participated. Details of the

schools, their geographical location, names of language teachers and school principals, is contained in *Appendix 7*.

The classes taught by these ten teachers represented all grades from kindergarten to grade 12. With the exception of a large secondary school in Merritt, the majority of the schools have small populations, a fairly high ratio of Native to non-Native students, and many of the schools have split or multi-grade classrooms. Many of the schools are located close to the First Nations communities where the students live and for the most part, are supportive of the language and culture programs available in those schools.

Although not directly connected to the research that was conducted in these schools, there are other educators that were involved in one way or another in the project. School principals were aware of the research and asked to be kept informed about the progress being made and most have indicated an interest in the results of the study. Although many of these schools had First Nations Support Workers and some of them were involved in supporting the language teachers in some aspects of the program, the researcher had no contact with them.

### ***Population and Sample Descriptions***

#### **Description of Participants**

The principal participants in this research project were the First Nations language teachers. These nine teachers represent a wide range of linguistic ability, life experiences, and varying teaching experiences. All of the teachers are of Aboriginal ancestry, most of them are female, many of them are Elders in their communities, and most of them are completely fluent speakers of their first language. Most of the teachers are not fully certified teachers, but many of them have been certified by the BC College of Teachers to teach their language.

Most of the teachers who volunteered to participate in the study were personally known by the researcher. Others teachers were asked to participate by their District First Nations Coordinator or principal. Two of the teachers were not contacted until January 2004, and therefore only participated in the second trial. The teachers were selected by the researcher based on previous contact and work in First Nations language curriculum development and based on the knowledge that they would likely be teaching in one of the three school districts or at one of the Band-operated schools during the research period. Ultimately, the teachers who did participate were self-selecting, since I did not ask any of the teachers to participate unless they are completely willing to do so. All potential participants received a Letter of Invitation and Consent Form from the researcher. Their right to refuse to participate without fear of reprisal was clearly stated in the letter and their right to change their mind about participating in any aspect of the study was clearly explained in the Consent Form. Copies of the Letter of Invitation and Consent Form are included in the Ethics Review submission to the Behavioural Research Ethics Board of the University of British Columbia. During the process of collecting feedback and data from the participating teachers, it was not necessary to specifically name any of the teachers.

The researcher did not have any direct contact with any of the students whose level of First Nations language proficiency was assessed by the language teachers. The only contact with students came during the first contact with one of the public school language teachers when the researcher was invited to observe one of the classes for about 30 minutes. Nonetheless, a draft parental consent form was given to each of the participating language teachers who were asked to consult with their principal or use their own judgement about whether or not the letters of consent would be necessary in their situation. A draft copy of a parental consent letter was included in the Ethics Review submission to the Behavioural Research Ethics Board of the University of British Columbia.

## Sample Rationale

Since the only source of funding for this research was a very small “Scholarly Activity” grant from the researcher’s place of employment (University College of the Cariboo) that did not even cover the travel costs associated with this project, selection of teachers was made based on keeping the study within a reasonable geographical region of the researcher’s place of residence. All locations were within a 100 km radius and this kept costs to a minimum. Another reason for selecting this sample population of language teachers was that four different languages could be represented in the sample. This provided for a greater degree of generalization about the findings than if only one language was used. A third reason for this sample make-up was that with this size of sample, there was a greater possibility that virtually all grades would be represented in the student sample, and therefore the data that was collected would be more fully representative of the K-12 school system. Finally, since most of the teachers were known to the researcher, informal discussions had been ongoing with many of the teachers in the period leading up to the research, and knowing the need for a culturally appropriate means of determining language proficiency, were quite willing to participate in the research, hoping that the results would make it easier for them and for the next generation of language teachers to determine the language proficiency levels of their students.

## ***Instrumentation***

### Assessment Device:

As mentioned previously in this chapter, the complete assessment package, which will ultimately be published as *Language Teachers’ Handbook*, (see *Appendix 9*) is comprised of three sections, and includes:

- ◆ an introduction and instructions for the use of the Handbook;
- ◆ a set of First Nations Language Benchmarks (FNLB), complete with descriptions of each of the levels of proficiency in each of listening, speaking, reading, and writing; and
- ◆ a check-list for teachers to use as a reference in determining levels of proficiency.

### *The Benchmarks*

The Benchmarks represent Part 1 of the *Language Teachers' Handbook*. These benchmarks, which were used, amended, and refined over two trial periods, were initially modeled on the *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000* (Pawlikowska-Smith, 2000) and to a lesser degree on the *ILR Language Skill Level Descriptions*, the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines*, and the *ALTE Framework*, and were further adapted to fit more appropriately into a First Nations context. The development of the initial draft took place during the time period April to August 2003 in order to be ready for use for the first trial beginning in late September 2003.

The intent was to have as many as nine levels of proficiency identified in each of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Like the *CLB 2000*, the FNLB has three **stages** (Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced), and three **proficiency levels** (Developmental, Progression, and Accomplished), within each of the three stages. These three stages and three proficiency levels are graphically represented in *Illustration 1* and compared to other rating scales in *Table 2*. The descriptors that identify each of these levels were borrowed from the language rating scales previously mentioned and were adapted to fit the circumstances under which they were trialed. This model of First Nations language assessment was refined for use by language teachers in other jurisdictions through the process of trialing, receiving feedback, and modifying the descriptors based on the feedback received.

### *The Examples*

Part 2 of the *Language Teacher's Handbook* contains examples of language use for all *stages* and all *proficiency levels* contained in the model. These samples are grouped in a number of different categories. For example, in **Stage 1**, samples are provided in the following categories: *ask and answer simple questions*; *give simple directions or instructions*; and *handle simple social or classroom situations*. **Stage 2** samples include *giving simple explanations, giving factual descriptions (of people, places, things, etc.)*,

*narrating events, and handling more complicated social and classroom situations. Stage 3* examples include: *giving detailed descriptions and explanations; handling complex questions, social situations, educational issues; supporting an opinion, defending a point of view or justifying an action; and counselling or giving advice.* Part 2 was developed so that teachers would have examples at each of the three *proficiency levels* for each stage, giving them 9 possible levels of fluency with which to assess their students' language ability.

### *The Check-list*

Part 3 of the *Handbook* consists of four check-lists, one in each of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, that can be used by language teachers over time to indicate levels of proficiency and to record their observations about the language proficiency level of each of their students. These check-lists were further refined following their use in each of the trial periods. The check-list has a space for the student's name, the date of the observation, and in addition to containing all of the descriptors in the FNLB, has a space for the teacher to write additional comments about student performance. Participating language teachers were asked to use these check-lists with each of the students they selected to participate in the study, and to make notes about the appropriateness and utility of both the wording and format of the check-list. Some teachers kept portfolios of student work as evidence of levels of language proficiency. Teachers were then able to make an overall estimate of language ability in listening, speaking, reading, and writing by referring to the check-list and any additional information they had collected during the trial period.

### Administration of the Assessment Device

September meetings with small groups and individual language teachers were scheduled. A "script" (detailed agenda) was prepared which was used when meeting with language teachers to ensure that they all got the same message regarding the use of the draft *Handbook*. The researcher went over in detail each of the three sections of the

*Handbook*, ensuring that a common understanding of its content and the focus of the trial period about to be undertaken by the teachers. Teachers were asked to establish a routine for observing, monitoring, and recording results on a regular basis for each of the students they had selected for assessment using the *Handbook*. There was time set aside for discussion and questions to ensure that the teachers were as comfortable as possible with the assessment device and how it was to be used with participating students. A draft Parental Consent Form was prepared and was provided for each of the teachers during this preliminary discussion. I provided my phone, fax, and email contact numbers at home and at work so that teachers could call anytime for further instructions, to pass on information, or to provide feedback during the trial period. At that preliminary meeting, a time-frame for the trial for each teacher was established, as was a date for a feedback and discussion meeting following the first trial period. In September, when those discussions were held with language teachers, school principals and other interested school staff who were available were also briefed on the research that was about to take place. This was done so that there would be an understanding of the process that was taking place in the language classes and so that there was support from other staff for the language teachers who were participating in the study.

#### Relationship to the Research Goal:

As stated in Chapter 1, the goal of this research project is the same as the stated purpose, that is, “to develop and trial a ‘made for teachers’ method of identifying levels of language proficiency that is culturally appropriate and easily administered.” (p. 8). In the previous pages of this chapter, extensive detail has been provided of the development of the assessment device (Teacher’s Handbook for Assessing First Nations Language Proficiency), its philosophical and academic underpinnings (also established in Chapter 2), the content and intent of what the Handbook contains, the cultural relevance of the assessment device, how the device was introduced to language teachers, and how the *Handbook* was used in the trials. The descriptions contained in the preceding pages of this chapter, are evidence of the relationship between the assessment device (*Handbook*) and the research goal. All that is really necessary is to highlight the key words and

phrases in the goal – develop, trial, identifying levels of language proficiency, culturally appropriate, and easily administered – to see that a direct and strong relationship exists between the instrumentation being used and the research goal.

### ***Data Collection***

#### Contacting Participants

Immediately following the issue of a Certificate of Approval by the UBC Behavioral Research Ethics Board, the potential participating language teachers were contacted. This contact was made either directly with the language teachers themselves (for those teachers who were known to the researcher), or through a district First Nations coordinator or the school principal. A Letter of Initial contact was forwarded to each of the potential participants by email, fax, or post, or was delivered by the researcher in person, whichever method was most convenient for the language teacher. The Letter of Initial Contact contained a tear-off response form at the end. Once a response to that initial letter was received, an Invitation to Participate and Consent Form was given to each respondent to formalize the agreement between the researcher and language teacher. Following these formalities, subsequent contact between the researcher and language teachers was by telephone an/or email to establish dates and times to meet for further discussion of the research procedures, as previously outlined earlier in this chapter.

#### Collecting Data

Since the research methods associated with this project are qualitative in nature, the majority of the data collected was in the form of verbal and narrative feedback from the participating language teachers. Notes made by the researcher at all of the meetings with individual teachers and with small groups of teachers were the basis for the amendments and refinements made to the *Handbook* following each of the trial periods. The pre-trial meetings with teachers, the trials themselves, and the feedback from teachers following

each of the trials, all yielded data that were instrumental in making the appropriate amendments to the *Handbook* and to realize the goal of the research.

Due to the limitations of scope and time associated with this research, it was not intended to collect any data directly from the students selected to participate by the language teachers. The use of the check-lists prepared on the students was only indirectly necessary to assist in determining: *Was the use of the check-lists a practical way to gather information? Are there ways to make them easier to use? And, Are there other examples that could be added to those already on the check-lists?* The actual “score” of each of the students was of minimal consequence to the success of this research project.

### Codification

It was anticipated that most of the participating language teachers would be willing to have their names used in the reports of the research. For the most part, their names are simply recorded alongside any information they provide in the form of feedback, questions, etc. concerning the study. In case one of the participating teachers wished to remain anonymous, a pseudonym would have been assigned and any information, feedback, etc. that came from that teacher would be recorded and retained only under that name (that information will remain confidential throughout the life of the project) which was assigned to them. At the completion of the study, prior to reporting any of the information in this thesis or other publications, each participant was asked if they wished to have their name used to acknowledge their participation and contribution to the project.

### ***Concluding Material***

This chapter has served to describe the detailed plan for the conduct of research associated with this doctoral project. Based on the purpose of this research, the following items have been addressed: theoretical constructs and principles to guide the research were established; philosophical and academic justification for using this research

paradigm has been provided; descriptions of research participants, how they were selected, and where the research took place has been identified; a detailed description of the assessment device (First Nations Language Benchmarks and Check-lists), how it was developed and how it was used, have also been provided. Details on how the data was gathered, recorded, and prepared for analysis have been provided, and timelines for the project, including more specific details for the conduct of the two trials, have been outlined. A complete analysis of the data that were gathered, details of the resulting refinements to the FNLB and Check-lists, and recommendations for future research follow in succeeding chapters.

# *Chapter Five*

## *Presentation and Discussion of Results*

### *Introduction*

The purposes of this chapter are: to describe the progress made in the development of the First Nations Language Benchmarks (FNLB) based on the trial use of the *Benchmarks* by First Nations language teachers; to document the collaborative nature of this research project by providing details of dialogue between the researcher and the participating language teachers; to provide a detailed account of where and why changes were made to the *Benchmarks*; to comment on four additional findings of this research; to summarize the pertinent aspects of the final discussions with the participating language teachers; and to provide a sense of what benefits could be derived by First Nations language teachers from the *Benchmarks* and check-lists.

One of the prominent themes of this thesis, one which has been stated and re-emphasized continuously throughout, has been the context in which the research has been carried out; that is, the research has been carried out by a non-Native person working with First Nations language teachers in both public schools (off-reserve) and Band-operated schools (on-reserve). The whole project, therefore, has been located in two cultures for much of the time and this has been an important factor, both in the conduct of the research and in the reporting of the results. In reporting on the roles played by the First Nations language teachers, the results they obtained during the use of the *Benchmarks*, and the subsequent refinements that were made to the *Benchmarks* and the checklists, every attempt has been made to stay within the First Nations context and to take into consideration all of the factors and circumstances that have had an effective on the outcome of this research. The reader is alerted to the following: the analysis, presentation and discussion of the results of this research will be done in a way that is culturally appropriate, in keeping with the collaborative nature of the research, and in keeping with the way that participating

language teachers would want the information presented – in a clear, concise manner that is understandable, practical, and will ultimately benefit First Nations students.

### *The Metamorphosis of the Assessment Model*

Prior to undertaking this research project, I had been engaged in First Nations language curriculum development for a few years. During that time, and because of my association with First Nations language teachers, it became evident to me that there was very little, if any, systematic assessment of language proficiency being carried out. As a result, I began to think about ways to carry out First Nations language assessment that might be useful for language teachers. After reflecting on the way that French and English language proficiency levels were determined (based on my experience in the Canadian Military), I carried out some internet research to familiarize myself with how language proficiency is currently being assessed in the Canadian Public Service. This reflection and research resulted in the development of the assessment tool that is attached as *Appendix I*. Following development of this first model, I asked a few of the language teachers I knew to consider using it with their classes and solicited feedback from them. All of this took place prior to my entry into the EdD program and my intent at that time was simply to provide some assistance to First Nations language teachers, many of whom were struggling with assessing, evaluating, and reporting on their students' abilities in First Nations language. Although the language teachers were pleased to have an assessment device to use with their students, they soon identified two main faults with it: they wanted to see oral interaction divided into "listening" and "speaking" to go along with the "reading" and "writing" competencies and they suggested that three levels of proficiency were not nearly enough, that more levels of discrimination were needed to more accurately estimate the language proficiency of their students.

It was following acceptance into the EdD program and selection of "assessing First Nations language proficiency" as a research topic, that further development of this assessment device became much more important and urgent. As previously described in Chapter 2, further investigation of methods of determining levels of language proficiency

such as those proposed by Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR), American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE), and the Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000 (CLB), was undertaken in order to develop an appropriate language assessment device for First Nations language teachers. The results of that research, combined with information provided by one of the language teachers who had reviewed the first prototype, led to an expansion of the assessment device to four competencies (listening, speaking, reading, and writing).<sup>8</sup> In addition, the degrees of proficiency were expanded to three stages (Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced), each of which contained three levels (Developmental, Progression, and Accomplished), for a total of 9 different levels of proficiency in each of the four competencies. Appendix 2 is an example of the First Nations Language Benchmarks (FNLB) that were used during the first trial period, September to December, 2003. During that first trial period, the language teachers were asked to use the *Benchmarks* in conjunction with a check-list (Appendix 3) that I had developed as an aid to recording the observations being made by the language teachers.

Following the first trial period from September to December, 2003, language teachers provided feedback on the use of the *Benchmarks*. This resulted in some minor changes being made to the structure and wording of the *Benchmarks* and a new check-list was developed to assist in recording observational assessments. The new check-list is attached as Appendix 4. Details of the changes that were made following the first trial period will be explained more fully later in this chapter.

Using the revised *Benchmarks* and check-list, a second trial period was undertaken from January to April, 2004. Further feedback was received from the participating language teachers and additional refinements were made to both the *Benchmarks* and the check-

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<sup>8</sup> The competencies, as listed, have been placed in order of cultural importance for First Nations people – this based on the words of a Secwepemc (Shuswap) Elder, who, when engaged in a discussion on the topic, said “...being able to listen is the most important; that is the way children learn the language. They listen first and then learn to speak later.” (discussion with Kathy Michelle, June, 2003.) Speaking is obviously the next most important competency, since it was the principal way that First Nations people communicated. It is only in the last 100 plus years that the Interior Salish languages have been written. Reading and writing, therefore, are of lesser importance, particularly in the very early stages of learning the language, when the predominant skills to be learned are listening and speaking.

list. This time, the changes were mostly to word usage in the *Benchmarks* and in the structure of the descriptors used in the checklist. Appendix 5 contains the further revised *Benchmarks* and check-list, which will also be explained in more detail later in this chapter. These documents are the ones that will be contained in the *Teacher's handbook for Assessing First Nations Language Proficiency*, to be published as an addendum to this thesis.

### ***Collaborative Approach and the Cultural Context***

Earlier in this thesis I alluded to the importance of conducting this research project using a collaborative approach. This research would not have been possible without the full and cooperative participation of First Nations language teachers, all of whom went out of their way to assist me. Much of the success of this project can be directly attributable to the assistance provided by those language teachers and I believe that the excellent working relationship between us was largely based on a level of mutual respect and trust that increased as the research progressed.

There was also another factor that I believe was part of the process; over time an “ethical space” developed between myself and the language teachers. Poole (1972) suggests that when two separate sets of intentions (in this case it could be cultures) come into contact with one another – “...then ethical space is set up instantaneously.” (p. 5), and Stiffarm (1998) says that “ethical space is created when the intentions of two entities structure the space between them in two different ways....” (p. 14). The ethical space that existed between myself and the language teachers was slightly different in each case, but all of these spaces, I believe, were positive, were based on a mutual respect for each other, and included a tacit understanding that we were approaching the research from two different cultural backgrounds. There was also a sense that at least part of the ethical space included “an ethic of caring” (Nodding, 1984 Chapter 4), since it was obvious to me that each of the language teachers I conducted research with, cared a great deal for their students and for their language. It was only upon reflection, after most of the research had been concluded, that I recognized how important these spaces were to both the

teachers and to me and that it was likely that similar spaces would always be a part of research being conducted across and between cultures.

### *Working with First Nations Language Teachers*

Prior to the “official” beginning of the research project, I had spoken to many of the participating language teachers. This occurred either intentionally, because I had already begun to think about how I might conduct the research, or through chance meetings with potential participants, usually at professional development activities, language workshops, or conferences. When I approached language teachers on a more formal basis in September 2003 to ask if they would be willing to participate in the research project, it did not come as a surprise to most of them. All of the teachers who attended the first briefing sessions, usually in small groups, were keenly interested in the project and most indicated immediately that they would be willing to participate. I provided each teacher or group of teachers with an overview of the research project and explained that the intent was to have a trial period of approximately 8 – 10 weeks in the September to December period, followed by a second trial period of 8 – 10 weeks in the January to April time frame. I indicated that I would be seeking feedback from them in December and April as well as asking them to give me copies of the completed check-lists from the students they selected for assessment. I provided each teacher with a complete “package” of materials that included: a letter of introduction; a detailed explanation of how the observation and recording of results was to be carried out; a laminated copy of the Benchmarks; and copies of the check-list to aid in recording observations. I also provided each of them with copies of the Ethics Review Board Certificates (one from The University of British Columbia and one from The University College of the Cariboo), a copy of the letter either from the School Board of their district or from their Chief and Council giving me permission to conduct research in their district or in their Band-operated school, as well as copies of consent forms for themselves and samples that could be used with their students should they so decide. I allowed time at the end of the presentation for further discussion, questions, and/or further explanations. Appendix 6

provides some additional information on the numbers of teachers who attended briefing sessions and how many actually became involved in the research as active participants.

Worthy of note are the circumstances around the two language teachers who chose not to participate in the project. In the first instance, I spoke with a potential participant at a language conference in August, 2003. When it was agreed that a short discussion about participating in the research project could be held over dinner, the language teacher, after gathering food from the buffet, chose to eat at another table, in spite of the fact that many of her colleagues were at the same table as I was! I took this as a sign that the teacher did not want to participate in the research project and I attempted no further contact with that teacher. In the second instance, following the initial briefing session in September, one of the language teachers contacted me by telephone and indicated that he did not wish to participate in the research project. I thanked him for attending the briefing session and indicated that I understood his not wanting to participate and once again, I attempted no further contact with that teacher.

