Language Challenges of Aboriginal Students in Canadian Public Schools

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Many Aboriginal students may face language related challenges in K-12 public educational contexts in Canada. It might happen because about 20% of Aboriginal peoples speak in their ancestral languages, and speak English as an Additional Language (EAL). The remaining ones (around 80%) speak English or in some cases, French, as their first language. However, the variety of English many of them speak is called Indigenous English, and they speak Standard English as a Second Dialect (SESD) (Sterzuk, 2008). Nevertheless, many Aboriginal EAL/SESD students are mainstreamed into regular classes, that is, classes where they study in the Standard English. This paper is an attempt to point out two salient language related issues the Aboriginal EAL and SESD students might face in public schools, placing more emphasis on the former. First, monolingual instructional assumptions are explained, and the negative consequences of receiving dominant language medium instruction are analyzed. Secondly, some teachers' assumptions about linguistic minority students, and EAL training are further analyzed. The impacts of these issues on the Aboriginal students' education are discussed in detail, and finally, some programs and strategies designed to address these problems are mentioned.

INTRODUCTION

The Aboriginal[1] population in Canada is growing quickly. It was 976,305 in 2001, and increased to 1,172,785 in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2006). In Manitoba, the Aboriginal population is growing more quickly, and is younger than the non–Aboriginal one (Silver, Mallett, Greene & Simard, 2002). The Aboriginal population in Manitoba was 15.4% in 2006, compared to 13.6% in 2001 and even less (11.7%) in 1996 (Statistics Canada). The educational implication of this young and fast-growing population is that a large percentage of the school population in provinces such as Manitoba is Aboriginal (Silver et al., 2002). However, research has shown that the educational attainment for

[1] Aboriginal: Canadian individuals identifying themselves as North America Indian, Métis, and Inuit (Statistics Canada). The term "First Nations" is used interchangeably with Indian (Core Learning Resources). In this paper, the term Indigenous also refers to Aboriginal peoples as a whole (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit), and anything ascribed to them such as their languages and cultures.

Aboriginal students in Canada is much lower than the overall population (Cummins, 1997). In Manitoba, of the whole population aged 15-29, 12.4% of the Aboriginal and 1.9% of the non–Aboriginal population have below Grade 9 education (Silver, et al., 2002). In addition, at this age range, 33% of the Aboriginal population have a high school diploma, compared to 62.7% of the non–Aboriginal one (Canada and Manitoba, cited in Silver et al., 2002, p. 7).

One reason for the low educational achievement of the Aboriginal students may pertain to language because many of them come from different linguistic backgrounds. About 20% of Aboriginal peoples speak an Aboriginal language as their mother tongue (Census Canada, 2001, cited in Sterzuk, 2008, p. 11), and speak English as an Additional[1] Language (EAL). Although the remainder of this population (80%) speak English or in some cases French as their first language, many of them speak Standard English as a Second Dialect (SESD) (Sterzk, 2008). Standard English dialect is a variety of English "with the most prestige and/or influence with the English-speaking community, used to perform various official and ceremonial functions in spoken and written forms" (Johnson & Johnson, 1998, p. 303). Many Aboriginal students who speak EAL or SESD might not have the required linguistic background to build on in regular (or mainstream) classes– that is, classes in provincial[2] schools where the Aboriginal students, along with English–speaking students, study in the Standard English. If these students do not overcome the language barrier, they might perform poorly at school, or eventually drop out (Duff, 2001; Watt & Roessingh, 1994).

Language education challenges facing the Aboriginal students need to be investigated because of their potentially great impact on the issues such as the educational attainment. Many studies have been conducted on Aboriginal education in Canada. Few of them, however, tended to analyze language related issues in detail. To bridge this gap in the literature, this paper is organized in the following way. First, two salient language related issues facing the Aboriginal students in the K-12 public educational context in Canada are discussed in detail. Secondly, some relevant programs and strategies designed to facilitate learning both EAL and their ancestral languages[3] are mentioned. Conclusion and discussion are presented in the

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[1] Additional language refers to a language one knows in addition to his or her first language
[2] Provincial and public are used interchangeably in this paper.
[3] In this paper, ancestral language refers to any Aboriginal language spoken by Aboriginal peoples and/or their ancestors in Canada.

end. The arguments of this paper include the Aboriginal SESD and EAL students; however, more emphasis is placed on the latter.

ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE MEDIUM INSTRUCTION

According to Canadian Census of 2001, around 20% of the Aboriginal peoples speak in an Aboriginal language, and the remaining 80% speak either English or in some cases French as their first language (Sterzuk, 2008). However, the English many of them speak is not the variety spoken by the dominant population, that is, Standard English. The variety of English spoken by many Aboriginal peoples is called Indigenous English. Indigenous English is different from Standard English in terms of lexicon, morphological, phonological, syntax, pragmatic, and non–verbal features (Sterzuk, 2008). Although many Aboriginal children speak EAL or SESD, many of them are mainstreamed into regular (or mainstream) classes where they study in Standard English along with non–Aboriginal students. According to Blake and Van Sickle (2001), these students cannot become fluent in the Standard dialect right away after entering school. Lack of fluency in the Standard dialect, in turn, might lead to "interruptions and delays in Indigenous students' mastery of literacy skills and, subsequently, subject matter" (Sterzuk, 2008). Sterzuk (2003) conducted a study with four Aboriginal English–speaking students and two non–Aboriginal Standard English–speaking children in Grade 3 in a semi-urban community in Saskatchewan, and concluded that the Aboriginal children were below grade level in the language arts.

One might wonder, then, why most Aboriginal students receive dominant[1] language/dialect medium instruction, instead of maintaining[2] their first languages/dialect at the same time. A reason for this seems to be the monolingual instructional assumptions, (that is, receiving instruction only in the additional language). In the next section of the paper, the monolingual instructional assumptions are defined, with a discussion of the potential language problems that monolingual instruction might cause for the Aboriginal students.

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[1] Dominant language in this paper refers to English in all Canadian provinces except Quebec. Dominant dialect refers to Standard English.

[2] Language maintenance refers to the situation where "an individual or group continues to use their language, particularly in a BILINGUAL or MULTILINGUAL area or among immigrant groups" (Richards, Platt & Platt, 1992, p. 202, CAPS in original).

MONOLINGUAL INSTRUCTIONAL ASSUMPTIONS

In Canada, monolingual instructional assumptions are predominant in the education of bilingual children (Cummins, 2005, p. 588), including linguistic minority[1] students. These assumptions aim to enable EAL learners to think mainly in the additional language, that is, English, rather than their first languages (Cummins, 2009). Moreover, they include these assumptions:

1. Instruction should be carried out exclusively in the target language without recourse to the students' [first language]; bilingual dictionary use is also discouraged.

2. Translation between LI [, that is, the first language] and L2 [,that is, an additional language] has no place in the teaching of language or literacy. Encouragement of translation in L2 teaching is viewed as a reversion to the discredited grammar/translation method; or in bilingual/immersion programs, use of translation is equated with the discredited concurrent translation method.

3. Within L2 immersion[2] and bilingual/dual[3] language programs, the two languages should be kept rigidly separate; they constitute "two solitudes." (Cummins, 2005, p. 588, quotes in original)

The advocates of the monolingual instruction believe that bilingual education hinders EAL students from excelling at school (Hakuta & Moran, 1995). They attribute these students' underachievement at school (Esser, 2006) and poor literacy to education in the mother tongue rather than in the dominant language (Cummins, 2001). These beliefs stem from earlier research with bilingual children and comparing them with the monolingual ones from a cognitive perspective. For instance, Peal and Lambert (1962) found that the monolingual students performed better than the bilingual ones on the academic tasks and verbal sections of an intelligence test. In his research with Irish

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[1] Linguistic minority refers to a group which is smaller in number than the rest of the population of a State, "whose members have … linguistic features different from those of the rest of the population, and are guided, if only implicitly, by the will to safeguard their … language (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000, p. 489-490). In this paper, linguistic minority includes the Aboriginal EAL/SESD students in Canada.

[2] Immersion program refers to a program in which students that speak in only one language receive second, or additional, language medium instruction at school. The second language might be used the entire day (as in the total immersion program) or only part of it (as in the partial immersion program) (Richards, Platt & Platt, 1992).