Originally, I had planned to have all of the preliminary meetings and briefing sessions with small groups and individual teachers completed by about the third week in September, but that did not happen. Some of the language teachers did not start teaching until after mid-September and it took longer than I had anticipated to arrange meeting times with all teachers. In fact, it was not until the first week in October that I had managed to see most of the teachers. In two cases, for a variety of reasons, I was unable to meet directly with the language teachers and had to ask their First Nations Education Coordinator to pass on information to them. This meant that those teachers did not get the full briefing from me and as a result, the feedback I received from those teachers in the first trial period was not very useful. Also, I had intended to follow-up the preliminary meeting and briefing sessions with periodic visits during the 8 to 10 weeks of the first trial period. Because of my teaching schedule, my student-teacher supervision responsibilities, and language teacher timetable difficulties, I only managed to meet with two teachers prior to the end of the trial period in December. One of the other language teachers was involved in an automobile accident in October and was off work until mid-

January, while another teacher did not receive a teaching assignment at the secondary level until the second school semester started in February. Due in large part to these factors, the feedback at the end of the first trial period was minimal in terms of quantity, although the quality of the feedback I did receive was high, and I was able to make some improvements to the *Benchmarks* and the check-list based on that feedback.

Prior to the start of the second trial, I met with all 10 participating teachers to update them on the changes made to the *Benchmarks* and check-list and asked that they use them for an additional 8 – 10 week period with a view to providing additional feedback. One of the most important things that I decided to change as a result of the first trial was to make a commitment to visit with each of them more frequently over the period of the second trial. I managed three visits between the end of January and the beginning of April with most of the teachers and at least two visits with all but one of the teachers who I managed to visit only once in March. The conduct of the second trial period was much more productive than the first and both the quantity and quality of data that I collected was superior to the first trial period. This meant that the changes that I was able to make to the *Benchmarks* and the check-list were much more meaningful and legitimate, since they were based on a much stronger input from the language teachers.

The meetings with the teachers during both of the trial periods were characterized by valuable feedback on the actual assessment device as well as the process of observing and estimating levels of language proficiency as indicated by the *Benchmarks*. There was also very interesting “sidebar” information that was shared by the teachers on related topics as well as the telling of interesting stories associated with the research. Details on the specific feedback provided by the teachers will be detailed in the following section, but two anecdotes that came out during discussions with the teachers bear repeating here.

In the first instance, a teacher reported that she had decided to send home the parental consent form with students in one of her classes so that the parents would be aware that the research was being carried out and that some of the students would be assessed using this new method. This was a class of grade 5/6 students and like most students at that

grade level, were curious about the content of the letter being sent home for their parents to sign. The result was that when the consent forms were returned (signed by their parents) to the language teacher, all of those students approached her to ask that they be moved to the front of the class. When the teacher asked why, the students indicated that if they were going to be tested on their language ability, they did not want to miss anything and therefore wanted to be seated at the front of the class! In fact, those students asked their fellow classmates to change places with them so they could be closer to the front!

The second very interesting “story” told to me by one of the teachers was about his students in a kindergarten class. It seems that these students were very enthusiastic about learning their language and the language teacher liked this enthusiasm and encouraged the students to respond spontaneously to questions that he asked, particularly when he used the technique of Total Physical Response (TPR).<sup>9</sup> However, since this language teacher is not a certified teacher, the classroom teacher normally stayed in the classroom during language instruction. The concern of the language teacher was that the classroom teacher did not like students to “speak out” or speak out of turn, or to speak until spoken to or until they raised their hand and were asked to speak. According to the language teacher this destroyed all attempts at spontaneity and actually seemed to stifle the responses of the students. Frustrated, he said that he felt that he and the students were caught “between two classroom cultures” and that under those circumstances, learning the language could cease to be fun. Although not directly related to the research, these two anecdotes were sources of both amusement and concern for me and highlighted some of the interesting and difficult times encountered by First Nations language teachers in the course of teaching their native language.

One of the other factors that made the collection and analysis of information from the language teachers difficult was the variety of different contexts in which the teachers had

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<sup>9</sup> Total Physical Response (TPR) is a strategy for teaching another language that involves students carrying out a physical action in response to teacher instructions. This strategy was first developed by James Asher in the 1960's and was first published in 1977. TPR is widely used as a second language teaching technique and is very popular amongst First Nations language teachers. (Asher, 2003).

to teach. Although most of the public schools where the teachers work are reasonably typical of small, rural schools with relatively high percentages of First Nations students, not all of the schools support the teaching of First Nations language to the same degree. Of the 11 schools where the participating teachers teach, four are public elementary schools, one is a public middle school, three are public secondary schools, one is a kindergarten to grade 10 Band school located on-reserve but staffed and managed by the local school district, one is a kindergarten to grade 10 Band-operated school, and one is a kindergarten to grade 10 Band-operated native language immersion school (see table 3, Chapter 5). In those schools located on-reserve, there is a much greater sense of urgency associated with learning the language, which in turn gives those students who are learning their native language a much greater sense of pride in their own culture. It makes the task of the language teacher that much easier and that much more satisfying when there is community support behind the language program. To an outside observer, it seems that while the efforts of those language teachers who work in public schools is appreciated, the non-Native culture of the schools mitigates against their program of instruction being as successful as those programs being taught in Band-operated schools. In addition, as far as data collection and analysis is concerned, the fact that all grades are represented has made the comparison of some of the information difficult; in fact, as I will explain later, many of the teachers indicated that using the *Benchmarks* would be much more useful if they were grade specific. In most schools, the First Nations language teacher is the only one in the school that teaches First Nations language and therefore has no regular contact with others who teach the language. In some cases the teachers meet occasionally in the afternoon at a central location to do preparatory work and to collaborate on curriculum development or the development of learning resources. For the most part, however, they are alone in the school setting and this makes it very difficult for them to keep up with new resources, be aware of new methods, and to be able to speak regularly to a colleague. At the same time, this heterogeneity of situations makes the outcome much more valid and generalizable to other areas of British Columbia.

## Discussion of the Results – Specific Changes Made to the *Benchmarks*

By far, the vast majority of the changes made to the Benchmarks have come directly from the feedback provided by the participating teachers. On a few rare occasions, I have made some adjustments myself based on additional reading and research that I have carried out in conjunction with the primary research of the language teachers. The following are details of the changes that were made to the Benchmarks and the check-list.

a.	<b>Transforming the <i>Benchmark</i> descriptors into a checklist</b>
	Following the first trial period, during which I asked the teachers to familiarize themselves with the levels of proficiency represented by the various benchmark descriptors and then use a separate check-list as a tool to assist in the observation and estimation of proficiency levels, most of the teachers reported that they would rather just use a check-list that was a re-formatted version of the <i>Benchmarks</i> themselves. The result was a check-list that used the same terminology as was used in the <i>Benchmarks</i> with a check box to indicate whether or not the student was at that level of proficiency and a space to write any additional comments the teacher had about the student’s performance. <i>Appendix 3</i> illustrates the former method and <i>Appendix 4</i> represents the amended version of the check-list used in the second trial period. Minor changes were made to format and language following the second trial period. The reason that these changes were made was to give the teacher a more “user-friendly method of assessing student proficiency levels that was more directly connected to the <i>Benchmark</i> descriptors. The final version of the check-lists is contained in <i>Appendix 5</i>
b.	<b>Moving some of the “descriptors” from one level to another</b>
	Several of the teachers indicated that some of the descriptors in the Benchmarks were misplaced and that they would be more appropriately placed either above or below in the <i>Benchmarks</i> . This was relatively easy to accommodate and accomplish, as it only required cutting and pasting to provide a more accurate reflection of the indicators for the various <i>Benchmark</i> levels. The revised Benchmarks and check-lists attached as <i>Appendix 5</i> contain those changes.
c.	<b>Expanding the descriptor “boxes” if there are two variables separated or joined by the word “and”, resulting in two separate statements and two “check” off boxes</b>
	In some cases a descriptor contained two elements but students were able to demonstrate the ability to do only one of them. In these cases, one check mark

c.	<b>Expanding the descriptor “boxes” if there are two variables separated or joined by the word “and”, resulting in two separate statements and two “check” off boxes</b>
	would indicate that the student was competent in both elements and sometimes this was not the case. The teachers suggested that in those instances where two tasks were joined by “and”, two separate descriptors be formed, each with its own check box so that a more accurate assessment would be possible. <i>For example</i> , one descriptor which originally read “the learner can understand a very limited number of common individual words and simple phrases in a predictable context” became two descriptors, the first being “the learner can understand a very limited number of common individual words in a predictable context” and the second being “the learner can understand a very limited number of simple phrases in a predictable context.” All such descriptors were amended into individual performance indicators which could be more readily assessed.

d.	<b>Placing the phrase “the student” or “the learner” at the top, outside all of the descriptor boxes</b>
	The language teachers found that the descriptors became very tedious to read as they all began with “Learner”. It was suggested that the antecedent “the learner” simply be placed outside the top of the “box” for each of the levels in each stage instead of in each descriptor. This was done for all four competencies and is reflected in the final format of the check-list

e.	<b><i>Wording and language changes</i></b>
	Many of the teachers suggested that the language and wording in the descriptors still needed some additional refinement. They indicated that some of the vocabulary was inappropriate or that they did not really have a good understanding of what was meant by some of the terminology. Suggestions for amending specific words and phrases were collected from the teachers and incorporated into the final Benchmarks and check-list in order to make them more “teacher friendly”, more culturally appropriate, and more accurate.

f.	<b><i>Deleting items dealing with “persuasion”</i></b>
	A few of the teachers, particularly those who were teaching at the primary level, indicated that they found very little use for descriptors that indicated that the student was to be able to demonstrate the ability to “persuade” someone to do something. The teachers felt that this might be more appropriate for older students and/or adults and that in most instances, it was not something that was culturally appropriate for their students. The descriptors that had included the idea of persuasion were therefore removed from the <i>Benchmarks</i> and the check-list.

### *Language Teacher Suggestions for Additional Uses of the Benchmarks*

Part of the feedback I received from the participating language teachers were observations about possible additional uses for the *Benchmarks*. These were unsolicited responses from a majority of the teachers and are seen as positive spin-offs from this research project that may be of benefit to other language teachers. Although the primary intended use of the *Benchmarks* is for assessing levels of language proficiency, these additional uses seem worthy of mention. The following additional uses are suggested.

a.	<b><i>Advising Teaching Practice (washback)</i></b>
	Teachers said that as they were using the check-list to assess levels of proficiency of their students, they noticed that in some cases, some of their students were being checked as not being fluent at a particular level on the same item. This indicated to them that possibly the reason that this occurred was because they had neglected to teach that particular aspect of the language or that they had been ineffective in having the students learn certain vocabulary or grammar. So, they said, if the <i>Benchmarks</i> accurately reflect the learning outcomes for a particular class, when the check-list is used to determine proficiency levels, any teaching points that may have been overlooked, would become evident as the teacher was assessing the students. In this way, the check-lists can be used to assess student proficiency levels as well as provide teachers with a check on how effectively they are teaching to the learning outcomes.
b.	<b><i>Establishing Learning Outcomes</i></b>
	Effective classroom assessment strategies are based on the prescribed learning outcomes established for students. Since this is the case, the First Nations Language Benchmarks (FNLB), according to the feedback received from participating language teachers, can be used to ensure that both their Unit Learning Outcomes and Lesson Instructional Objectives coincide with and match the descriptors of the <i>Benchmarks</i> . If this process is followed, assessment results obtained from the use of the FNLB will be based on the intended student learning outcomes and provide accurate information to use in reporting on student progress.
c.	<b><i>Reporting on Student Achievement and Progress</i></b>
	Tied to good assessment methods, evaluation techniques, and grading strategies, is accurate reporting of student results. Language teachers have repeatedly informed me of the difficulty they have in preparing report cards for their students. According to those teachers who provided feedback on this, the descriptors of the <i>Benchmarks</i> are excellent for developing phrases and sentences that describe, in a factual way, the progress and performance levels of their students. Although this was an unintended use of the <i>Benchmarks</i> , it is an appropriate use nonetheless.

## **Additional Research Findings**

The specific, assessment-related findings of this research project that have been identified in the previous section, are based primarily on the feedback provided by the participating language teachers. There was, however, other compelling information that came out of discussions with the language teachers that is significant and relevant enough to report since these items do have an influence on instruction, learning, and assessment. These other “non-assessment” items include: *spiritual connections with First Nations language*; *“teaching the language” versus “learning the language”*; *differing school learning environments*; and *language teaching resources*. Each of these items will be described in the form of a short article using the following sub-headings:

- a. Finding
- b. Discussion
- c. Conclusion

### **1. Spiritual Connections with First Nations Language**

Finding: In recent discussions with First Nations language teachers and other First Nations educators, the topic of the spiritual nature of First Nations language has come up several times. Since I have been involved in researching the assessment of First Nations language proficiency, I have had frequent opportunities to discuss language and Native spirituality with language teachers and have found that many of them can readily identify significant connections between spirituality and language.

Discussion: First, spirituality is not religion. First Nations view of spirituality usually encompasses the notion of a “Creator” or a “Higher Being” but this is only one aspect of Native spirituality. In its fullest sense, it is about the relationship between the people and all other entities, both animate and inanimate, in the universe. There are relationships between humans and animals, birds, insects, etc., with other living things such as plants and other forms of vegetation, with the earth and all things that are contained in the earth, and with the sun,

moon, planets, stars, and other celestial bodies. For First Nations people, all of these things exist in a state of harmony and balance. Notions of spirituality also extend to the respect and regard First Nations people have for their departed relatives. There is a sense that those who have passed on are still there to guide those who are still living and that they will eventually be together after the living have passed on as well.

Previously, in Chapter 3 of this thesis, I quoted some First Nations people, many of them educators, some of them Elders, who had expressed their feelings about the spiritual nature of language or the connections between spirituality and their native language. Further to those discussions, I have also asked the participating language teachers to speak to me about any spiritual connections they might have experienced in learning or teaching their native language. Most of the language teachers' feeling about the spiritual nature of native languages support the earlier individuals' viewpoints and express some unique opinions as well. The following are some of the quotes from First Nations language teachers who participated in this research project.<sup>10</sup>

In a public school there is limited opportunity for students to learn about spiritual things. Most of the spiritual aspects of the language have to be learned outside of the classroom and outside of the school, but it doesn't always get done in the home or in the community. We must try to get other Elders outside the school, in the community, to help us teach the spiritual aspects of the language. (Aggie Patrick, Feb. 26, 2004)

When I teach about nature, about being outdoors, I put myself directly in that situation and I feel a warmth, a connection with the land and this makes teaching the language easier. The same with traditional clothing and traditional dwellings – it is easier to teach the language when you can visualize and “feel” actually wearing that clothing and being in a dwelling – it makes teaching the language more real. (Linda Redan, Feb. 26, 2004)

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<sup>10</sup> Individuals quoted have consented to have their names appear in print and have been provided with a copy of their quotes in the context of the material in this chapter of the thesis.

Examples [of spiritual connections] could be the prayer and/or the circle that is observed each day before school starts or before First Nations language class and the example of the “strength of animals” that is stressed when students are learning the language. (Jo-Anne Campbell, April 13, 2004)

There are some [Aboriginal] words that are impossible to translate and it is very difficult to pass on to someone else who doesn't know the language, the feelings associated with those words. (Janice McGillis, Feb. 26, 2004)

I took a canoe trip where we went into a number of Aboriginal communities and there were so many beautiful languages that we got to hear. What we encountered was a form of “verbal identity” based on their language. You carry with you (through the language) who you are. Being able to speak your own language makes you so proud of who you are. Learning the language is a personal passion and spirituality makes it stronger, with stronger connections to your own people. (Neawana John, Feb. 26, 2004)

The emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of teaching a language must be in balance and a language teacher has to be conscious of that balance and the connections between the four. There needs to be respect for all things living and non-living – for example we respect our resources such as deer and fish and we ask the Creator for permission to take them and when we take them we give thanks. (Bucky Ned, Feb. 26, 2004)

These quotes, I believe, illustrate two things. First, that the language teachers have expressed many of the same sentiments as others who spoke about language and spiritual connections and they had their own unique views as well, some of which were tempered by the practical nature of their language teaching responsibilities in the classroom. Second, that the connections between spirituality and teaching/learning Native languages, traverse cultural and language barriers, since the quotes represent the thoughts and feelings of people from three different language groups.

Conclusions: Identifiable and strong connections do exist between spirituality and teaching/learning native language. Language teachers, Elders, First Nations

educators, and community members have all spoken convincingly about the various ways in which their language is connected to their spiritual world-view. The implications for assessing levels of language proficiency may not be as obvious nor as easy to demonstrate, but the fact that there are spiritual connections to the language should not be ignored in how levels of language proficiency are assessed. Language teachers should be prepared to allow a certain degree of interpretive latitude, particularly as students develop greater degrees of proficiency, to allow for the possibility that some students may be able to express themselves in ways that are more in keeping with their First Nations spiritual heritage.

## 2. “Teaching the Language” versus “Learning the Language”

Finding: As mentioned in Chapter 3, in the process of reading material to try to gain a broader understanding of all aspects of First Nations languages – teaching them, learning them, and assessing them, I began to question whether “teaching a First Nations language” and “learning a First Nations language” are the same or separate issues or if they are two parts of the same issue. In other words, are the intentions of First Nations people to revive, save, or maintain their language more strongly focused on *teaching* the language or *learning* the language? Initially I felt that by finding out which is the most important to First Nations people, it might help me to have a better understanding of the process of teaching and learning First Nations language and shed additional light on how best to assess levels of student proficiency in the language.

Discussion: For the most part, I believe that whether teaching or learning First Nations language is more significant depends on the perspective of the individual. For a community leader whose goal is to attempt to save the language from extinction, teaching the language to the younger generations would most likely be of paramount importance. For those younger generations, on the other hand, it would likely be more important to be learners of the language – not only to help

in the preservation of their language and culture, but also to be able to communicate effectively with fluent-speaking Elders so that the many nuances and intricacies of the language would not be lost, for even with written forms of the language in existence, a language will never be truly “saved” if the sense and understanding of words is not also retained along with the written words.

Once again, in an attempt to determine whether there was any substance to my hypothesis regarding teaching vs learning of the language, I posed the following question to some of the language teachers who were participating in this project: “Are teaching a First Nations language and learning a First Nations language the same or are they two different issues?” Here is a small sample of their responses.

Teaching the language is critical. The fluent speakers are dying and there are fewer and fewer who want to teach and help preserve the language. It is very scary – every day that I come to the school, I feel like I have to rush because it is important for the students to learn, but it takes time to learn a language and it is frustrating for a teacher who is also an Elder, but you just have to be patient. (Aggie Patrick, Feb. 26, 2004)

I am still in the process of re-learning my language and I feel that I have a responsibility to teach the language. I see teaching my language as a “gift” to others; it must be passed on. I believe that language and culture are intimately interlocked, that they cannot be separated. A knowledge of the land is also important in teaching the language - there is a definite need to maintain connections with our culture through language. (Bucky Ned, Feb. 26, 2004)

When I asked the same question of a small group of language teachers that included Linda Redan, Neawana John, and Janice McGillis, all three of them just looked at me rather blankly without saying anything. In order to try to elicit responses from them, I posed a further question, “How did you get into teaching your language in the first place?” Almost simultaneously they responded with precisely the same words, “I got dragged into teaching by other language teachers and community members who knew I could speak a little of the language.” Each in turn expanded on their first remarks.

I just put my name forward for language training courses and I was accepted and I began to learn the language. Also, I am teaching different now than when I started. The past two years at the Intermediate level, I am using more picture stories and games to get them to learn. (Janice McGillis, Feb. 26, 2004)

Because I knew how to speak the language a little, I got put into a classroom and told to teach; just do it. I learned to teach because I had to survive. I guess I was learning and teaching at the same time. My original interest was in Aboriginal history (family history) and this was a natural tie-in to [teaching] the language. (Linda Redan, Feb. 26, 2004)

In the beginning, I just wanted to learn to speak the language properly, I didn't necessarily want to teach it. As I was learning, I just got shoved into teaching. I learned the language in a lot different way than I am teaching it now. Different students need different approaches. (Neawana John, Feb. 26, 2004)

Those teachers who learned their language growing up, are now adults and who have maintained their ability to speak the language, teaching the language would seem to be of a higher priority for them. They see sharing their language skills with others, particularly younger students, as a legacy that they are responsible for leaving. For others, some of whom are younger adults who have learned their language later in life, learning is still an important part of their relationship with the language. Several of the teachers consider themselves to still be learners as well as teachers and it is often difficult for them, particularly working in isolation, to continually be learning while they are teaching. This is a situation that will be occurring more and more frequently as time goes on since most of the young adults do not have any Native language ability at all. As a result, unless their children begin to have opportunities to learn the language from an early age in daycare, pre-school, and in the K to 12 system, their language will soon be extinct.

Conclusions: In the final analysis, does it really matter whether teaching a native language and learning a native language are separate issues or two parts of the same issue? Perhaps not. But in trying to describe the difference between teaching a language and learning a language, most of the language teachers I spoke with are passionate about both teaching and learning and for them there is a strong relationship between the two. One of the factors might be that most of the teachers have had to partially or totally re-learn their language. For them, the connection is that they have been involved both as a student and as a teacher. This experience has given them the sense that there is a relationship between teaching a language and learning a language that they are likely to pass on to their students. In addition, it may be that the teachers to whom I posed the question, chose to respond with statements about what really matters for them – that is, the role of their native language in their lives, their responsibility to learn to be more fluent in their own language, and being able to teach it effectively to their students. What matters in a more global sense is that First Nations languages are perpetuated through teaching by fluent speakers and learning by students of all ages. Teaching and learning are inseparably linked and the main difference between them is simply the perspective from which one chooses to view the issue. At this point I feel like I have only brushed the surface on this issue, and it is perhaps worth pursuing, but not at this time and not at the expense of further work refining the First Nations Language Benchmarks.

### **3. Differing School Learning Environments**

Finding: Based on the observations I made while visiting participating language teachers in their schools, it was evident that the learning environments in which they teach are vastly different. What are these differences, why do they exist, and how can they be reduced?

Discussion: *What are the differences in learning environments?* The following table provides an illustration of some of the differences in the schools that were involved in the research project.

School	District	Public/Band	Grades	Language
A	1	Public	K to 7	St'at'imc
B	1	Public	K to 7	St'at'imc
C	1	Public	8 to 12	St'at'imc
D	1	On-reserve/ public staffed	K to 10	St'at'imc
E	2	Public	8 to 12	Secwepemc
F	N/A	On-reserve	K to 10 Immersion	Secwepemc
G	3	Public	K to 7	Nsi'lx
H	3	Public	K to 7	Nle?kepmx
I	3	Public	7 to 9	Nle?kepmx
J	3	Public	8 to 12	Nle?kepmx
K	N/A	On-reserve	K to 10	Secwepemc

Table 3 - Schools Involved in the Research Project

As can be seen from the information contained in Table 3, the schools where the participating language teachers work are not only separated by large geographical distances, they also span all grades from kindergarten to grade 12. Most of the elementary schools are small, with populations ranging from 50 to 250 students, and even the secondary schools are not overly large, ranging in size from 250 to 500 students. The largest noticeable difference in learning environments is between the public schools located in non-Native communities and the Band-operated schools located on-reserve. In those schools located on-reserve, there is a much greater sense of urgency and purpose associated with teaching the language, which in turn gives those students who are learning their Native language a much greater sense of pride in their own culture. It makes the task of the language teacher that much easier and that much more satisfying when there is community support behind the language program.

To an outside observer, it seems that for those teachers who work in the public schools, while their efforts are appreciated, the non-Native culture of the schools mitigates against their program of instruction being as successful as those programs being taught in Band-operated schools. Another difference is that in the public schools, there are very few other First Nations people employed there, usually at most a First Nations Support Worker, but very few other teachers. In Band-operated schools, however, there is a much greater likelihood of there being other First Nations teachers and staff members. This makes a great deal of difference for the language teacher, who has other First Nations people to speak to on a regular basis and this helps to provide a much more supportive environment in which to teach.

*Why do the differences in learning environments exist?* These differences exist for a variety of political and economic reasons. In the public school system (in recent years there has been some pressure put on school boards to hire more teachers of Aboriginal ancestry), the demand far outstrips the supply of certified First Nations teachers. The rate of growth of First Nations students is positive – something that cannot be said for the non-Native student population, which is in steady decline. This means that even more First Nations teachers are needed to bring their numbers, province wide, up to the same percentage levels represented by First Nations students in the public school system. When this is achieved, there may be a greater First Nations presence in the public schools and therefore a more supportive environment for First Nations language and culture programs to be taught.

Many school districts that have large populations of First Nations students are beginning to establish First Nations Education Councils who have a direct say in how Aboriginal Targeted Funds are spent in support of First Nations programs in the schools. It is up to those Councils to decide how those funds will be spent and in which areas (of which language is one), the priorities for spending will be emphasized. If a higher priority is placed on in-school support for First Nations

students and less on language teaching, then that translates to fewer language programs and thus fewer language teachers in district schools. This lower priority for language can be quite apparent to both the language teachers and students and often results in programs eventually being cancelled in some schools. Most of these conditions do not exist in Band-operated schools, primarily because one of the reasons that such schools are established in the first place is a desire on the part of the First Nations community to emphasize First Nations language and culture for their students. There are usually a greater number of teachers and staff who are members of the community or at least Aboriginal descent and this provides a much better learning atmosphere in the school, particularly for those involved in teaching language and culture programs. Many Band-operated schools are directed by community-based Education Advisory Committees comprised of community members and often selected members of the Band Council. This means that both the political and community will is behind the school and a very high priority is usually placed on the effective delivery of language and culture programs. All of this support makes the work of the First Nations language teacher much more meaningful and enjoyable.

***How can the differences in Learning Environments between public and Band-operated schools be reduced?*** It is interesting to note that one of the main goals of the many First Nations Education Councils that have been established in school districts over the past few years is usually to strive for academic “parity” of First Nations students with their non-Native counterparts. The usual method of comparing academic performance is to cite the results achieved on the annual Foundations Skills Assessment (FSA) conducted by the Ministry of Education. Improvements have been made in that regard, but there is still a long way to go to achieve parity province-wide. Not that academic achievement is not important, but the same purpose and resolve has to be directed toward the enrichment of First Nations language and culture programs being made available in public schools, particularly in those schools where there are high percentages of First Nations students. In addition, continued pressure has to be applied to hiring a greater

number of teachers of Aboriginal descent in order to ensure that greater parity is achieved in the First Nations student to First Nations teacher ratio. There will be a profound positive effect on the learning environment in those schools where there are adequate numbers of First Nations teachers, support staff, and language teachers and the students will begin to realize and appreciate the value of language and culture programs that are being made available to them. There is also a need for greater cooperation between the public school system and Band-operated schools in the area of program delivery. Many First Nations communities are located within close proximity to public schools, and while the establishment of Band-operated schools on reserve is a good thing, many students from the same community continue to attend the local public school instead of the Band-operated school. This too, is understandable and is done for a variety of valid reasons. What should be attempted, however, particularly in this era of dwindling resources, is a greater degree of cooperation between schools that are located in close geographical proximity. Collaboration on learning resources, field trips, and special events around Aboriginal language and culture are possible and will make the language and culture programs of both schools better for all First Nations students.

Conclusions: Learning environments in First Nations language programs should and can be improved, particularly in public schools. It is the responsibility of First Nations Education Councils, where they have been established, and First Nations parents to impress upon school boards and district staffs that the effective delivery of First Nations language programs deserve the highest priority for the First Nations targeted funds provided by the Ministry of Education. It is also the responsibility of those school boards to hire more First Nations teachers to bring their numbers closer to the ratio of native to non-native students in the public school system. By doing these two things, school boards will have taken positive steps to improve the learning environment for students of First Nations languages.

#### 4. **Language Teaching Resources**

Finding: From the very first time I contacted language teachers about participating in this research project, discussions invariably involved the teachers talking about the need for additional resources to support language teaching, particularly in the public school system. The issues include: the lack of appropriate reading materials in their native language; the lack of funding for learning resource development; the apparent low priority and lack of funding for full-time language teaching; the need for additional funding for school-based language activities; lack of professional development activities for language teachers and the lack of funding for these activities; and the lack of younger qualified language teachers to fill in for those who are or will be retiring in the near future. The effective delivery of First Nations programs depends to a great extent on the availability of resources to support such programs. If a low priority is placed on the provision of these resources, language programs will be much less effective.

Discussion: Virtually all of the issues raised by First Nations language teachers involve the allocation of additional funds. For the most part, the funds that support language teaching come from the First Nations targeted funds provided by the Ministry of Education. These funds are based on the number of First Nations students (who live on-reserve) who are registered at public schools in each district in the province and are allocated to each district by the Minister of Education. The allocation of those funds becomes the responsibility of the local school board and (where they exist) the local First Nations Education Council. Each of the issues will be addressed separately as follows:

##### ***Lack of Appropriate Reading Materials***

Most other languages taught in the public school system have a European or Asian “parent” language, most of which have had a written form for centuries and therefore have print-based materials to support the teaching of these languages.

The vast majority of First Nations languages were not previously written, and therefore, unless individual teachers have taken the time to prepare written materials on their own, they are virtually non-existent in the public school system. The only places where print materials are beginning to become available are in those locations where First Nations immersion programs have been established. Even in those locations, more print materials are needed to provide a broad base of reading materials for students to use. If reading materials in greater quantities are not made available for language teachers, particularly at the intermediate and secondary levels, students will not reach their full potential in this aspect of language proficiency. A higher priority for First Nations targeted funding directed towards the development of reading materials suitable for First Nations language classes must be established by school districts and by First Nations Education Councils.

#### ***The Lack of Funding for the Development of Learning Resources***

This is similar in nature to the previous issue except that this entails the broad spectrum of all learning resources in support of language teaching. This includes such items as flash cards, pictures depicting various aspects of First Nations life with printed sub-titles, posters that include words written in the appropriate Native language, culturally appropriate pictures for young children to colour, and a wide range of technological support. For example, the use of a portable microphone and speaker system in the classroom to assist the teacher and students in hearing and pronunciation of words; computer stations equipped with interactive CD-rom programs; video and audio tape recorders; and ready access to the internet from the classroom. Another area that requires more funding is for supplies that support teaching students how to make cultural art and crafts. Supplies for making drums, important items of clothing for ceremonies, beading, the making of tools such as those used in fishing, hunting, and gathering food are also important for language teachers to have access to. Once again, those responsible for the allocation of funds must strive to make the work of the language teacher more effective by providing the funds necessary to develop

and/or purchase a wide variety of learning resources and supporting school visits by First Nations people who are willing to share their cultural experience and expertise.

### ***Low Priority for Funding Full-time Language Teaching***

In most public schools a relatively low priority is placed on First Nations language teaching and in some cases, not all students receive instruction in their Native language. What this means is that most language teachers are only paid for the time they are teaching the language and often that is much less than full-time. In some cases, the teachers have to travel significant distances to and from their place of residence to teach one class per day, which amounts to less than ¼ time paid for their teaching. This means that time spent travelling back and forth to school and the time spent preparing for class and developing teaching resources is done on their own, unpaid time. For some of the older teachers, it hardly seems worth it to put in all of that time and energy in return for such small remuneration. Language teachers have unique abilities and skills and should be supported and compensated accordingly. If language teachers are not treated with respect and accorded the professional standing financially that they deserve, fewer and fewer of them will be willing to teach their language in public schools.

### ***Additional Funding for school-based Language Activities***

Funding is also required to improve the quality of education received by First Nations language students. Funds for classes to go on field trips to important First Nations locations and activities is an essential aspect of learning the language. Other activities include hosting gatherings and pow-wows at the school and inviting special guests and Elders to visit the school to speak (in their native language) to students on selected topics. Expenses associated with these activities include providing small gifts, honoraria, and hosting feasts associated with some of the ceremonies. Although these activities are sometimes seen as “frills”, such

cultural activities are a very important part of learning the language and cannot be ignored or minimized without having a negative effective on students.

### ***Professional Development Activities***

Although recognized by principals and school boards as being important, it seems that only “lip service” is paid to the question of adequate professional development when it comes to language teachers. Some opportunities do exist, but not nearly enough funding is available for language teachers to attend these activities. One of the most important and tangible benefits that First Nations language teachers realize from attending professional development activities is networking with other language teachers. Since most of them teach in isolation of each other, it is only through attendance at professional development activities designed specifically for them that they are able to engage in discussions about their practice with other language teachers. Once again, a higher priority should be placed on the allocation of sufficient professional development funds for every language teacher to attend at least two or three professional development activities each school year.

### ***Lack of Younger Qualified Language Teachers***

This is perhaps one of the most critical issues faced by school districts, although in most cases, I am not sure they are even aware that this is a concern. Most of the language teachers involved in this research project and others that I have come in contact with over the past few years are nearing the end of their teaching careers. Many are over 60 years of age and are either becoming “burned out”, are becoming tired of extensive travel associated with their teaching, or are frustrated with the lack of priority placed on teaching language. In many locations, when a language teacher is ill or cannot teach, there are no teachers-on-call to take their place and the class is given a study period or other school work to do.

There is not an abundance of younger, fluent speaking, First Nations teachers waiting in the wings to step in when the current teachers either leave their position or retire. Communities need to take the responsibility of encouraging young people to learn the language and become teachers of the language at the same time. There should be incentives established for young adults to pursue post-secondary education either as a teacher or a linguist, with the goal of becoming a language teacher for their people. The British Columbia College of Teachers (BCCT) also recognizes and certifies fluent speakers who meet community standards to teach their Native language. First Nations communities should be supporting younger members to become fluent speakers, to upgrade their basic instructional skills and become certified through the BCCT to teach their Native language. If some affirmative action is not taken in this regard, in a few short years there will be no language teachers available.

Conclusions: To address all these issues, there must be a greater emphasis placed on improving all aspects of teaching First Nations language from enhancing reading materials, school based activities, and other learning resources, to providing more professional development opportunities, to emphasizing the importance of according language teachers full-time professional positions, and to providing incentives to attract younger language teachers into the profession. Those who are in positions of authority and influence must see to it that a higher priority is placed on the allocation of funds in support of First Nations language programs in public schools.

### **Final Discussions with Language Teachers**

To ensure closure with each of the language teachers that have participated in this research project, I arranged to meet with each individually. This proved to be difficult since it meant arranging a time to meet with them prior to the end of this school year, and that was not possible in all cases. For those teachers whom I have not managed to get in touch with before the end of June, I am still planning on making a connection with them

during the summer. This will be an interesting process, since contact during peak fishing and gathering times will almost certainly be difficult, though not impossible.

The debriefing process that I have followed with those I have spoken to and will follow with those I contact during the summer is:

- a. ask them to review the appropriate sections of the thesis for accurateness in the things that I have reported on, particularly those sections that deal specifically with their comments or observations;
- b. ask them if they have any further comments about the *Benchmarks* or the check-lists once they have seen the amended versions;
- c. explain what will happen to the results of this research
  - ◆ the complete written thesis
  - ◆ the defence of the thesis
  - ◆ presentations at conferences and workshops
  - ◆ other potential uses for the *Benchmarks* and check-list
- d. ensure that all the information intended in the “acknowledgements” section is correct and accurately reflects what the language teachers wish to have included (or omitted); and
- e. extend my personal thanks for participating in the research project and providing each language teacher with a small personal gift.

### ***The Final Result***

As of the publication date of this thesis, the First Nations Language Benchmarks, which I have referred to as the FNLB or more simply the *Benchmarks*, and the accompanying *Benchmarks* check-lists, are in their final, classroom-ready form. Both are included as Appendix 5.

### The First Nations Language Benchmarks and Check-lists

Although in some instances it may be appropriate to apply for copyright to newly developed materials such as the *Benchmarks* and the check-lists, I do not intend to follow this procedure. As I have previously stated in this thesis, the knowledge represented by this method of assessing First Nations language proficiency is not my property; rather it is collectively “owned” by all First Nations language teachers. The development and publication of these materials is the result of the dedication, effort, and teamwork expended by all of the language teachers involved in this project and the results are intended to be used by any and all language teachers who would use them. Copies of this thesis will be provided to all of the individuals who were involved in any way with this project. The *Benchmarks* and check-list may be copied and used in language nests, daycares, pre-schools and Aboriginal Headstart Programs; in classrooms from Kindergarten to grade 12 and in post-secondary institutions, as well as in community settings where adults are learning or re-learning their language. They may also be used as reference by individuals or groups developing language Integrated Resources Packages or language curriculum, or any other situation where they can be useful.

Following successful defence of this thesis, it is my intent to “showcase” the *Benchmarks* at every opportunity. I will be publishing articles on aspects of this work and I will also be presenting at First Nations language conferences whenever the opportunity presents itself. As I continue to be involved in developing First Nations language curriculum, I will be incorporating these materials within that new curriculum and will also be including aspects of First Nations language assessment as a part of the language curriculum development workshops that I been asked to facilitate for various First Nations educational organizations.

### Language Teachers’ Handbook

This publication, which is included as Appendix 9 to this thesis, will also be made available for use by all teachers who wish to use it in their language program. There is no intent to copyright or otherwise restrict the distribution and/or copying of this

handbook. If the use of this document becomes widespread and there is demand for copies, it may be necessary to seek a partnership with a First Nations organization to publish sufficient copies to meet the demand. If this were the case, I would want the copies to be made available at cost to all individuals and organizations involved in teaching Aboriginal languages.

# Chapter Six

## Summary and Recommendations

### *Introduction*

Earlier in this thesis I used the metaphor of *gathering* to illustrate, in a First Nations cultural context, a definition of assessment. I would like now to use another metaphor, one that represents the undertaking of this research project, the metaphor of a journey. The metaphor will describe how the project began, what transpired during the research (journey), and how it ended. I believe that this metaphor is also culturally appropriate, as many First Nations legends and stories involve the use of a journey metaphor (Hanna and Henry, 1995).

There are three main purposes of this final chapter. The **first** is to summarize the contents of the thesis (using the journey metaphor) in a way that links the important components of the research project from beginning to end. The **second** purpose is to provide details of what has been accomplished by completing this journey; that is, to provide an interpretation of the results, to identify connections with other comparable research, to highlight the implications of the results for other language teachers and educators, and to make recommendations for disseminating this information. And the **third** purpose is to make suggestions for other journeys (additional research) that should be undertaken in the assessment of First Nations language proficiency.

### *Statement of Purpose*

Before undertaking any journey, it is important to identify a destination or purpose. The purpose of this journey (research project) has been, through collaboration with practicing First Nations Language teachers, *to develop and trial a “made for teachers” assessment tool that is culturally appropriate, easily administered, and will assist in the determination of levels of First Nations language proficiency.* The final destination of

this journey is the publication of a *Language Assessment Handbook* that contains a “set” of First Nations language Benchmarks (FNLB or *Benchmarks*) and a series of check-lists to be used during the assessment process. The *Handbook* also contains some introductory material and a set of detailed instructions on the use of the *Benchmarks* and the check-lists.

The inspiration to begin this journey came from the many First Nations language teachers and educators, too numerous to mention by name, with whom I have had the pleasure of working over the past ten to twelve years. With a background in curriculum development, a growing interest in classroom assessment and evaluation, and an ongoing fascination with the languages of the First Nations communities of British Columbia, I felt the need, indeed the obligation, to devote some effort to the development of a culturally appropriate method of assessing First Nations language proficiency. Caputo (1993), states that obligation is “...the feeling that comes over us when others need our help, when they call out for help, or support, or freedom, or whatever they need...” (p. 5) Working with First Nations language teachers, I felt their frustration at not having the tools to assess their students’ language proficiency. I saw the difficulties they were experiencing in preparing material to report on student progress. And I heard about the lack of resources and support to develop their own materials. This is where the sense of obligation came from; the desire to help First Nations language teachers by working with them to develop a “teacher friendly” means of assessing the language proficiency of their students.

Embarking on this journey with First Nations language teachers over the past 10 months has been challenging. Soliciting feedback from them, making revisions to the descriptors and the check-lists, collecting yet further feedback and then trying to synthesize all of the information that had been gathered in order to make appropriate and meaningful changes, took a great deal of endurance and fortitude. To get to this point, I drew on Caputo to sustain me. According to him, “Obligations constitute a ‘language game’ of their own, a language game that is not, however, a game that we play but rather, ... a game that plays us, that picks us up and carries us along by its momentum.” (p. 25). Without the impetus

that has been generated by this *obligation de Caputo*, it would have been much more difficult to sustain the level of energy and drive necessary to complete this journey. Even now, the sense of obligation that I feel about this project continues to provide momentum to continue the writing process.

### ***Research Context***

The theoretical and philosophical bases for the development of the *Benchmarks* is assessment. Not evaluation, not grading, not reporting, but **assessment**. Granted, all of these concepts are part of a process that begins with observing and collecting information on a student, followed by placing a value on the information collected, assigning a grade based on that value, and then reporting that information to others. So, the assessment of language proficiency, which can be accomplished in a number of ways, (observation, collecting and placing work samples into a portfolio, paper and pencil tests, verbal and auditory tests), is a process of collecting information about levels of student proficiency in a particular language. The *Benchmarks* have been designed to assist the First Nations language teacher in the assessment (through observation of student performance over a period of time), of approximate levels of language proficiency based on the various descriptors for each of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. As the feedback from the participating language teachers has shown, there are other uses for the *Benchmarks*, but the primary intended use is for assessment of student achievement and/or progress.