[3] Dual track program refers to a type of bilingual program in which the majority, that is, dominant, and minority languages are both used as the medium of instruction at school. Daily time exposure to each language depends on the type of program.

students, McNamara (1966) found that English–speaking children taught in Irish were behind the ones taught in English in the problem Arithmetic. Later, Torrance, Gowan, Wu and Aliotti (1970) concluded that in Singapore, the bilingual children in grades three to five performed lower than the monolingual ones on the flexibility and fluency scales of the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking. Similarly, Tsushima and Hogan (1975) found that the verbal academic skills of Japanese English bilinguals in grade 4 and 5 were lower than their monolingual (English–speaking) counterparts on nonverbal IQ tests.

From a social point of view, some researchers relate "low social mobility" (Cummins, 2001, p. 260) to bilingualism, and believe that receiving mother tongue medium instruction prevents EAL students from integration into dominant society. In addition, "[g]lorification of dominant languages, stigmatisation of … minority languages and the rationalisation of the relationship between them" might make some linguistic minority parents shift to the dominant language (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009, n.p.) or the Standard dialect. As a result, many Aboriginal parents might prefer their children to receive the dominant language/dialect medium instruction.

Phillipson (1992) identified factors influencing English language teaching, which could serve as other justifications for the monolingual instruction. In addition to the belief that English should be taught alone, these factors include the idea that native English speakers are best for teaching it. Moreover, some might believe that English should be taught as early and as much as possible, and that English language standards would decrease if other languages are used. According to what Wink (2009) calls a "misunderstanding" about bilingualism, "if we want children to speak English, some seem to believe that we must give more, sooner, faster, harder, and louder" (p. 327).

The ideas and assumptions about the negative effects of bilingualism and the superiority of the monolingual instruction over the bilingual one have led to the lack of a coherent ancestral language maintenance policy in Canada (Cummins, 2005). As a result, many Aboriginal EAL/SESD students receive dominant language medium instruction at public schools in Canada. The disadvantages of the monolingual instruction for these students and the language challenges they might face in these contexts are discussed in the following section.

DISADVANTAGES OF MONOLINGUAL INSTRUCTION FOR ABORIGINAL STUDENTS

Researchers have discovered that the monolingual instruction could disadvantage Aboriginal students for a variety of reasons. As Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000) mentioned, learners' background knowledge is fundamental in all subsequent learning. The Aboriginal EAL learners' pre–existing knowledge might be encoded in their first language; therefore, English knowledge and concepts should be linked with their mother tongues (Cummins, cited in Cummins, 2009, p. 318). This cannot be realized if the Aboriginal learners receive instruction only in the additional language (Cummins, 2009). Moreover, in a monolingual setting, the use of bilingual dictionaries, mother tongue, and translation is usually discouraged. Therefore, many Aboriginal students are potentially impeded from enhancing their linguistic awareness (Malakoff & Hakuta, 1991) and critical and higher order thinking (Cummins, 2007), and increasing their knowledge about the additional language vocabulary (Cummins, 2007).

In mainstream classrooms, using one's ancestral language tends to be discouraged. However, research results (Cummins, 2001; Toukomma & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1977) indicate that the first and additional language proficiencies are related to each other, and that the first language proficiency is required for learning at least some subject matters at schools. Cummins' (2001) Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis proposes that,

> The level of L2 competence which a bilingual child attains is partially a function of the type of competence the child has developed in L1 at the time when intensive exposure to L2 begins. When the usage of certain functions of language and the development of L1 vocabulary and concepts are strongly promoted by the child's linguistic environment outside of school, as in the case of most middle class children in immersion programs, then intensive exposure to L2 is likely to result in high levels of L2 competence at no cost of L1. However, for children whose L1 skills are less well developed in certain respects, intensive exposure to L2 in the initial grades in likely to impede the continued development of L1. This will, in turn, exert a limiting effect on the development of L2. (p. 75)

This hypothesis has been validated by studies on the first and additional language proficiency, which demonstrated that the linguistic minority students whose first languages were maintained at home and at school performed better academically (Cummins, 2007; Cummins, 2005). The application of the Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis to the Aboriginal EAL students' education is found in Toukomma and Skutnabb-Kangas' (1977, p. 28) conclusion that,

> The basis for the possible attainment of the threshold level of L2 competence seems to be the level attained in the mother tongue. If in an early stage of its development a minority child finds itself in a foreign language learning environment without contemporaneously receiving the requisite support in its mother tongue, the development of its skill in the mother tongue will slow down or even cease leaving the child without a basis for learning the additional language well enough to attain the threshold level in it.