The First Nations Language Benchmarks are an evolved set of language rating scales that have been specifically designed for First Nations language. This research has been conducted using four Interior Salish languages, but with minor cultural amendments the *Benchmarks* and check-lists could quite easily be used with other First Nations languages. Most of the international language rating scales (*Proficiency Requirements in common English Study Group: Oral Proficiency Rating Scales*, undated) that have been used as references for the development of the First Nations Language Benchmarks (except for the Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000) contain very general scales, but are excellent models from which to develop a framework. Using the framework concepts

from the international scales, borrowing liberally from the CLB 2000 documents, and integrating the feedback from the First Nations language teachers who participated in the research project, I have developed what I believe to be a legitimate and bona fide means of assessing language proficiency. Of course further use of the *Benchmarks* and checklists is needed to confirm their effectiveness at all grade levels and in other language groups, but significant strides have been made to provide language teachers with a practical means of assessing language proficiency.

Aside from the challenge of developing and modifying the First Nations Language Benchmarks, one of the most compelling aspects of this journey has been meeting the challenges associated with conducting research in a First Nations educational context. This has been dealt with comprehensively in Chapter 3, but some of that bears repeating. Researching collaboratively has been essential to the completion of this journey. As previously noted by Tom (1996), “the [positive] impact [of collaboration] was ... in the ways these individuals had a deeper understanding of the purposes of the project.” (p. 358). Without the cooperation, assistance, and willing participation of the First Nations language teachers, the conduct of this research and the gathering of data would have been impossible and meaningless. Although at times coordinating meetings with these very busy teachers was a challenge, the feedback they provided was given willingly and without hesitation, making the compilation of information that much more effective and efficient.

The appropriate cultural protocols for meeting, discussing, collaborating, sharing intellectual knowledge, and for acknowledging and recognizing the contribution of the First Nations language teachers were very important to observe. As one who has lived and worked in First Nations communities continuously over the past twelve years, I was aware of the protocols, but I had to guard against taking anything for granted, particularly because I was working with language teachers from four different nations. I hope it has been evident throughout this thesis, that I have paid particular attention to protocols and I am confident that I have been respectful of the knowledge and abilities of the participating language teachers.

Whenever First Nations education is the subject of research, historical and political factors cannot be ignored. Both of these factors can be illustrated through the use of a single example – residential schools. Many of the First Nations language teachers who embarked on this journey with me, attended residential school or someone in their immediate family had had that experience. In this part of the province, it is virtually impossible to find any First Nations person who has not been affected directly or indirectly by the residential school experience. That experience continues to have a “trickle-down” effect on virtually all aspects of education as it relates to First Nations students in this province. It affects the way First Nations parents communicate with teachers and administrators in public schools. It affects the choices parents make about sending their children to Band-operated schools or public schools. It affects the way First Nations adults feel about entering public schools. And it affects how they feel about the way their children are treated in some schools.

Having been raised in a small town where a residential school was located, and having attended public secondary school with students from that residential school, I have at least a basic understanding of the circumstances in which those students grew up in the educational system. That previous experience, along with the respectful working relationships I had established with the language teachers before this project began, allowed me to start this journey from a location that was slightly ahead of the normal “starting line”. Nonetheless, becoming more aware of the historical and political factors associated with this research through reading such authors as Archibald (1995), Barman (1986), Battiste (1995), Greymorning (2000), Haig-Brown (1998), Hebert (2000), Kirkness (1985), Smith (2001), and Stiffarm (1998), as well as becoming more familiar with documents such as “Indian Control of Indian Education” (1972) and “The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples” (1996) has enabled me to put this entire research project in the proper perspective, and permitted me to begin to develop a better understanding of the First Nations’ view of education. Without the insight gained through personal experience, listening to the words of First Nations people and reading the words of these and other authors, this journey would have been much more difficult,

maybe even impossible, given the context of the research and given the feeling of many First Nations people about having research conducted “on them” by “outsiders”.

The last issue associated with conducting this research was the fact that I am a non-Native person conducting educational research with First Nations people. Much of what I have already stated in this chapter provides a frame of reference for how I approached this research project. I believe that my knowledge and understanding of local First Nations culture and protocols, an elementary understanding of two of the four languages, and previous professional association with many of the language teachers, has allowed me a special place of privilege with the language teachers and educators involved in this research project. Nevertheless, in spite of my knowledge of the culture and educational context of the research, and in spite of the experience I have gained working in First Nations communities, I will never, ever, be First Nations, nor will I ever be able to completely understand what it is like to be a First Nations teacher or student. This situation is one that I have struggled with on a daily basis for years, not only to try to better understand the educational issues that face First Nations educators, students and parents, but also to better understand all of the daily issues faced by First Nations people. This is particularly important for me since my wife of 38 years is First Nations.

### ***Review of the Methodology***

Since the research methodology has been dealt with in detail in Chapter 4, what follows is a very short summary of what this part of the journey involved. Prior to my involvement in this doctoral program, I had carried out some preliminary research into methods of assessing language proficiency. Much of this early research was based on an on-line publication entitled *General Second Official Language Qualifications* (Public Service of Canada, Undated), and my own personal experience with bilingual language qualifications that existed for the military and Canadian Public Service in the 1980s and early 1990s. The assessment tool I subsequently constructed represented a very primitive attempt to develop a means to measure levels of language proficiency. It was initially conceived as a few descriptors (a three-level scale that assigned beginning, intermediate,

and advanced levels of proficiency in three competencies - oral interaction, reading, and writing) along with a check-list of “common language capabilities” to assist the language teacher in assessing student language abilities. Before any assessment was actually carried out with this device, substantial revisions were undertaken. The reason for these revisions – language teachers who reviewed this first model indicated that they needed more “levels” to be able to discriminate ability levels more accurately in the determination of language proficiency. This led me to carry out further research and ultimately to develop, based on a variety of international models and the Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000, an assessment model that included a total of nine “ability” levels (3 stages with 3 levels in each stage). The original check-list was retained and the language teachers who participated in the first trial were asked to use the *Benchmarks* for reference and the check-list to record student proficiency levels.

Two trial periods were then undertaken with the collaboration and cooperation of First Nations language teachers. Trial One took place between October and December 2003 and Trial Two from late January to early April 2004. The trial schools included both public and Band-operated schools and involved assessing the proficiency levels of students from kindergarten to grade 12 (See Chapter 5, Table 3). The data collected during and on completion of the two trial periods consisted primarily of written and verbal feedback from the participating language teachers. This information was then used to make appropriate amendments (where feasible) to the existing *Benchmarks* and check-lists.

### ***Summary of the Results***

What actually happened during the first trial period was that the teachers used the *Benchmarks* to estimate proficiency levels and ignored the check-list. The teachers found that using the *Benchmarks* directly was easier than referring to the *Benchmarks* and then using a separate check-list (which contained words and phrases that were substantially different from those in the Benchmark descriptors) to record student ability. Using the feedback received from the first trial, the *Benchmarks* were amended only slightly.

However, a completely new check-list format was developed that contained the same words and phrases used in the Benchmark descriptors. The amended *Benchmarks* and the new check-lists were then used during the second trial period. After the second trial period was completed, and based on language teacher feedback, the *Benchmarks* were further revised, as were the check-lists, to better meet teacher needs. For example, the descriptors have been simplified and reduced to include smaller components of language use for ease in assessing. The *Language Teacher's Handbook* (Appendix 7), contains a preamble, including a section on how to use the *Handbook*, a complete set of updated *Benchmarks*, and a revised set of check-lists that is “teacher ready” for use in assessing levels of student proficiency through observation.

### ***Further Discussion and Interpretation of the Findings***

In the final analysis, reaching the end of this journey has resulted in two important outcomes. First, a set of First Nations language *Benchmarks* that are culturally appropriate for the British Columbia Interior Salish languages has been developed in collaboration with currently active First Nations language teachers. The *Benchmarks*, which describe nine levels of language proficiency, are the cornerstone of this language assessment process. The second outcome (based directly on the descriptors which make up the *Benchmarks*), is the development of a set of check-lists. These check-lists are ready for classroom use and are a practical, “teacher friendly” means of collecting information on students. The data collected by teachers is then used to estimate levels of First Nations language proficiency.

There are “secondary” uses for the *Benchmarks* and check-lists that have been identified by language teachers who participated in this research. Although not planned for in the original research, they are nonetheless valid outcomes. These secondary uses for the *Benchmarks* will be described more fully later in this chapter.

The other “outcomes” were not really outcomes, but rather were related, contextual issues associated with the research that have been explained in detail in Chapter 5. Although

there is extensive writing and research on language testing, most of which involves European languages, there is very little current research that is focused on the assessment of First Nations language proficiency. Perhaps this is because most Aboriginal languages are oral and until recently have not been written. Or, perhaps it is because, at least in British Columbia, many Aboriginal languages have not yet been recognized as appropriate secondary school credits for graduation. As has been mentioned in Chapter 3, there are currently only seven First Nations languages recognized by the Ministry of Education for secondary graduation. This is changing and with that change comes the requirement for a greater degree of accountability on the part of language teachers and school administrators to substantiate the grades that are given for First Nations language courses.

Also, some of the research done on Aboriginal language assessment has been conducted outside of North America, and even in this electronic age, much of it is difficult to access. Most of the North American literature on First Nations language is either very technical (linguistics) and seems to have very little practical appeal or applicability for First Nations language teachers or it deals with the historical and political aspects of language revitalization. Both of these are very important, but they do not address the day-to-day assessment needs of First Nations language teachers.

There is also much written about the value of language-based education (Gilliland, 1988; Kipp, 2000; Kirkness, 1992; Norbert and Reyhner, 2002; Paupanekis and Westfall, 2001; Stiffarm, 1998) and about the need for First Nations schools whose underlying premise is total immersion in the Aboriginal language of the community in which the school is located (widely published information regarding the revitalization of aboriginal languages in Hawaii and New Zealand; and Hinton and Hale, 2001; Ignace, 1998; Kipp, 2000; and Kirkness, 1992). In my opinion, this is the only way that many of the endangered First Nations languages will survive. This issue, too, is very important, but once again, it is an issue that is at best, on the periphery of the day-to-day concerns of most First Nations language teachers.

So it seems that by embarking on this particular First Nations language assessment journey, much like Robert Frost, I have ventured down “the road not taken”

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveller, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same, (Frost, 1946)

Based on the lack of specific research in the area of language assessment, I can say that like Frost, I have taken “the other” road, the one that was “grassy and wanted wear” even though at the time I began this journey, I had no idea that it was so infrequently travelled.

### ***Implications for use of this Research***

It is anticipated that the *Language Teachers' Handbook*, which contains an introduction, instructions for using the *Benchmarks* and check-lists, the actual First Nations Language Benchmarks, and the check-lists, will serve as a ready reference for First Nations language teachers and other educators. The research that has led to the development of the *Handbook* is based on assessments conducted in four different languages and it is expected that the *Benchmarks* and check-lists will also be useful for other First Nations languages. Some modifications of the descriptors will likely be necessary to render the descriptors more culturally appropriate and relevant for other First Nations languages, but the principle of using the *Benchmarks* and check-lists to gather information about levels of student language proficiency should hold true in other First Nations languages.

Secondary benefits of using the *Benchmarks* and check-lists have already been identified earlier in this thesis. What the participating language teachers have told me is that first, through using the *Benchmarks* and check-lists, they have become much more aware of

what they have taught well and what might need more attention or emphasis. This feedback was based on the assessed language proficiency level of their students; that is, by looking at the check-lists they had compiled, they could see trends in what the students could or could not do in the language. Second, the teachers said that using the same wording in the check-lists that is used in the *Benchmarks*, helped them to link what they were assessing with lesson and unit learning outcomes. Also, by having copies of the *Benchmark* descriptors handy, they were able to develop more meaningful “expected learning outcomes” for the students. And third, many of the participating language teachers said that they did or would use the *Benchmark* descriptors to guide them in writing the narrative portion of student report cards. The language teachers felt that using the descriptors provided a more accurate description of student proficiency levels in the native language.

### ***Dissemination of Research Information***

From the beginning of this journey, one of my intentions was to ensure that the information gathered during this journey was made available to as many First Nations language teachers as possible. It is also my intent to make the information available to other educational organizations such as the First Nations Education Steering Committee, the British Columbia Ministry of Education, and First Nations Education Councils of School Districts throughout the province. Participating language teachers have expressed a desire to see the end results of their involvement in the project made available to as many other First Nations language teachers as possible. For me, the obligation to commit to this journey has also included the necessity to ensure that the maximum number of First Nations language teachers benefit from using the *Handbook*. This means following up with further publication of the results of the research, making presentations at First Nations language conferences wherever and whenever possible, and by conducting workshops that emphasize the assessment component of language curriculum development.

To do this, I intend to publish the *Language Teachers' Handbook* as a separate document using the title "A Language Teacher's Guide to Assessing First Nations Language Proficiency". I am hoping that an organization such as the First Nations Education Steering Committee will undertake publication of this material and make it available to First Nations language teachers at cost.

Even as this journey is nearing its conclusion, I have already presented the results of the research at two conferences. The first was in April, 2004 at the Okanagan Mainline Regional First Nations Support Worker and Language Teacher Conference in Penticton, British Columbia. Approximately 15 First Nations language teachers attended that session. Most of the individuals who attended my session showed interest in the *Benchmarks* and check-lists, made positive comments about them, and were eager to get copies of the materials so that they could use them in their classrooms.

In June, 2004 I presented at a conference at the University of Arizona in Tucson, Arizona. My session was attended by about 50 people, some of whom were students at the American Indian Language Development Institute summer session, while the remainder were language teachers and educators attending the conference. Once again, there was considerable interest in the assessment process and there were requests for additional information on this work. I intend to continue to seek opportunities to present at local, provincial, national and international conferences where the assessment of language proficiency is relevant. And as a language curriculum development consultant, I plan to continue to facilitate workshops focused on First Nations language curriculum development in which the topic of assessing language proficiency will be prominent. Finally, as I continue to pursue research in this area, I am hopeful that I will be successful in having articles published in scholarly journals that will expose this information to an even wider audience.

### *Recommendations for Additional Research*

To begin with, it has been exceedingly difficult to find related research. Much of what has been written about First Nations language deals with language preservation/revitalization (with the growing realization that language immersion is one of the most effective methods of producing fluent speakers), language curriculum development, and with the development of teaching resources. It seems to me that most of the research efforts are focused on areas other than language proficiency assessment, probably because other topics are of more pressing cultural and political concern. The completion of this journey represents only a small step toward establishing a wide variety of means of assessing First Nations language proficiency. The more well-established First Nations language programs become, particularly in public schools, the greater will be the requirement for language teachers to have the capability to assess student progress and ability. As the number of First Nations language immersion programs increase, so too will the need to assess language proficiency become more important. And, the greater the number of jurisdictions that recognize First Nations language as credit toward secondary school, college and even university graduation, the greater will be the requirement for accountability in reporting student achievement. Therefore, some means of assessing language fluency will be essential.

As mentioned, the results from this research project are a meagre beginning only. There is much left to be accomplished in the specific area of language proficiency assessment, not to mention other means of assessing language ability and fluency.

#### *1. Further Refinement of the Descriptors*

The first area where additional research is needed involves further amendment to and refinement of the descriptors used in the *Benchmarks*. This can best be accomplished over time as language teachers continue to utilize the *Benchmarks* and check-lists to assess student language proficiency. Teachers will find that some of the words and/or phrases contained in the *Benchmarks* can be changed to make the descriptors more appropriate for their students. As the *Benchmarks* and check-lists are used by a greater

number of language teachers in a greater number of First Nations languages, teachers will make other changes to the descriptors in order to make them more culturally appropriate for their language. Still other language teachers will find descriptors to add to the list already developed. This will have the effect of making the *Benchmarks* and check-lists more comprehensive and permit teachers to be even more accurate in their determination of language proficiency. If these changes are made as they are required, the result will be a more appropriate set of *Benchmarks* and check-lists for a wide variety of language families.

## 2. *Grade-Specific Benchmarks*

The second area where additional research is needed is similar in nature to that just described. Many of the participating First Nations language teachers indicated that they would like to see the descriptors amended so that they are more grade-specific. They stated that most of the descriptors were applicable to the higher intermediate grades and to the secondary level but that they were not always appropriate for the primary grades. What would be most appropriate for their use would be a set of *Benchmarks* for each of the primary (kindergarten to grade 3), intermediate (grades 4 to 8), and secondary (grades 9 to 12). The process of adding more detail to the wording of the *Benchmark* and check-list descriptors will also take a significant amount of time to accomplish and could be best carried out with ongoing assistance from First Nations language teachers who are active in the classroom on a daily basis and who regularly monitor the progress of their students.

## 3. *A Method to Collate and Present Results*

A third area where additional research is needed is based specifically on feedback from one of the language teachers. She suggested that once the check-lists had been used to assess language proficiency, it would be advantageous for the teacher, students, and parents to be able to see at a glance, the relative level of language proficiency achieved. To do this, it would be necessary to devise a method of quickly identifying all of the positive areas of language development, the areas that needed further work, assigning

values to both of those categories and then being able to represent that achievement cumulatively by a score or on a graph. This would involve assigning some sort of numerical scoring system to connect with each of the descriptors in the check-lists and determining whether or not a weighting system might also be required. It would also have to involve some practical and easily administered system of representing the “score” achieved through this evaluative process so that teachers would not encounter difficulty in explaining the process to students and parents. This may appear to be a more complicated method of presenting the results of language proficiency assessment, but the idea seems to have the potential to be a viable research project that could be accomplished with assistance from First Nations language teachers.

#### 4. *Actual Test Development*

The fourth and final area where additional research would likely yield very beneficial results would be the development of actual audio/visual and pencil and paper tests based on the *Benchmarks* for each of the four components – listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The development of such tests will likely be very useful in language immersion schools where all four components are used on a daily basis, particularly in the higher grades. There is a significant restriction to researching in this area. Unlike the previous areas mentioned, developing these specific tests will mean doing so in one language at a time. Since these tests will have to measure specific language abilities, they will have to be composed, written, and administered in the language of instruction and the oral components will have to be conducted and assessed by fluent speakers if the tests are to produce valid results. Additional research in this area will likely take a long time, and in order to ensure appropriate levels of reliability and validity, could also be very costly. However, such research has the potential to be a very significant step forward in assessing First Nations language ability. One of the language teachers who participated in the research project is teaching at an immersion school and has expressed an interest in pursuing this project and I believe that such a project has the potential to be significant enough to warrant research grant funding from provincial and national sources.

### *Concluding Material*

In the final analysis, the realization of the end of this journey has produced results that represent a unique method of assessing First Nations language proficiency. Although preliminary and rudimentary, the development of the First Nations Language Benchmarks with complementary check-lists, represents the establishment of a foundation on which to build a greater capacity to assess First Nations language proficiency and provide First Nations students and language teachers with a clearer indication of language ability. With increasing teacher use and the resulting modifications, the First Nations Language Benchmarks have the potential to become useful, practical classroom assessment tools for language teachers.

In keeping with the journey metaphor, and returning once again to the words of Robert Frost,

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence;  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference. (Frost, 1946)

I chose to take “the one less travelled by” and I am happy I did. This journey down the First Nations language assessment road has been wonderfully enriching, with many challenges along the way. It has also been a journey that has ended with a great deal of satisfaction in having accomplished what I set out to do.

And what has “made all the difference” is not in having completed this journey on my own, but having had the company and assistance of a group of very fine and dedicated First Nations language teachers, without whom I would never had been able to complete the journey.

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**APPENDIX 1**

**THE ORIGINAL FIRST NATIONS LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT PROTOTYPE**

***DETERMINING ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY  
THROUGH OBSERVATION AND ASSESSMENT***

**A Document in Progress**

**Prepared by Jack Miller**

**June 2002**

## DETERMINING ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY THROUGH OBSERVATION AND ASSESSMENT

### Language Proficiency Levels:

The levels are ordered from 1 (lowest) to 3 (highest) and are cumulative; that is, a student who can function at level 2 can perform what is expected at level 1 and level 2 and a student who can function at level 3 can perform what is expected at all three levels.

There are three *categories* of proficiency – **Oral Interaction, Reading, and Writing**. All three categories have three *levels* of proficiency – Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3.

### Examples of the Characteristics of Performance at Levels 1, 2, and 3:

	<b>Level 1</b>	<b>Level 2</b>	<b>Level 3</b>
<b>Ability to converse</b>	Can sustain a simple question and answer exchange	Can sustain an informal conversation on concrete topics	Can participate effectively in discussion on a broad variety of topics
	Can produce new sentences (not simply repeat memorized material)	Is able to paraphrase when lacking the exact vocabulary	Can expand on topics with ease
<b>Ease in using the language</b>	Delivery may be slow	Speaks with some spontaneity	Has a natural delivery
	Can form sentences with some hesitation	May hesitate when using more complex sentences	Seldom hesitates except to look for ideas
<b>Clarity of communication</b>	Has basic vocabulary for routine social interaction	Has concrete vocabulary for less routine social interactions	Has precise vocabulary to convey exact meanings
	Can talk about facts in the present	Can situate facts and events in time (i.e. has good mastery of simple verb tenses)	Can link sequences, facts and events in time (i.e. has solid mastery of more complex verb forms.)
	Can link words to form simple sentences	Can link sentences together into longer passages	Can link sentences effectively to convey complex ideas

	<b>Level 1</b>	<b>Level 2</b>	<b>Level 3</b>
	May ask for repetition or rephrasing of some questions	Has few difficulties understanding the assessor	Can readily and accurately interpret what the assessor says
	Can generally be understood if the listener pays close attention	Can be understood by most people, but repetition may sometimes be required	Can be easily understood; pronunciation does not interfere with communication

## ORAL INTERACTION PROFICIENCY LEVELS

### Level 1

Level 1 is the basic level of Aboriginal language proficiency in oral interaction. A student at this level can ask and answer simple questions and give simple instructions or uncomplicated directs which are routine in nature. However, communications may be difficult because a student speaking at this level makes many errors and has deficiencies in grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary and fluency. The person at this level may have problems in understanding speech spoken at a normal rate and repetitions may be required to understand what is being said. Examples of some tasks which can be performed at *Oral Interaction Level 1*, are as follows:

- asking and answering simple questions from other students or other people about names, greetings, addresses, dates, time, or numbers;
- making requests to other students or other people and responding to such requests about simple and uncomplicated matters pertaining to school, family, the community, clothing, etc.;
- giving and following simple directions about the location of people, places, or things; and
- giving and following instructions and uncomplicated matters about school activities and other people in the school or home.

### Level 2

Level 2 is the minimum level of Aboriginal language proficiency in oral interaction for students who demonstrate an average to above average ability in discussions that involve departure from routine or repetitive use of an aboriginal language. A student at this level can sustain conversation on concrete topics, describe things that they have accomplished or would like to do, give straightforward instructions to others, and provide factual descriptions and explanations. While errors and deficiencies in grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency may occur, these do not seriously interfere with communication. However, students at this level should not be expected to cope with situations that require the understanding or expression of subtle or abstract ideas. The ability to deal with situations involving hypothetical ideas and the use of persuasion is also limited. Examples of some tasks which can be performed at *Oral Interaction Level 2*, are as follows:

- handling questions from other students, friends, school staff, or family members about a wide variety of topics (either by telephone or in face-to-face conversations);
- participating in informal meetings or study sessions dealing with such matters as school work, homework, establishing priorities, deadlines, etc.;
- giving factual accounts to students or school staff of actions or events that have occurred;
- reciting simple stories or legends; and
- giving and following instructions about how certain things are done, such as putting on clothing, cooking, fishing, hunting, and household chores.

### Level 3

Level 3 is the minimum level of Aboriginal language proficiency in oral interaction for students who are able to demonstrate that they can handle sensitive situations where the understanding and expression of subtle, abstract, or complicated ideas are required, or where unfamiliar topics must be dealt with. A student at this level can support opinions or understand and express hypothetical and conditional ideas. However, the ease and fluency of a native speaker is not required or expected. There may be some errors or deficiencies in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, but such errors rarely interfere with communication. Examples of some tasks which can be performed at *Oral*

*Interaction Level 3*, are as follows

- giving and understanding explanations and descriptions which may involve complicated details, hypothetical questions, or complex and abstract ideas;
- giving and understanding detailed accounts of events, actions taken, or steps to be followed;
- participating effectively in discussions which involve the rapid exchanges of ideas;
- counseling and giving advice to other students, family members, or other members of the community;
- making presentations, giving instructions to others, or defending a particular point of view; and
- dealing with situations which require quick and accurate use of both languages in rapid succession.

## READING PROFICIENCY LEVELS

### Level 1

Level 1 is the minimum level of Aboriginal language proficiency in reading for students who demonstrate comprehension of written materials that is restricted to topics of limited scope. A student reading at this level can understand very simple texts and grasp the main idea of texts about familiar topics. In addition, elementary points of information such as dates, numbers, or names can be read and understood from relatively more complex texts in order to perform routine tasks. A student at this level would not be expected to read and understand detailed information. Examples of some tasks which can be performed at **Reading Level 1**, are as follows:

- scanning various written texts in order to pick out specific elements of information such as dates, numbers, place names, etc.;
- reading elementary level materials such as readers, short stories or legends, and identifying familiar words and phrases; and
- reading familiar words and being able to associate them with pictures that illustrate the words.

### Level 2

Level 2 is the minimum level of Aboriginal language proficiency in reading for students who demonstrate comprehension of written materials that is close to grade level for the non-aboriginal language, including descriptive or factual material. A student reading at this level can grasp the main idea of most grade-level texts, locate specific details and distinguish main from subsidiary ideas. However, reading texts using complex grammar and less common vocabulary could cause difficulty. Examples of some tasks which can be performed at **Reading Level 2**, are as follows:

- reading reference materials to extract information required for class projects or assignments;
- reading articles or other documents to get a general idea of the content or to extract specific details; and
- reading instructions, notices, or newsletters on familiar topics.

### Level 3

Level 3 is the minimum level of Aboriginal language in reading that should be identified for students demonstrating comprehension of text dealing with a wide variety of school and community related topics. At this level most complex details, inferences, and fine points of meaning are understood. Specialized or less familiar material can also be read with good comprehension. Some seldom-used expressions may be missed, however, and there may be some difficulty with very complex grammatical structures. Examples of some tasks which can be performed at **Reading Level 3**, are as follows:

- reading important papers, research or technical reports, or other documents in order to assess implications, provide comments, or make recommendations;
- skimming books, stories or legends, articles, or reports in order to have an overview of the content; and
- reading in-depth materials such as policies or regulations in order to extract details for interpretation.

### Summary of Reading Proficiency for Levels 1, 2, and 3

Level 1	Ability to understand texts on topics of limited scope; ability to understand very simple texts and grasp the main idea of texts about familiar topics; ability to read and understand elementary points of information such as dates, numbers, or names from relatively more complicated texts in order to perform routine classroom tasks.
Level 2	Ability to understand most descriptive or factual material on class or school related topics; ability to grasp the main idea of most class texts, locate specific details and distinguish main from secondary ideas.
Level 3	Ability to understand texts on a wide variety of classroom and school related topics; ability to understand most complex details; inferences and fine points of meanings; ability to read with good comprehension, specialized or less familiar material.

## WRITING PROFICIENCY LEVELS

### Level 1

Level 1 is the minimum level of Aboriginal language proficiency in writing for students that demonstrate the ability to write very limited units of information in the Aboriginal language. A student at this level may write isolated words, phrases, simple statements or questions on very familiar topics using words of time, place, or person. Errors of grammar, vocabulary, and spelling are to be expected and tolerated as long as the message is understandable. Examples of some tasks which can be performed at **Writing Level 1**, are as follows:

- writing simple phrases or sentences describing greetings, daily chores, family relationships, school related activities, etc.;
- listing a series of items or activities in alphabetical order;
- writing a short paragraph describing familiar topics; and
- using forms or formats dealing with routine or familiar situations by filling in words or slightly adapting content.

### Level 2

Level 2 is the minimum level of Aboriginal language proficiency in writing for students that demonstrate the ability to write short descriptive or factual texts in the Aboriginal language. A student writing at this level has sufficient mastery of grammar and vocabulary to deal with more detailed information on a variety of topics. While the basic information is communicated, the writing will require some corrections in grammar and vocabulary as well as revision for style. Examples of some tasks which can be performed at **Writing Level 2**, are as follows:

- preparing short written passages which provide information or explanations for the reader;
- writing brief reports on material that has been read;
- filling in forms or writing reports where brief written comments or explanations are required; and
- making observations or presenting conclusions or recommendations based on something read or seen.

Level 3

Level 3 is the minimum level of Aboriginal language proficiency in writing for students that are able to demonstrate the ability to write explanations or descriptions in a variety of informal and formal situations. At this level, a student can write texts in which the ideas are developed and presented in a coherent manner. The style of presentation and use of vocabulary, grammar, and spelling are generally appropriate and require few corrections. Examples of some tasks which can be performed at **Writing Level 3**, are as follows:

- writing stories or text in which detailed facts and reasons must be provided;
- writing short stories, reports, recommendations, newsletters, on school or community related topics;
- preparing a summary of a meeting or conference; and
- making corrections to text for grammar, spelling, meaning, or tone.

Summary of Writing Fluency for Levels 1, 2, and 3

Level 1	Ability to write very limited units of information in the aboriginal language; ability to write isolated words, phrases, simple statements or questions on very familiar topics using words of time, place, or person.
Level 2	Ability to write short descriptive or factual texts in the aboriginal language; ability to write with sufficient mastery of grammar and vocabulary to deal with explicit information on school and community related topics.
Level 3	Ability to write explanations or descriptions in a variety of formal and informal school and community related situations; ability to write texts in which the ideas are developed and presented in a coherent manner; ability to write texts in which vocabulary, grammar, and spelling are generally appropriate and require few corrections.

**EXAMPLES OF ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY  
AT LEVELS 1, 2, AND 3**

Level 1

**a. Ask and answer simple questions:**

- Hello, how are you? (and other simple greetings)
- What is your name?
- What community are you from?
- Who are your parents? Who are your Grandparents?
- What are you doing?
- What shall we do next?

**b. Give simple directions or instructions:**

- Commands – sit down, be quiet, lets go, etc.
- Go to the calendar and point the arrow to the weather for today.
- Let's count to ....
- Bring me the \_\_\_\_\_ .
- Counting – Can you show me \_\_\_\_\_ items?
- Show me how you tie your shoes.
- Go and wash your hands.

**c. Handle simple social or classroom situations:**

- Ask to leave the classroom.
- Greeting a guest to the class.
- Responding to teacher's instructions about classroom behaviours.
- Asking to borrow something from a classmate.
- Make a simple apology.

Level 2

**a. Give simple explanations:**

- Describe how to spear a fish.
- Why were you late for class?
- What will we do today?
- Describe how to plant a seed.

**b. Give factual descriptions (of people, places, or things):**

- Describe what she is wearing.
- Describe your family.
- Describe your house or your home.
- Describe your school.

**c. Narrate events (past, present, and future):**

- Describe the events of your weekend.
- Describe a sports activity.
- Tell a story about a specific event.
- Develop a simple story from pictures.
- Describe one aspect of a field trip.

**d. Handle complicated social or classroom situations:**

- Describe a fictional character or a famous personality.
- Give a more complicated apology.

Level 3

**a. Give detailed descriptions and explanations:**

- Describe traditional clothing and why and when it was worn.
- What are some of the activities that take place at a potlatch?
- How to butcher/dress an animal.
- Give all the meanings of a word that has multiple meanings.

**b. Handle complex questions, social situations, and educational issues:**

- What do you want to do with your schooling?
- What courses are you currently taking?
- Re-write a myth in your own words.

**c. Support an opinion, defend a point of view, or justify an action:**

- What is your opinion of \_\_\_\_\_ ?
- Debate 2 sides of an issue.

**d. Counsel and give advice:**

- One student could advise another student about the effects of smoking.
- Respond to a "typical" "Dear Abby" question.
- Peer counseling about staying in school.

**ASSESSMENT CHECK-LIST FOR ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY**

Use of the following check-lists is recommended for language teachers to assist in determining a proficiency level in each of Oral Interaction, Reading, and Writing in an Aboriginal language. These are not intended to be all-inclusive, but rather a beginning point for the development, over time, of more comprehensive lists by the language teacher as they gain more experience in determining student proficiency.

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Observation Date(s) \_\_\_\_\_

**Oral Interaction** (in the \_\_\_\_\_ language)

Activity	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
The student demonstrates an ability to converse by greeting fellow students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student demonstrates the ability to recognize and say a variety of articles of clothing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student can speak about all the members of her/his family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student uses the language with ease in most classroom settings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student is able to communicate clearly with classmates, with the teacher, with Elders, and with other speakers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student, through speaking the language, demonstrates an understanding of the past, the present, and the future	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student can link words to form phrases and connects ideas to form sentences and more complex structures.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student can be understood by classmates and the teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student is able to describe hunting and fishing activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student is able to sound out the letters of the alphabet.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Observation Date(s) \_\_\_\_\_

**Reading** (in the \_\_\_\_\_ language)

Activity	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
The student is able to recognize and identify familiar words in the reading of a legend or story.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student is able to connect familiar words to pictures that are familiar.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student is able to recognize letters of the alphabet and to sound out the letters.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student is able to read reference materials and extract information for use in the class or in assignments.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student demonstrates the ability to read and remember common instructions in print form in the classroom.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student is able to read familiar and common signs in the community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Observation Date(s) \_\_\_\_\_

**Writing** (in the \_\_\_\_\_ language)

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Level 1</b>	<b>Level 2</b>	<b>Level 3</b>
The student is able to write simple words and phrases.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student is able to list a series of words	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student is able to complete familiar phrases or sentences by filling in a missing word.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student is able to write a paragraph dealing with familiar topics in the classroom, at home, or in the community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student is able to write the alphabet from memory.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student is able to write a brief summary after having read a short story or article.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student is able to describe in writing, some common fishing or hunting activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**APPENDIX 2**

**FIRST NATIONS LANGUAGE BENCHMARKS  
USED IN THE FIRST TRIAL, OCT. TO DEC., 2003**

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

## LISTENING

### STAGE ONE: BASIC PROFICIENCY

#### B 1 Developmental:

- learner can understand a very limited number of common individual words and simple phrases in a predictable context
- learner can follow greetings
- learner can follow simple instructions that depend on gestures
- learner needs extensive assistance such as explanation, demonstrations, etc.

#### B 2 Progression:

- learner can understand a limited number of common words, simple phrases and simple short sentences within topics of immediate personal relevance
- learner can follow simple personal information questions and simple commands or directions related to the immediate context
- learner struggles to understand simple instructions if without clear context clues
- learner needs frequent assistance
- learner can follow questions related to personal experience and an expanded range of common daily instructions

#### B 3 Accomplished:

- learner can follow, although with considerable effort, simple formal and informal conversations on topics of immediate personal relevance
- learner can recognize many topics by familiar words and phrases
- learner can follow simple short direct questions
- learner can understand many common everyday instructions and directions related to the context
- learner often requests repetition
- learner needs little assistance

## LISTENING

### STAGE TWO: INTERMEDIATE PROFICIENCY

#### I 1 Developmental:

- learner can follow, very broadly and with some effort, the gist of oral communication in moderately demanding situations
- learner can understand simple exchanges: direct questions about personal experience and familiar topics, short sets of common daily instructions, routine announcements
- learner can understand a range of common vocabulary
- learner often requests repetition

#### I 2 Progression:

- learner can comprehend main points and most important details in a discussion in moderately demanding contexts of language use
- learner can follow most formal and informal conversations on familiar topics at a descriptive level, at a normal rate of speech
- learner can understand a range of common vocabulary
- learner can understand short sets of instructions and directions
- learner sometimes requires slower speech, repetitions and rewording

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

-2-

## I 3 Accomplished:

- learner can comprehend main points, details, speaker's purpose, attitudes and style of speaking in moderately demanding contexts of language use
- learner can comprehend an expanded range of concrete, abstract, and conceptual language
- learner can determine mood, attitude, and feelings
- learner can understand sufficient vocabulary and slang expressions to follow detailed stories and descriptions
- learner often has difficulty following rapid, regionally accented speech between native speakers

## LISTENING

## STAGE THREE: ADVANCED PROFICIENCY

### A 1 Developmental:

- learner can obtain information for important tasks by listening to 15- to 30-minute complex exchanges and presentations in some demanding contexts of language use
- learner can sufficiently grasp the meaning to summarize key points and important details
- learner may miss some details or transition details and becomes lost
- learner often has difficulty understanding verbal humour and cultural references

### A 2 Progression:

- learner can obtain complex detailed information, ideas, and opinions needed for complex tasks
- learner can follow most formal and informal discussions on topics of general interest, delivered at a normal rate of speed
- learner only occasionally misses a topic shift or other transition
- learner can understand a broad range of factual, persuasive and expressive oral language in various contexts
- learner sometimes has difficulty with interpreting culturally based verbal humour, especially when spoken at a rapid rate
- learner has an adequate listening/interpreting skill to satisfy most school, social, and family-related situations

### A 3 Accomplished:

- learner can competently and fluently interpret all spoken language in a broad variety of demanding contexts
- learner can follow long stretches of oral discussion with complex language
- learner can understand most, if not all, stated and unstated information in a discussion
- learner is able to critically evaluate most aspects of oral discussion

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

## SPEAKING

### STAGE ONE: BASIC PROFICIENCY

#### B 1 Developmental:

- learner can speak very little; responds to basic questions about personal information
- learner speaks in single words or strings of two or three words
- learner demonstrates very limited vocabulary
- learner makes very long pauses, often speaks words spoken. Depends on gestures
- learner may switch to English at times
- pronunciation difficulties may restrict communication
- learner needs considerable assistance

#### B 2 Progression:

- learner can communicate in a limited way, some immediate and personal needs
- learner asks and responds to simple, familiar questions, uses single words and short sentences
- learner demonstrates limited vocabulary and a few simple phrases
- learner demonstrates some use of very basic grammar
- learner makes long pauses and depends on gestures to express meaning
- learner demonstrates use of vocabulary which is somewhat limited

#### B 3 Accomplished:

- learner can take part in short routine conversations
- learner can communicate basic needs, ask and respond to simple familiar questions, and can describe things using short sentences
- learner demonstrates use of basic grammar, uses correct past tense
- learner demonstrates adequate use of vocabulary for basic communication
- pronunciation difficulties may restrict communication; needs a little assistance

## SPEAKING

### STAGE TWO: INTERMEDIATE PROFICIENCY

#### I 1 Developmental:

- learner can participate with some effort in routine social conversations and can talk about needs and familiar topics of personal relevance
- learner can use a variety of simple structures and some complex ones. Grammar and pronunciation errors are frequent and sometimes impede communication
- learner can demonstrate a range of common everyday vocabulary; may avoid topics with unfamiliar vocabulary
- learner can speak using connectives (and, but, first, next, then, because) but hesitations and pauses are frequent

#### I 2 Progression:

- learner can communicate comfortably in most common daily situations
- learner can participate in formal and informal conversations, involving problem solving and decision making situations in the classroom or home
- learner can speak on familiar concrete topics at a descriptive level
- can demonstrate a range of everyday vocabulary, including some common phrases
- grammar and pronunciation errors are still frequent, but rarely impede communication

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

-2-

## I 3 Accomplished:

- learner can communicate effectively in most daily practical and social situations
- learner can participate in conversations with confidence
- learner can provide descriptions, opinions, and explanations
- in social interaction, the learner demonstrates an increased ability to respond appropriately to the formality level of the situation
- learner can use a variety of sentence structures
- the learner's grammar and pronunciation errors rarely impede communication

## SPEAKING

## STAGE THREE: ADVANCED PROFICIENCY

### A 1 Developmental:

- learner can obtain, provide, and exchange key information for important tasks in complex routine and a few non-routine situations
- learner can actively and effectively participate in 30 minute formal exchanges about complex, abstract, and detailed information
- learner's grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation errors very rarely impede communication
- learner's prepared speech is mostly accurate in form, but may be rigid in its structure

### A 2 Progression:

- learner can satisfy many social or school-related expectations for competent communication
- learner can actively participate in meetings, interviews dealing with complex, abstract, and detailed information
- learner can lead routine meetings and manage interactions in a small, familiar group session
- learner can contribute to extended discussions about complex, abstract, and detailed information
- learner's grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation errors do not impede communication

### A 3 Accomplished:

- learner can create or contribute to discussions in a broad range of complex situations
- learner can deliver public presentations to audiences
- learner can lead formal group discussions on complex topics
- learner can communicate to explain complex ideas to diverse groups, debate on complex topics, teach, and resolve conflicts in a variety of situations
- learner uses language that is complex, accurate, and flexible in its structure

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

## READING

### STAGE ONE: BASIC PROFICIENCY

#### B 1 Developmental:

- learner shows little word sight recognition except for a small number of familiar words
- learner has a limited knowledge of the language and limited exposure to sound-symbol relationships and spelling conventions
- learner can match simple illustrations and written short sentences containing some familiar words

#### B 2 Progression:

- learner can read personal and common place names and other short texts with familiar words and simple phrases in predictable contexts
- learner can read a simple paragraph passage with a familiar, predictable context of daily life/experience
- learner can find a specific piece of information in a simple text, mostly in simple formatted text with clear layout

#### B 3 Accomplished:

- learner is able to read a simple two- to three paragraph passage within a mostly familiar and predictable context of daily life and experience
- learner can locate, compare and contrast one or more specific pieces of information in larger texts
- learner uses a bilingual dictionary almost constantly

## READING

### STAGE TWO: INTERMEDIATE PROFICIENCY

#### I 1 Developmental:

- learner can understand the purpose, main ideas, and some detail in two to three paragraph texts in moderately demanding contexts of language
- learner can find specific, detailed information in text, charts, and schedules
- learner can determine specific details from routine everyday texts such as sets of instructions
- learner often requires rereading and clarification
- learner can occasionally successfully guess the meaning of a word or phrase from the context

#### I 2 Progression:

- learner can follow main ideas, key words, and important details in a one or two paged text on a familiar topic within a predictable context
- learner can compare and contrast two or three specific pieces of information in visually complex texts (e.g. tables, course schedules, calendars, etc.)
- learner can read printed or legible handwritten notes, schedules, itineraries
- learner can learn new information about familiar topics from reading mostly factual texts within familiar background knowledge and experience

#### I 3 Accomplished:

- learner can follow main ideas, key words and important details in two or three page text on a familiar topic
- learner can extract relevant points, but often requires clarification of various cultural references
- learner can locate and integrate several specific pieces of information in complex texts

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

-2-

READING

STAGE THREE: ADVANCED PROFICIENCY

A 1 Developmental:

- learner can read multipurpose texts, including legends and stories, texts, academic materials, and other similar documents
- learner can sufficiently grasp the meaning of text to summarize key points
- learner often has difficulty with infrequently used cultural references
- learner can identify writer's bias and the purpose/function of the text

A 2 Progression:

- learner reads mostly to obtain general information, ideas, opinions, and to learn content area for study tasks
- learner can search through complex displays of information and can effectively locate and extract specific pieces of information
- learner can summarize key points and draw conclusions
- learner sometimes experiences difficulty interpreting cultural references

A 3 Accomplished:

- learner can read a full variety of general and literary texts
- learner can read critically and with appreciation for aesthetic qualities, style, rhetorical nuance, tone, humour, writer's bias and points of view
- learner can search through complex displays of information and can use knowledge to locate specific pieces and extract information from complex and dense texts

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

## WRITING

### STAGE ONE: BASIC PROFICIENCY

#### B 1 Developmental:

- learner can write down basic personal identification information
- learner can copy/record time, addresses, names, numbers, etc.
- learner can write a small number of familiar words, simple phrases and sentences about self, related to immediate needs

#### B 2 Progression:

- learner can write a few sentences and phrases about self and family or other familiar information
- learner can copy basic factual information from other materials
- learner can write a number of one-clause sentences about self and family
- learner can write down a simple set of instructions

#### B 3 Accomplished:

- learner can effectively write simple ideas and information about personal experience within predictable contexts
- learner can write simple descriptions and narration of events
- learner can write simple messages
- learner can take slow, simple dictation with frequent repetitions
- learner shows ability to use one clause sentences or coordinated clauses with basic tenses

## WRITING

### STAGE TWO: INTERMEDIATE PROFICIENCY

#### I 1 Developmental:

- learner demonstrates developmental level of ability in performing moderately complex writing tasks
- learner can effectively convey ideas, opinions, feeling, or experiences in a simple paragraph
- learner can write short letters and notes on a familiar topic
- learner can take simple dictation with occasional repetitions at a slow to normal rate of speech
- learner can write a short routine report on a familiar topic

#### I 2 Progression:

- learner demonstrates an enhanced ability in performing moderately complex writing tasks
- learner can effectively convey familiar information in familiar standard formats
- learner can write one- or two-paragraph letters and compositions
- learner can reproduce information received orally or visually and can take simple notes from short oral presentations or from reference materials
- learner can join two or three paragraphs into a larger text
- learner often produces written work patterns that are typical of English structures; text structures longer than a paragraph may seem “stilted” to a native reader

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

-2-

## I 3 Accomplished:

- learner demonstrates accomplished ability in performing moderately complex writing tasks
- learner can link sentences and paragraphs to form coherent texts to express ideas on familiar topics
- learner can write down a set of simple instructions based on clear oral communication
- learner can extract key information and relevant detail from a page-long text and write an outline or summary
- learner demonstrates good control over common sentence patterns

## WRITING

## STAGE THREE: ADVANCED PROFICIENCY

### A 1 Developmental:

- learner can write formal and informal texts needed for complex routine tasks in some demanding contexts of language use
- learner can write to offer and request information, clarification, confirmation and to express feelings, opinions, and ideas
- learner can write a coherent essay, paper, or report
- grammatical errors and errors in word combinations still occur
- learner can effectively proofread and revise own text with occasional input from others

### A 2 Progression:

- learner can write to inform, express opinions, communicate solutions and decisions or persuade familiar and unfamiliar audiences
- learner can analyze extensive information and ideas from multiple sources for other people's use
- learner can take notes/minutes from meetings on a wide range of topics
- learner can write an interesting essay, story, or report on a diverse range of topics
- learner can demonstrate very good control of grammar, vocabulary, and organization. Occasional errors are minimal

### A 3 Accomplished:

- learner can write complex original formal texts needed for very complex or specialized tasks in demanding contexts of language use
- learner can produce effective and stylistically polished essays, reports, or documents appropriate to purpose and audience
- learner can effectively proofread, revise, and edit all aspects of texts, using own resources
- learner can demonstrate excellent control over grammar, vocabulary, and organization. Errors are rare and minimal

**APPENDIX 3**

***BENCHMARK CHECK-LISTS  
USED IN THE FIRST TRIAL  
OCTOBER TO DECEMBER, 2003***

## ASSESSMENT CHECK-LIST FOR ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Use of the following check-lists is recommended for language teachers to assist in determining a proficiency level in each of Oral Interaction, Reading, and Writing in an Aboriginal language. These are not intended to be all-inclusive, but rather a beginning point for the development, over time, of more comprehensive lists by the language teacher as they gain more experience in determining student proficiency.

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Observation Date(s) \_\_\_\_\_

**Oral Interaction** (in the \_\_\_\_\_ language)

Activity	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
The student demonstrates an ability to converse by greeting fellow students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student demonstrates the ability to recognize and say a variety of articles of clothing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student can speak about all the members of her/his family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student uses the language with ease in most classroom settings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student is able to communicate clearly with classmates, with the teacher, with Elders, and with other speakers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student, through speaking the language, demonstrates an understanding of the past, the present, and the future	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student can link words to form phrases and connects ideas to form sentences and more complex structures.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student can be understood by classmates and the teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student is able to describe hunting and fishing activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student is able to sound out the letters of the alphabet.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Observation Date(s) \_\_\_\_\_

**Reading** (in the \_\_\_\_\_ language)

Activity	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
The student is able to recognize and identify familiar words in the reading of a legend or story.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student is able to connect familiar words to pictures that are familiar.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student is able to recognize letters of the alphabet and to sound out the letters.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student is able to read reference materials and extract information for use in the class or in assignments.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student demonstrates the ability to read and remember common instructions in print form in the classroom.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student is able to read familiar and common signs in the community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Observation Date(s) \_\_\_\_\_

**Writing** (in the \_\_\_\_\_ language)

Activity	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
The student is able to write simple words and phrases.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student is able to list a series of words	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student is able to complete familiar phrases or sentences by filling in a missing word.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student is able to write a paragraph dealing with familiar topics in the classroom, at home, or in the community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student is able to write the alphabet from memory.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student is able to write a brief summary after having read a short story or article.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student is able to describe in writing, some common fishing or hunting activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**APPENDIX 4**

***BENCHMARK CHECK-LISTS  
USED IN THE SECOND TRIAL  
JANUARY TO APRIL, 2004***

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

## LISTENING

## STAGE ONE: BASIC PROFICIENCY

**NOTE:** *These Benchmarks are to be used in an age-appropriate context.*

### B 1 Developmental:

*Notes/Comments*

Learner can understand a very limited number of common individual words and simple phrases in a predictable context.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can follow basic greetings.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can follow simple instructions that depend on gestures.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner needs extensive assistance such as explanation, demonstrations, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### B 2 Progression:

*Notes/Comments*

Learner can follow simple personal information questions and simple commands or directions related to the immediate context.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner struggles to understand simple instructions without clear context clues.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner needs frequent assistance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can follow questions related to personal experience and an expanded range of common classroom instructions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### B 3 Accomplished:

*Notes/Comments*

Learner can follow, although with considerable effort, simple formal and informal discussions on topics of immediate personal relevance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can recognize many topics by familiar words and phrases.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can follow simple short direct questions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can understand many common classroom instructions and directions related to the context.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner often requests repetition.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner needs little assistance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

## LISTENING

## STAGE TWO: INTERMEDIATE PROFICIENCY

**NOTE:** These Benchmarks are to be used in an age-appropriate context.

### I 1 Developmental:

*Notes/Comments*

Learner can follow, very broadly and with some effort, the gist of oral communication in moderately demanding situations	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can understand simple exchanges: direct questions about personal experience and familiar topics short sets of common daily instructions, and routine announcements.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can understand a range of common vocabulary.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner often requests repetition.	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### I 2 Progression:

*Notes/Comments*

Learner can understand main points and most important details in discussions in most situations involving home or classroom activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can follow most formal and informal discussions on familiar topics at a descriptive level, at normal rate of speech.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can understand a range of common vocabulary	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can understand short sets of instructions and directions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner sometimes requires slower speech, repetitions, and rewording.	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### I 3 Accomplished:

*Notes/Comments*

Learner can comprehend main points, details, speaker's purpose, attitudes and style of speaking in most common classroom or home contexts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can comprehend an expanded range of concrete abstract, and conceptual language.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner is beginning to determine mood, attitude, and feelings.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can understand sufficient vocabulary and "common" expressions to follow detailed stories and descriptions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner often has difficulty following rapid, regionally accented speech between native speakers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

## LISTENING

## STAGE THREE: ADVANCED PROFICIENCY

**NOTE:** These Benchmarks are to be used in an age-appropriate context.

### A 1 Developmental:

		<i>Notes/Comments</i>
Learner can obtain information for important tasks by listening to 15- to 30-minute discussion and presentation in some demanding contexts of language use.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can sufficiently grasp the meaning to summarize key points and important details.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner may miss some details or transition details and become lost.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner often has difficulty understanding verbal humour and cultural references.	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### A 2 Progression:

		<i>Notes/Comments</i>
Learner can follow most formal and informal discussions on topics of general interest, delivered at a normal rate of speed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner only occasionally misses a topic shift or other transition.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can understand a broad range of factual, persuasive and expressive oral language in both the classroom and home settings.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner sometimes has difficulty interpreting culturally based verbal humour, especially when spoken at a rapid rate.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner has an adequate listening/interpreting skill to satisfy most school, social, and family-related situations	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### A 3 Accomplished:

		<i>Notes/Comments</i>
Learner can competently and fluently interpret all spoken language in a broad variety of demanding contexts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can follow long stretches of oral discussion with complex language,	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can understand most, if not all, stated and unstated information in a discussion.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner is able to critically evaluate most aspects of oral discussion.	<input type="checkbox"/>	

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

## SPEAKING

## STAGE ONE: BASIC PROFICIENCY

**NOTE:** These Benchmarks are to be used in an age-appropriate context.

### B 1 Developmental:

		<i>Notes/Comments</i>
Learner can speak very little; responds to basic questions about personal information	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner speaks in single words or strings of two or three words	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner demonstrates very limited vocabulary	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner makes very long pauses, often speaks words spoken. Depends on gestures	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner may switch to English at times	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Pronunciation difficulties may restrict communication	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner needs considerable assistance	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### B 2 Progression:

		<i>Notes/Comments</i>
Learner can communicate in a limited way, some immediate and personal needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner asks and responds to simple, familiar questions, uses single words and short sentences	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner demonstrates limited vocabulary and a few simple phrases	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner demonstrates some use of very basic Grammar (“I” form or “he/she” form)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner makes long pauses and depends on gestures to express meaning	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner demonstrates use of vocabulary which is somewhat limited	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### B 3 Accomplished:

		<i>Notes/Comments</i>
Learner can take part in short routine conversations	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can communicate basic needs, ask and respond to simple familiar questions, and can describe things using short sentences	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner demonstrates use of basic grammar, uses correct past tense	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner demonstrates adequate use of vocabulary for basic communication	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Pronunciation difficulties may restrict communication; needs a little assistance	<input type="checkbox"/>	

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

## SPEAKING

## STAGE TWO: INTERMEDIATE PROFICIENCY

**NOTE:** These Benchmarks are to be used in an age-appropriate context.

### I 1 Developmental:

*Notes/Comments*

Learner can participate with some effort in routine social conversations and can talk about needs and familiar topics of a personal nature	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can use a variety of simple structures and some complex ones. Grammar and pronunciation errors are frequent and sometimes impede communication	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can demonstrate a range of common everyday vocabulary; may avoid topics with unfamiliar vocabulary	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can speak using connectives (and, but, first, next, then, because) but hesitations and pauses are frequent	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### I 2 Progression:

*Notes/Comments*

Learner can communicate comfortably in most common classroom or family situations	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can participate in formal and informal conversations, involving problem solving and decision making situations in the classroom or home	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can speak on familiar concrete topics at a descriptive level	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can demonstrate a range of everyday vocabulary including some common phrases	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Grammar and pronunciation errors are still frequent, but rarely impede communication	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### I 3 Accomplished:

*Notes/Comments*

Learner can communicate effectively in most daily practical and social situations	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can participate in conversations with confidence	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can provide descriptions, opinions, and explanations	<input type="checkbox"/>	
In discussion, the learner demonstrates an increased ability to respond appropriately to the formality level of the situation	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can use a variety of sentence structures	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner's grammar and pronunciation errors rarely impede communication	<input type="checkbox"/>	

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

## SPEAKING

## STAGE THREE: ADVANCED PROFICIENCY

**NOTE:** These Benchmarks are to be used in an age-appropriate context.

### A 1 Developmental:

*Notes/Comments*

Learner can obtain, provide, and exchange key information for important classroom tasks	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can actively and effectively participate in 30 minute formal discussions about complex, and detailed information	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner's grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation errors very rarely impede communication	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner's speech is mostly accurate in form, but may be rigid in its structure	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### A 2 Progression:

*Notes/Comments*

Learner can satisfy many social or school-related expectations for competent communication	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can actively participate in discussions and interviews dealing with detailed information	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can lead discussions and manage interactions in a small, familiar group session	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can contribute to extended discussions about complex and detailed information	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner's grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation errors do not impede communication	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### A 3 Accomplished:

*Notes/Comments*

Learner can create or contribute to discussions in a broad range of complex situations	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can deliver public presentations to audiences	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can lead formal group discussions on complex topics	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can communicate to explain complex ideas to diverse groups, debate on complex topics, teach, and resolve conflicts in a variety of situations	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner uses language that is complex, accurate, and flexible in its structure	<input type="checkbox"/>	

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

## READING

## STAGE ONE: BASIC PROFICIENCY

**NOTE:** *These Benchmarks are to be used in an age-appropriate context.*

### **B 1 Developmental:**

*Notes/Comments*

Learner shows little word sight recognition except for a small number of familiar words	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner has a limited knowledge of the language and limited exposure to sound-symbol relationships and spelling conventions	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can match simple illustrations and written short sentences containing some familiar words	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### **B 2 Progression:**

*Notes/Comments*

Learner can read personal and common place names and other short texts with familiar words and simple phrases in predictable contexts	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can read a simple paragraph passage with a familiar, predictable context of daily life/experience	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can find a specific piece of information in a simple text, mostly in simple formatted text with clear layout	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### **B 3 Accomplished:**

*Notes/Comments*

Learner is able to read a simple two to three paragraph passage within a mostly familiar and predictable context of daily life and experience	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can locate, compare and contrast one or more specific pieces of information in larger texts	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner uses a bilingual dictionary almost constantly	<input type="checkbox"/>	

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

## READING

## STAGE TWO: INTERMEDIATE PROFICIENCY

**NOTE:** These Benchmarks are to be used in an age-appropriate context.

### I 1 Developmental:

*Notes/Comments*

Learner can understand the purpose, main ideas, and some detail in two to three paragraph texts in moderately demanding contexts of language	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can find specific, detailed information in text, charts, and schedules	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can determine specific details from routine everyday texts such as sets of instructions	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner often requires rereading and clarification	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can occasionally successfully guess the meaning of a word or phrase from the context	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### I 2 Progression:

*Notes/Comments*

Learner can follow main ideas, key words, and important details in a one or two paged text on a familiar topic within a predictable context	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can compare and contrast two or three specific pieces of information in visually complex texts (e.g. tables, course schedules, calendars, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can read printed or legible handwritten notes, schedules, itineraries	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can learn new information about familiar topics from reading mostly factual texts within familiar background knowledge and experience	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### I 3 Accomplished:

*Notes/Comments*

Learner can follow main ideas, key words and important details in two or three page text on familiar topic	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can extract relevant points, but often requires clarification of various cultural references	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can locate and integrate several specific pieces of information in complex texts	<input type="checkbox"/>	

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

## READING

## STAGE THREE: ADVANCED PROFICIENCY

**NOTE:** *These Benchmarks are to be used in an age-appropriate context.*

### A 1 Developmental:

*Notes/Comments*

Learner can read multipurpose texts, including legends and stories, academic materials, and other similar documents	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can sufficiently grasp the meaning of text to summarize key points	<input type="checkbox"/>	
learner often has difficulty with infrequently used cultural references	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can identify writer's bias and the purpose/function of the text	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### A 2 Progression:

*Notes/Comments*

Learner reads mostly to obtain general information, ideas, opinions, and to learn content area for study tasks	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can search through complex displays of information and can effectively locate and extract specific pieces of information	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can summarize key points and draw conclusions	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner sometimes experiences difficulty in interpreting cultural references	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### A 3 Accomplished:

*Notes/Comments*

Learner can read a full variety of general and literary texts	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can read critically and with appreciation for aesthetic qualities, style, rhetorical nuance, tone, humour writer's bias and points of view	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can search through complex displays of information and can use knowledge to locate specific pieces and extract information from complex and dense texts	<input type="checkbox"/>	

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

## WRITING

## STAGE ONE: BASIC PROFICIENCY

**NOTE:** *These Benchmarks are to be used in an age-appropriate context.*

### **B 1 Developmental:**

*Notes/Comments*

Learner can write down basic personal identification information	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can copy/record time, addresses, names, numbers, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can write a small number of familiar words, simple phrases and sentences about self, related to the classroom and to family life	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### **B 2 Progression:**

*Notes/Comments*

Learner can write a few sentences and phrases about self and family or other familiar information	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can copy basic factual information from other materials	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can write a number of one-clause sentences about self and family	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can write down a simple set of instructions	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### **B 3 Accomplished:**

*Notes/Comments*

Learner can effectively write simple ideas and information about personal experience within predictable contexts	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can write simple descriptions and narration of events	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can write simple messages	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can take slow, simple dictation with frequent repetitions	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner shows ability to use one clause sentences or coordinated clauses with basic tenses	<input type="checkbox"/>	

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

## WRITING

## STAGE TWO: INTERMEDIATE PROFICIENCY

**NOTE:** These Benchmarks are to be used in an age-appropriate context.

### I 1 Developmental:

*Notes/Comments*

Learner demonstrates developmental level of ability in performing moderately complex writing tasks	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can effectively convey ideas, opinions, feelings, or experiences in a simple paragraph	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can write short letters and notes on a familiar topic	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can take simple dictation with occasional repetitions at a slow to normal rate of speech	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can write a short routine report on a familiar topic	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### I 2 Progression:

*Notes/Comments*

Learner demonstrates an enhanced ability in performing moderately complex writing tasks	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can effectively convey familiar information in familiar standard formats	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can write one- or two-paragraph letters and compositions	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can reproduce information received orally or visually and can take simple notes from short oral presentations or from reference materials	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can join two or three paragraphs into a larger text	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner often produces written work patterns that are typical of English structures; text structures longer than a paragraph may seem “stilted” to a native reader	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### I 3 Accomplished:

*Notes/Comments*

Learner can link sentences and paragraphs to form coherent texts to express ideas on familiar topics	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can write down a set of simple instructions based on clear oral communication	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can extract key information and relevant detail from a page-long text and write an outline or summary	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner demonstrates good control over common sentence patterns	<input type="checkbox"/>	

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

## WRITING

## STAGE THREE: ADVANCED PROFICIENCY

**NOTE:** *These Benchmarks are to be used in an age-appropriate context.*

### A 1 Developmental:

*Notes/Comments*

Learner can write formal and informal texts needed for complex routine tasks in some demanding contexts of language use	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can write to offer and request information, clarification, confirmation and to express feelings, opinions, and ideas	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can write a coherent essay, paper, or report	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Grammatical errors and errors in word combinations still occur	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can effectively proofread and revise own text with occasional input from others	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### A 2 Progression:

*Notes/Comments*

Learner can write to inform, express opinions, communicate solutions and decisions or persuade familiar and unfamiliar audiences	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can analyze extensive information and ideas from multiple sources for other people's use	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can write an interesting essay, story, or report on a diverse range of topics	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner demonstrates very good control of grammar, vocabulary, and organization	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### A 3 Accomplished:

*Notes/Comments*

Learner can write complex original formal texts needed for very complex or specialized tasks in demanding contexts of language use	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can produce effective and stylistically polished essays, reports, or documents appropriate to purpose and audience	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can effectively proofread, revise, and edit all aspects of texts, using own resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learner can demonstrate excellent control over grammar, vocabulary, and organization. Errors are rare and minimal.	<input type="checkbox"/>	

**APPENDIX 5A**

**FIRST NATIONS LANGAUGE BENCHMARKS  
AFTER FINAL REVISIONS**

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

## **LISTENING**      **STAGE ONE: BASIC PROFICIENCY**

### B 1 Developmental:

#### ***The Student:***

- understands a very limited number of common individual words and simple phrases in a predictable context
- follows basic greetings
- follows simple instructions that depend on gestures
- needs extensive assistance such as explanation, demonstrations, etc.

### B 2 Progression:

#### ***The Student:***

- responds to simple personal information questions and simple commands or directions related to the immediate context
- struggles to understand simple instructions if without clear context clues
- needs frequent assistance
- follows questions related to personal experience and an expanded range of common daily instructions

### B 3 Accomplished:

#### ***The Student:***

- follows simple formal and informal conversations on topics of immediate personal relevance
- recognizes many topics by familiar words and phrases
- follows simple short direct questions
- understands many common everyday instructions and directions related to the context
- requests repetition often

## **LISTENING**      **STAGE TWO: INTERMEDIATE PROFICIENCY**

### I 1 Developmental:

#### ***The Student:***

- follows, very broadly and with some effort, the gist of oral communication in moderately demanding situations
- understands simple exchanges: direct questions about personal experience and familiar topics, short sets of common daily instructions, routine announcements
- understands a range of common vocabulary
- requests repetition frequently

### I 2 Progression:

#### ***The Student:***

- comprehends main points and most important details in a discussion in moderately demanding contexts of language use
- follows most conversations on familiar topics at a descriptive level, at a normal rate of speech
- understands a range of common vocabulary
- understands short sets of instructions and directions
- sometimes requires slower speech, repetitions and rewording

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

-2-

I 3 Accomplished:

***The Student:***

- comprehends main points, details, speaker's purpose, attitudes and style of speaking in moderately demanding contexts of language use
- comprehends an expanded range of concrete, abstract, and conceptual language
- is beginning to determine mood, attitude, and feelings
- understands sufficient vocabulary and slang expressions to follow detailed stories and descriptions
- has difficulty following rapid, regionally accented speech between native speakers

## **LISTENING STAGE THREE: ADVANCED PROFICIENCY**

A 1 Developmental:

***The Student:***

- obtains information for important tasks by listening to 15- to 30-minute complex exchanges and presentations in some demanding contexts of language use
- grasps the meaning of discussion in order to summarize key points and important details
- may miss some details or transition details and becomes lost
- may have difficulty understanding verbal humour and cultural references

A 2 Progression:

***The Student:***

- obtains complex detailed information, ideas, and opinions needed for complex tasks
- follows most formal and informal discussions on topics of general interest, delivered at a normal rate of speed
- occasionally misses a topic shift or other transition
- understands a broad range of factual, persuasive and expressive oral language in various contexts
- sometimes has difficulty with interpreting culturally based verbal humour, especially when spoken at a rapid rate
- has an adequate listening/interpreting skill to satisfy most school, social, and family-related situations

A 3 Accomplished:

***The Student:***

- competently and fluently interprets all spoken language in a broad variety of demanding contexts
- follows long stretches of oral discussion with complex language
- understands most, if not all, stated and unstated information in a discussion
- critically evaluates most aspects of oral discussion

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

## **SPEAKING**      **STAGE ONE: BASIC PROFICIENCY**

### B 1 Developmental:

#### ***The Student:***

- speaks very little; responds to basic questions about personal information
- speaks in single words or strings of two or three words
- demonstrates very limited vocabulary
- makes very long pauses, often speaks words spoken. Depends on gestures
- switches to English at times
- pronunciation difficulties may restrict communication
- needs considerable assistance

### B 2 Progression:

#### ***The Student:***

- communicates in a limited way, some immediate and personal needs
- asks and responds to simple, familiar questions, uses single words and short sentences
- demonstrates limited vocabulary and a few simple phrases
- demonstrates some use of very basic grammar
- makes long pauses and depends on gestures to express meaning
- demonstrates use of vocabulary which is somewhat limited

### B 3 Accomplished:

#### ***The Student:***

- takes part in short routine conversations
- communicates basic needs, asks and respond to simple familiar questions, and describes things using short sentences
- demonstrates use of basic grammar, uses correct past tense
- demonstrates adequate use of vocabulary for basic communication
- pronunciation difficulties may restrict communication; needs a little assistance

## **SPEAKING**      **STAGE TWO: INTERMEDIATE PROFICIENCY**

### I 1 Developmental:

#### ***The Student:***

- participates with some effort in routine social conversations and can talk about needs and familiar topics of personal relevance
- uses a variety of simple structures and some complex ones. Grammar and pronunciation errors are frequent and sometimes impede communication
- demonstrates a range of common everyday vocabulary; may avoid topics with unfamiliar vocabulary
- speaks using connectives (and, but, first, next, then, because) but hesitations and pauses are frequent

### I 2 Progression:

#### ***The Student:***

- communicates comfortably in most common daily situations
- participates in formal and informal conversations, involving problem solving and decision making situations in the classroom or home
- speaks on familiar concrete topics at a descriptive level
- demonstrates a range of everyday vocabulary, including some common phrases
- makes frequent grammatical and pronunciation errors, that do not impede communication

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

-2-

## I 3 Accomplished:

### ***The Student:***

- communicates effectively in most daily practical and social situations
- participates in conversations with confidence
- provides descriptions, opinions, and explanations when asked
- demonstrates an increased ability to respond appropriately to the formality level of the situation
- uses a variety of sentence structures
- makes grammar and pronunciation errors that rarely impede communication

## **SPEAKING**      **STAGE THREE: ADVANCED PROFICIENCY**

## A 1 Developmental:

### ***The Student:***

- provides important information and exchanges key information for important tasks in complex routine and a few non-routine situations
- actively and effectively participates in 30 minute formal exchanges about complex, abstract, and detailed information
- makes rare grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation errors which very rarely impede communication
- speaks accurately most of the time, but speech may be rigid in structure

## A 2 Progression:

### ***The Student:***

- satisfies many social or school-related expectations for competent communication
- actively participates in discussions dealing with complex, abstract, and detailed information
- leads routine meetings and manage interactions in a small, familiar group session
- contributes to extended discussions about complex, abstract, and detailed information
- makes grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation errors that do not impede communication

## A 3 Accomplished:

### ***The Student:***

- contributes to discussions in a broad range of complex situations
- delivers a presentation to class or school
- leads formal group discussions on complex topics
- communicates effectively to explain complex ideas to various groups of students
- uses language that is complex, accurate, and flexible in its structure

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

## READING STAGE ONE: BASIC PROFICIENCY

### B 1 Developmental:

#### *The Student:*

- shows little word sight recognition except for a small number of familiar words
- demonstrates a limited knowledge of the language and limited exposure to sound-symbol relationships and spelling conventions
- matches simple illustrations and written short sentences containing some familiar words

### B 2 Progression:

#### *The Student:*

- reads personal and common place names and other short texts with familiar words and simple phrases in predictable contexts
- reads a simple paragraph passage with a familiar, predictable context of daily life/experience
- locates a specific piece of information in a simple text, mostly in simple formatted text with clear layout

### B 3 Accomplished:

#### *The Student:*

- reads a simple two- to three paragraph passage within a mostly familiar and predictable context of daily life and experience
- locates, compare and contrast one or more specific pieces of information in larger texts
- uses a bilingual dictionary almost constantly

## READING STAGE TWO: INTERMEDIATE PROFICIENCY

### I 1 Developmental:

#### *The Student:*

- understands the purpose, main ideas, and some detail in two to three paragraph texts in moderately demanding contexts of language
- locates specific, detailed information in text, charts, and schedules
- determines specific details from routine everyday texts such as sets of instructions
- requires rereading and clarification
- makes occasional successfully guesses of the meaning of a word or phrase from the context

### I 2 Progression:

#### *The Student:*

- follows main ideas, key words, and important details in a one or two paged text on a familiar topic within a predictable context
- compares and contrasts two or three specific pieces of information in visually complex texts (e.g. tables, course schedules, calendars, etc.)
- reads printed or legible handwritten notes, schedules, itineraries
- learns new information about familiar topics from reading mostly factual texts within familiar background knowledge and experience

### I 3 Accomplished:

#### *The Student:*

- follows main ideas, key words and important details in two or three page text on a familiar topic
- extracts relevant points, but often requires clarification of various cultural references
- locates and integrates several specific pieces of information in complex texts

# *First Nations Language Benchmarks*

-2-

## **READING STAGE THREE: ADVANCED PROFICIENCY**

A 1 Developmental:

***The Student:***

- reads multipurpose texts, including legends and stories, texts, academic materials, and other similar documents
- grasps the meaning of text to summarize key points
- demonstrates some difficulty with infrequently used cultural references
- identifies writer's bias and the purpose/function of the text

A 2 Progression:

***The Student:***

- reads mostly to obtain general information, ideas, opinions, and to learn content area for study tasks
- searches through complex displays of information and can effectively locate and extract specific pieces of information
- summarizes key points and draw conclusions
- experiences occasional difficulty interpreting cultural references

A 3 Accomplished:

***The Student:***

- reads a full variety of general and literary texts
- reads critically and with appreciation for aesthetic qualities, style, rhetorical nuance, tone, humour, writer's bias and points of view
- searches through complex displays of information and uses knowledge to locate specific pieces and extract information from complex and dense texts

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

## WRITING STAGE ONE: BASIC PROFICIENCY

### B 1 Developmental:

#### *The Student:*

- writes basic personal identification information
- copies/records time, addresses, names, numbers, etc.
- writes a small number of familiar words, simple phrases and sentences about self, related to immediate needs

### B 2 Progression:

#### *The Student:*

- writes a few sentences and phrases about self and family or other familiar information
- copies basic factual information from other materials
- writes a number of one-clause sentences about self and family
- writes a simple set of instructions

### B 3 Accomplished:

#### *The Student:*

- writes simple ideas and information about personal experience within predictable contexts
- writes simple descriptions and narration of events
- writes simple messages
- takes slow, simple dictation with frequent repetitions
- demonstrates ability to use one clause sentences or coordinated clauses with basic tenses

## WRITING STAGE TWO: INTERMEDIATE PROFICIENCY

### I 1 Developmental:

#### *The Student:*

- demonstrates developmental level of ability in performing moderately complex writing tasks
- conveys ideas, opinions, feeling, or experiences in a simple paragraph
- writes short letters and notes on a familiar topic
- takes simple dictation with occasional repetitions at a slow to normal rate of speech
- writes a short routine report on a familiar topic

### I 2 Progression:

#### *The Student:*

- demonstrates an enhanced ability in performing moderately complex writing tasks
- conveys familiar information in familiar standard formats
- writes one- or two-paragraph letters and compositions
- reproduces information received orally or visually and can take simple notes from short oral presentations or from reference materials
- produces written work patterns that are typical of English structures; text structures longer than a paragraph may seem “stilted” to a native reader

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

-2-

## I 3 Accomplished:

### ***The Student:***

- links sentences and paragraphs to form coherent texts to express ideas on familiar topics
- writes a set of simple instructions based on clear oral communication
- extracts key information and relevant detail from a page-long text and write an outline or summary
- demonstrates good control over common sentence patterns

## **WRITING**

## **STAGE THREE: ADVANCED PROFICIENCY**

### A 1 Developmental:

#### ***The Student:***

- writes formal and informal texts needed for complex routine tasks in some demanding contexts of language use
- writes to offer and request information, clarification, confirmation and to express feelings, opinions, and ideas
- demonstrates the ability to write a coherent essay, paper, or report
- makes occasional grammatical errors and errors in word combinations
- proofreads and revises own text with occasional input from others

### A 2 Progression:

#### ***The Student:***

- writes to inform, express opinions, communicate solutions and decisions or persuade familiar and unfamiliar audiences
- demonstrates the ability to write an interesting essay, story, or report on a diverse range of topics
- demonstrates very good control of grammar, vocabulary, and organization. Occasional errors are minimal

### A 3 Accomplished:

#### ***The Student:***

- writes complex original formal texts needed for very complex or specialized tasks in demanding contexts of language use
- produces effective and stylistically polished essays, reports, or documents appropriate to purpose and audience
- proofreads, revises, and edits all aspects of texts, using own resources
- demonstrates excellent control over grammar, vocabulary, and organization. Errors are rare and minimal

**APPENDIX 5B**

***BENCHMARK CHECK-LISTS  
AFTER FINAL REVISIONS***

## *First Nations Language Benchmarks*

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **LISTENING**

### **STAGE ONE: BASIC PROFICIENCY**

**NOTE:** *These Benchmarks are to be used in an age/grade-appropriate context.*

#### **B 1 Developmental:**

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Understands a very limited number of common individual words in a predictable context.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Understands a very limited number of simple phrases in a predictable context.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Follows basic greetings.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Follows simple instructions that depend on gestures.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Needs extensive assistance such as explanation, demonstrations, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

#### **B 2 Progression:**

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Responds to simple personal information questions related to the immediate context.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Follows simple commands or directions related to the immediate context.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Struggles to understand simple instructions without clear clues about the context.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Needs frequent assistance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Follows questions related to personal experience.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Reacts appropriately to an increasing number of common classroom instructions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

#### **B 3 Accomplished:**

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Follows simple discussions on topics of immediate personal relevance, at times with considerable effort.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Recognizes topics by familiar words.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Recognizes topics by familiar phrases.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Follows simple short direct questions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Understands common classroom instructions related to the context.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Understands common classroom directions related to the context.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Requests repetition often.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

## *First Nations Language Benchmarks*

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **LISTENING STAGE TWO: INTERMEDIATE PROFICIENCY**

**NOTE:** *These Benchmarks are to be used in an age/grade-appropriate context.*

#### **I 1 Developmental:**

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Follows, with some effort, the gist of oral communication in moderately demanding situations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Understands direct questions about personal experience and familiar topics.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Understands short sets of common daily instructions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Understands routine announcements.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Understands a range of common vocabulary.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Requests repetition frequently.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

#### **I 2 Progression:**

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Understands important details in discussions involving classroom activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Understands main points in discussions involving home activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Follows most discussions on familiar topics at normal rate of speech.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Understands a range of common vocabulary.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Understand short sets of instructions and directions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sometimes requires slower speech, repetitions and rewording.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

#### **I 3 Accomplished:**

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Comprehends main points, details, and speaker's purpose, in most common classroom context.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Understands main points and details in most common discussions about home and family.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Comprehends an expanded range of concrete language.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Understands some abstract and conceptual language.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Is beginning to determine mood, attitude, and feelings.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Understands sufficient vocabulary and "common" expressions to follow stories and descriptions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Has difficulty following rapid speech by native speakers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

## *First Nations Language Benchmarks*

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **LISTENING**

### **STAGE THREE: ADVANCED PROFICIENCY**

**NOTE:** *These Benchmarks are to be used in an age/grade-appropriate context.*

#### **A 1 Developmental:**

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Obtains information for important tasks by listening to 15 to 30-minute discussion in some demanding contexts of language use.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Grasps the meaning of discussion in order to summarize key points and important details.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
May miss some details in a discussion and may become Lost.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
May have difficulty understanding verbal humour. May have difficulty understanding cultural references.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	

#### **A 2 Progression:**

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Obtains information for important tasks by listening to 15 to 30-minute discussion in some demanding contexts of language use.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Follows most discussions on topics of general interest, delivered at a normal rate of speed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Occasionally misses a topic shift or other transition.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Understands a broad range of factual and expressive oral language in the classroom setting.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Understands a broad range of factual and expressive oral language in the home settings.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sometimes has difficulty interpreting culturally based verbal humour, especially when spoken at a rapid rate.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Has an adequate listening/interpreting skill to satisfy most school, social, and family-related situations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

#### **A 3 Accomplished:**

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Competently and fluently interprets all spoken language in a broad variety of demanding contexts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Follows long stretches of oral discussion with complex language.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Understands most stated and unstated information in a discussion.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Critically evaluates most aspects of oral discussion.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## SPEAKING

## STAGE ONE: BASIC PROFICIENCY

**NOTE:** These Benchmarks are to be used in an age/grade-appropriate context.

### B 1 Developmental:

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Speaks very little; responds to basic questions about personal information.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Speaks in single words.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Speaks in strings of two or three words.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Demonstrates very limited vocabulary.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Makes very long pauses.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Speaks words spoken.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Depends on gestures.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Switches to English at times.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Pronunciation difficulties may restrict communication.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Needs considerable assistance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### B 2 Progression:

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Communicates in a limited way, to some immediate and personal needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Asks familiar questions using single words.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Asks familiar questions using short sentences.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Responds to simple questions using single words.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Responds to simple questions using short sentences.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Demonstrates limited vocabulary.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Speaks a few simple phrases.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Demonstrates some use of very basic grammar (“I” form or “he/she” form).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Makes long pauses.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Depends on gestures to express meaning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Demonstrates use of vocabulary which is somewhat limited.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### B 3 Accomplished:

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Takes part in short routine conversations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Communicates basic needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Asks simple familiar questions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Describes things using short sentences.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

*First Nations Language Benchmarks*

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Demonstrates use of basic grammar by using correct past tense.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Demonstrates adequate use of vocabulary for basic communication with occasional assistance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Pronunciation difficulties may restrict communication.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

## *First Nations Language Benchmarks*

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **SPEAKING**

### **STAGE TWO: INTERMEDIATE PROFICIENCY**

**NOTE:** *These Benchmarks are to be used in an age/grade-appropriate context.*

#### **I 1 Developmental:**

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Participates with some effort in routine social conversations Talks about needs and familiar topics of a personal nature.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Uses a variety of simple structures and some complex ones. Makes frequent grammar and pronunciation errors which sometimes impede communication.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Demonstrates a range of common everyday vocabulary. Occasionally avoids topics with unfamiliar vocabulary.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Speaks using connectives (and, but, first, next, then, because) but hesitations and pauses are frequent.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

#### **I 2 Progression:**

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Communicates comfortably in most common classroom or family situations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Participates in conversations involving problem solving and decision making situations in the classroom.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Speaks on familiar, concrete topics at a descriptive level.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Demonstrates a range of everyday vocabulary, including some common phrases.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Makes frequent grammatical and pronunciation errors, that don't impede communication.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

#### **I 3 Accomplished:**

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Communicates effectively in most daily practical situations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Participates in conversations with confidence.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Provides descriptions, opinions, and explanations when asked.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Demonstrates an increased ability to respond according to the difficulty level of the situation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Uses a variety of sentence structures.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Makes grammar and pronunciation errors that rarely impede communication.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## SPEAKING STAGE THREE: ADVANCED PROFICIENCY

**NOTE:** These Benchmarks are to be used in an age/grade-appropriate context.

### A 1 Developmental:

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Provides important information for important classroom tasks.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Exchanges key information to accomplish classroom tasks.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Actively and effectively participates in extended discussions on complex and detailed topics.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Makes rare grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation errors which do not impede communication.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Speaks accurately most of the time, but speech may be rigid in structure.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### A 2 Progression:

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Satisfies many school-related expectations for competent communication.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Satisfies most social-related expectations for competent communication.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Actively participates in discussions dealing with detailed information.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Leads discussions in a small, familiar group session.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Contributes to extended discussions about complex and detailed information.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Makes grammar errors that do not impede communication.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Makes vocabulary errors that do not impede communication.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Makes pronunciation errors that do not impede communication.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### A 3 Accomplished:

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Contributes to discussions in a broad range of complex situations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Delivers a presentation to class or school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Leads group discussions on complex topics.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Communicates effectively to explain complex ideas to various groups of students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Uses language that is complex, accurate, and flexible in its structure.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## READING STAGE ONE: BASIC PROFICIENCY

**NOTE:** These Benchmarks are to be used in an age/grade-appropriate context.

### B 1 Developmental:

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Shows little word sight recognition except for a small number of familiar words.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Demonstrates a limited knowledge of the language. Demonstrates limited exposure to sound-symbol relationships. Demonstrates limited exposure to spelling conventions.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	
Matches simple illustrations and written short sentences containing some familiar words.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### B 2 Progression:

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Reads personal names with familiar words.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Reads place names with familiar words.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Reads short sentences that contain familiar words.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Reads a simple paragraph passage with a familiar, predictable context of daily life/experience.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Locates a specific piece of information in simple formatted text with a clear layout.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### B 3 Accomplished:

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Reads a simple two to three paragraph passage within a familiar and predictable context of daily life & experience.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Locates one or more specific pieces of information in larger texts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Compares and contrasts one or more specific pieces of information in larger texts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Uses a bilingual dictionary frequently.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## READING STAGE TWO: INTERMEDIATE PROFICIENCY

**NOTE:** These Benchmarks are to be used in an age/grade-appropriate context.

### I 1 Developmental:

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Understands the purpose and main ideas, in two to three paragraph texts in moderately demanding contexts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Understands some detail in two to three paragraph texts in moderately demanding contexts of language.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Locates specific, detailed information in text.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Locates details contained in other information sources.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Determines specific details from routine everyday texts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Requires rereading and clarification frequently.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Makes occasional successful guesses of the meaning of a word from the context.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Makes occasional successful guesses of the meaning of a phrase from the context.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### I 2 Progression:

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Follows main ideas and key words in a short text on a familiar topic within a predictable context.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Identifies important details in a short text on a familiar topic within a predictable context.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Compares and contrasts two or three specific pieces of information in visually complex texts (e.g., calendars, course schedules etc.).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Reads printed or legible handwritten notes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Learns new information about familiar topics from reading mostly factual texts within familiar background knowledge and experience.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### I 3 Accomplished:

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Follows main ideas and key words in a two or three page text on a familiar topic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Identifies important details in a two or three page text on a familiar topic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Extracts relevant points from a passage, but often requires clarification of various cultural references.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Locates and integrates several specific pieces of information in complex texts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

## *First Nations Language Benchmarks*

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **READING**

### **STAGE THREE: ADVANCED PROFICIENCY**

**NOTE:** *These Benchmarks are to be used in an age/grade-appropriate context.*

#### **A 1 Developmental:**

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Reads multipurpose texts, including legends and stories and other academic materials.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Grasps the meaning of text in order to summarize key points.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Demonstrates some difficulty with infrequently used cultural references.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Identifies the purpose of the text.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Identifies the function of the text.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

#### **A 2 Progression:**

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Reads mostly to obtain general information, ideas, and opinions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Reads to learn content area for study tasks.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Searches through complex displays of information to locate and extract specific pieces of information.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Summarizes key points and draws conclusions from complex texts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Experiences occasional difficulty in interpreting cultural references.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

#### **A 3 Accomplished:**

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Reads a full variety of general and literary texts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Reads critically and with appreciation for style, tone, humour, and differing points of view.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Searches through complex displays of information and uses knowledge to locate and extract specific pieces of information from complex and dense texts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

## *First Nations Language Benchmarks*

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **WRITING**

### **STAGE ONE: BASIC PROFICIENCY**

**NOTE:** *These Benchmarks are to be used in an age/grade-appropriate context.*

#### **B 1 Developmental:**

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Writes basic personal identification information.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Copies time, addresses, names, numbers, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Records time, addresses, names, numbers, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Writes a small number of familiar words about self.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Writes simple phrases and sentences about self and family.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Writes simple phrases and sentences related to the classroom and to family life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

#### **B 2 Progression:**

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Writes a few phrases or a sentence about self.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Writes a few phrases or a sentence about family or other familiar information.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Copies basic factual information from other materials.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Writes a number of one-clause sentences about self.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Writes a number of one-clause sentences about family.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Writes a simple set of instructions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

#### **B 3 Accomplished:**

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Writes simple ideas and information about personal experience within predictable contexts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Writes simple descriptions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Writes simple narration of events.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Writes simple messages.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Takes slow, simple dictation with frequent repetitions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Demonstrates ability to use one clause sentences or coordinated clauses with basic tenses.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## WRITING

## STAGE TWO: INTERMEDIATE PROFICIENCY

**NOTE:** These Benchmarks are to be used in an age/grade-appropriate context.

### I 1 Developmental:

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Demonstrates developmental level of ability in performing moderately complex writing tasks.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Conveys ideas and opinions in a simple paragraph.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Convey feelings or experiences in a simple paragraph.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Writes short letters and notes on a familiar topic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Takes simple dictation with occasional repetitions at a slow to normal rate of speech.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Writes a short report on a familiar book or topic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### I 2 Progression:

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Demonstrates an enhanced ability in performing moderately complex writing tasks.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Conveys in writing, familiar information in familiar formats.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Writes one- or two-paragraph letters and compositions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Reproduces information received orally or visually.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Takes simple notes from short oral presentations or from reference materials.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Produces written work patterns that are typical of English structures; text structures longer than a paragraph may seem “stilted” to a native reader.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### I 3 Accomplished:

<i>The Student:</i>	Yes	No	Notes/Comments
Links sentences and paragraphs to form coherent texts to express ideas on familiar topics.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Writes a set of simple instructions based on clear oral communication.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Extracts key information and relevant detail from a page-long text and writes an outline or summary.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Demonstrates good control over common sentence patterns.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

## *First Nations Language Benchmarks*

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **WRITING**

### **STAGE THREE: ADVANCED PROFICIENCY**

**NOTE:** *These Benchmarks are to be used in an age/grade-appropriate context.*

#### **A 1 Developmental:**

<b><i>The Student:</i></b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Notes/Comments</b>
Writes texts needed for complex routine tasks in some demanding contexts of language use.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Writes to request clarification or confirmation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Writes to express feelings, opinions, and ideas.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Demonstrates the ability to write a coherent essay, paper, or report.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Makes occasional grammatical errors and errors in word combinations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Proofreads and revises own text with occasional input from others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

#### **A 2 Progression:**

<b><i>The Student:</i></b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Notes/Comments</b>
Writes to inform, express opinions, communicate solutions and decisions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Demonstrates the ability to write an interesting essay, story, or report on a diverse range of topics.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Demonstrates very good control of grammar, vocabulary, and organization.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

#### **A 3 Accomplished:**

<b><i>The Student:</i></b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Notes/Comments</b>
Writes complex and original texts for specialized tasks in demanding contexts of language use.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Produces effective and stylistically polished essays or reports appropriate to purpose and audience.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Proofreads, revises, and edits all aspects of texts, using own resources.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Demonstrates excellent control of grammar, vocabulary, and organization. Errors are rare and minimal.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

**APPENDIX 6**

**THE RESEARCH CONTEXT  
FIRST NATIONS LANGUAGE TEACHER INVOLVEMENT**

## The Research Context

**Phase One** – September to December, 2003

**Phase Two** – January to April, 2004

<b>Language Teachers, Schools, Districts, and Languages</b>	<b>Numbers</b>
Potential First Nations language teacher participants (Note 1)	14
Participation in initial briefing sessions (Note 2)	11 Teachers 3 Coordinators
Teachers who declined to participate (Notes 3 and 4)	2
Teachers who did not teach during Phase One (Note 5)	1
Teachers who did not participate in Phase One (Note 6)	2
Total teachers participating in Phase One	7
Total teachers participating in Phase Two	10
School Districts involved	3
Public Schools involved	9
First Nations Bands (Band Schools) involved (Note 7)	2
First Nations languages included in study	4

Note 1        This number is based on the known (to the researcher) language teachers in three School Districts in south central British Columbia. This area also includes Band-operated schools with language and culture programs.

Note 2        In the three public school districts that were part of the research project, First Nations Education Coordinators (in two of the districts) and a First Nations Language Coordinator in the third district were asked to attend the initial briefing sessions so that they would be privy to the initial discussions, would understand the scope of the research project, and could be future points of contact should additional local support be required for the language teachers.

Note 3        The researcher spoke with one potential participant at a language conference in August 2003. When it was suggested that a short discussion be held over dinner at the conference, the language teacher, after gathering food from the buffet, chose to eat at another table. This was taken as a gentle indicator that the teacher did not want to participate in the research project.

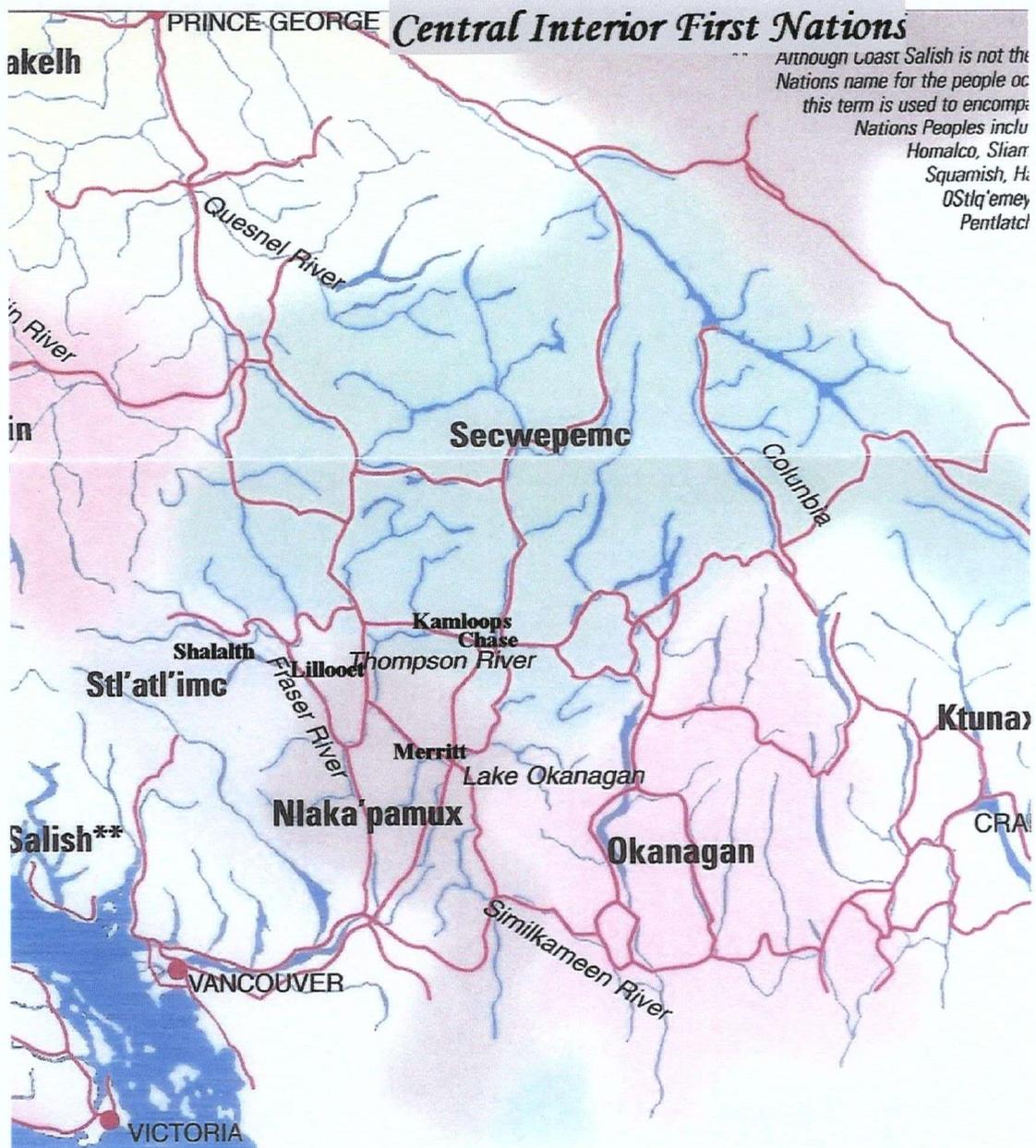
Note 4        Following the initial briefing session in September, one language teacher contacted the researcher by telephone and indicated that they did not wish to participate in the research project.

- Note 5      One teacher who wished to participate in the research project was not employed during Phase One. This teacher taught at the secondary level, the school was on a semester system, and there was no First Nations language taught in the first semester.
- Note 6      One teacher was injured in an automobile accident in early October and was subsequently absent from school until early December. It was decided that the assessments would be done in Phase Two. The other teacher did not receive a personal briefing from the researcher during the briefing sessions in September/October and was unsure of the procedures to follow and asked that she be involved only in Phase Two.
- Note 7      One Band-operated school was a Secwepemc (Shuswap) language immersion school. The other was a typical Band-operated school with a language and culture program as an integral part of its curriculum.

**APPENDIX 7**

**MAP OF RESEARCH AREA**

# MAP OF RESEARCH AREA



**APPENDIX 8**

**LANGUAGE TEACHERS' HANDBOOK**

*Language Teachers' Handbook*

*A Language Teacher's Guide to Assessing  
First Nations Language Proficiency*

**This Document Contains:**

*An Introduction*

*A Set of First Nations Language Benchmarks*

*A Set of Classroom Ready Check-lists*

*Instructions on the Use of the Benchmarks and  
Check-lists to Assess First Nations Language Proficiency*

# First Nations Language Benchmarks

## *Introduction and Overview*

The First Nations Language Benchmarks (throughout this document either *Benchmarks* or FNLB are used for purposes of brevity) have been developed to assist First Nations language teachers in the assessment of their students' communicative competence or language proficiency. The framework consists of:

- ◆ four language skills
  - Listening
  - Speaking
  - Reading
  - Writing
  
- ◆ three stages of progression
  - Stage 1 – Basic
  - Stage 2 – Intermediate
  - Stage 3 – Advanced
  
- ◆ three proficiency levels within each Stage:
  - Developmental
  - Progression
  - Accomplished
  
- ◆ three competency areas
  - social interaction
  - following and giving instructions
  - information sharing

## *Competencies*

Competencies are intended to be general statements of intended learning outcomes. They are directly observable and measurable indicators of language proficiency.

Social Interaction – interacting in a social situation, primarily in speech;

Following and Giving Instructions – understanding and following commands and Instructions, mainly in speech and writing; and

Information Sharing – discussing and exchanging information, ideas, opinions; telling stories, describing, etc. in speech and writing.

**Note:** In this document, the term “language assessment” is used instead of “language testing” since the intended use of the Benchmarks is both for placement (where there are large numbers of students, placing them in appropriate groupings), and for student achievement (assessing learning outcomes based on program objectives).

### ***Proficiency Stages***

The FNLB framework has been constructed to depict language proficiency in three stages, Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced. The stages all have the same structural levels that are all characterized by:

- ◆ progressively more difficult communication tasks
- ◆ progressively more difficult communication situations
- ◆ progressively higher expectations of communicative proficiency (language fluency)

Basic Proficiency (Stage 1 – Benchmarks 1 to 3) – describes the capabilities needed to communicate in common and predictable situations and within the area of basic needs, common everyday activities, and familiar classroom, home, and community topics relevant to most First Nations students.

Intermediate Proficiency (Stage 2 – Benchmarks 4 to 6) – describes the proficiency level of students who can participate more fully in a wider variety of situations. It is the range of abilities required to function in most familiar situations of daily educational and social experience.

Advanced Proficiency (Stage 3 – Benchmarks 7 to 9) – describes the range of abilities required to communicate effectively, accurately, and fluently in most educational and social contexts. Students at these levels have a good grasp of the language and can communicate coherently and precisely.

**Note:** “Native speaker performance samples clearly demonstrate that there is a range of ability on different tasks among native speakers. There is no one native speaker norm; the “norm” is also a range. Therefore, the mastery criterion has to be pragmatically established by a sampling of performance of competent language users in accomplishing a range of communicatively and cognitively demanding tasks in a variety of specified contexts.” (CLB 2000)

**Benchmark Overview**

This table will provide the reader with a general sense of the scope and progression of the First Nations Language *Benchmarks*.

Benchmark	Proficiency Level	Listening & Speaking Competencies	Reading Competencies	Writing Competencies
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**STAGE 1 BASIC PROFICIENCY**

1	Developmental	Gradually increasing proficiency in routine and familiar class and home situations that involve social interaction, commands, and information sharing.	Interpreting simple texts that involve instructions, social interaction and information.	Creating simple texts of social interaction, classroom and home routines.
2	Progression			
3	Accomplished			

**STAGE 2 – INTERMEDIATE PROFICIENCY**

4	Developmental	Gradually increasing proficiency in oral discourse in moderately demanding social contexts, classroom and home situations	Interpreting moderately complex texts that involve instructions, social interaction and information.	Creating moderately complex texts of social interaction, classroom and home routines.
5	Progression			
6	Accomplished			

**STAGE 3 – ADVANCED PROFICIENCY**

7	Developmental	Advanced proficiency levels in oral discourse in very demanding social contexts, classroom and home situations	Interpreting very complex texts that involve instructions, social interaction and information.	Creating very complex texts of social interaction, classroom and home routines.
8	Progression			
9	Accomplished			

## ***How to Use the First Nations Language Benchmarks***

### 1. Who will use the document?

This document is intended for use primarily by First Nations language teachers in public and Band-operated schools. Language curriculum developers may also find this a useful resource to refer to in the “assessment and evaluation” section of written language curriculum. Provincial developers of Integrated Resource Packages (IRPs) may also find this information useful in developing and/or revising First Nations language IRPs.

Although the primary use of this document may be by First Nations language teachers and other educational professionals, those who should benefit most from the use of the FNLB are First Nations students. By using a systematic and appropriate method of gathering information about the language proficiency levels of their students, First Nations language teachers will be able to provide feedback to their students using the FNLB descriptors in a consistent and constructive manner.

### 2. Organization and best use of this document.

This document presents the FNLB in sufficient detail to illustrate and define degrees of language proficiency, performance indicators and tasks for 9 discrete levels of communicative proficiency, in four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and in a variety of contexts such as the classroom, the home, and the community.

Language teachers are likely to have to use only small portions of the FNLB at a time, particularly when carrying out observational assessments of students. A broader use of the *Benchmarks* will likely occur when planning for instruction through the development of curricular goals, objectives, and learning outcomes.

This *Handbook* is organized into the following sections:

- a. introduction – which includes an introduction and overview, a discussion of competencies and proficiency stages, a broad overview of the *Benchmarks* and some instructions on how to use the *Handbook*;
- b. the detailed *Benchmarks*; and
- c. the *Benchmarks* checklist, which is to be used as a means to assess students’ language proficiency levels.

### 3. Guidelines for users.

Before attempting to use the Benchmark checklist with students, please read the introduction and overview section of this *Handbook*.

Once you are familiar with the overview and the intended uses of the FNLB, and are ready to use the Benchmark checklists with students, use only the proficiency stage that you feel is appropriate for the student whose proficiency levels you are assessing. For example, for a beginning student, use only Stage 1 – Basic Proficiency and follow these steps:

- a. look at the *Benchmark* descriptors in “Listening” and “Speaking” first to get a general sense of the progression represented by each of the 3 levels within that stage.
- b. next, following a number of classroom observations of individual students, use the *Benchmark* checklist (make copies for each student to use in your assessment) to record your estimate of how each student is performing in relation to each of the descriptors in the checklist. Use the four-point rating scale to assist you in making judgements about the degree to which each student meets the requirements of each proficiency level. (See below for the four-point rating scale)
- c. keep records of all your observations for each student until you have completed a set of *Benchmark* checklists on each student in the class. It is advisable to review these periodically to determine the progress that each of your students is making in the course. At least one *Benchmark* checklist should be completed and updated on each student for each reporting period during the school year or course semester.

#### **4-Point Rating Scale (Rubric) to be used with the *Benchmark* Checklist**

The following scoring rubric is provided to assist language teachers in gathering information about students’ language proficiency levels. Rate each student according to the description for each number and use this number, along with other comments, in the “Notes/Comments” column of the *Benchmark* checklist.

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Description of Student Performance</b>
1	Not yet able to achieve this level
2	Needs assistance to achieve this level
3	Satisfactory achievement - pass
4	Exceeds satisfactory achievement

4. Limitations of this document.

This Handbook is only one piece of the assessment “puzzle”. It represents only one method of determining First Nations language proficiency and is by no means put forward as the “best” or “only” means to determine student language proficiency. Teachers will undoubtedly find multiple uses for the descriptors, such as helping you to determine the effectiveness of your own teaching and perhaps using some of the descriptors to describe the performance levels of your students on report cards.

The descriptors used in the various stages and levels of the *Benchmarks* and the *Benchmark* checklists are intended as examples only and are not meant to be exclusive or all-inclusive. The descriptors are intended to describe the **range** of students’ language abilities at a particular *Benchmark* level.

**Note:** The information contained in this section is based on the information contained in sections III and IV of the Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000 and has been modified to better suit the needs of First Nations language teachers and First Nations students.

ATTACHED TO THE ABOVE INSTRUCTIONS WILL BE A COMPLETE SET OF BENCHMARKS AND CHECK-LISTS AS DETAILED IN APPENDICES 5A AND 5B