Toukomma and Skutnabb-Kangas (1977) also stated that development in one's first language is particularly crucial in subject areas that need abstract thinking, and linguistic minority students whose first language stopped developing prior to reaching the abstract thinking stage "remain on a lower level of educational capacity than they would originally have been able to achieve" (p. 70). In the case of the Aboriginal EAL students, initial instruction in their first language seems to lead "to better results than immersion or submersion[1] in" English (Cummins, 2001, p. 79). The reason in light of the Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis is that "certain aspects of the minority child's linguistic knowledge may not be fully developed on entry to school. Thus, some children may have only limited access to the cognitive–linguistic operations necessary to assimilate [English] and develop literacy skills" (p. 79).

Cummins' (1979) distinction between these two types of proficiency also refutes the monolingual instructional assumptions. Accordingly, two different language proficiencies exist: a Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills

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[1] Submersion Program refers to a program in which linguistic minority students receive instruction in a dominant/official language at school where teachers are monolingual in the dominant language. In such a program, the dominant language would be a threat to the minority students' mother tongue, and might replace it (Skutnabb-Kangas & McCarty, 2008).

(BICS), and a Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). The BICS refers to fluency in conversation while the CALP "refers to students' ability to understand and express, in both oral and written modes, concepts and ideas that are relevant to success in school" (Cummins, 2008, p. 71). Cummins (2008, p. 73) mentions, CALP or academic language proficiency develops through social interaction from birth but becomes differentiated from BICS after the early stages of schooling to reflect primarily the language that children acquire in school and which they need to use effectively if they are to progress successfully through the grades.

The BICS/CALP distinction was initially inspired by the research results with Finish students in Europe (Cummins, 2008). Skutnabb-Kangas and Toukomaa (1976) found that the Finnish children who had immigrated to Sweden were fluent in both Swedish and Finnish; however, their verbal academic skills in those languages were below age and grade expectation. Subsequent studies further underscored the need to distinguish between the BICS and CALP (Cummins, 2008). In his study with EAL teachers and students in a large school in Canada, Cummins (1980) recognized that the psychologists and teachers assumed that as soon as the students started talking English with ease, they could overcome language problems. They, however, might perform poorly on academic tasks in English and on the verbal scales of the cognitive ability test. As a result of such psychological assessments and assumptions, the EAL students were wrongly perceived to have communication problems. Therefore, they were placed inappropriately in special education classes. Cummins (1981) concluded that the BICS reaches peer levels in around two years of English exposure while the CALP develops to that level within five to seven years.

Empirical evidence also supported the dichotomy of the BICS and the CALP. Cummins (1979) argued that between two monolingual English–speaking siblings, the older one demonstrates better knowledge of reading, writing, and vocabulary. However, their fluency and phonology are very similar.

Studies performed by researchers in other countries further approved the BICS/CALP dichotomy. In the United States, Vincent (1996) reported that her research participants had received the additional language, that is, English, medium instruction from the beginning of their schooling, and gained native–like mastery of conversation in English in two or three years. However, they lacked the academic proficiency.

Misconceptions about the disadvantages of bilingualism and the advantages of the monolingual instruction cause many Aboriginal students to receive instruction in a language they do not know well, or at least not as well as their mother tongues. Because they are discouraged to use their first language in the classroom, the Aboriginal students might face cognitive challenges as they try to learn in the additional language. Moreover, since many of these students do not receive first language input adequately, their first language might not develop as much as it should. As a result, they tend to have problem learning subject areas which require abstract thinking. The Aboriginal students might also find it difficult to catch up with their native English–speaking peers academically even if they already have adequate knowledge of conversational English.

TEACHERS IN MAINSTREAM CLASSROOMS

Teachers in mainstream classrooms play a crucial role in linguistic minority students' linguistic, academic, cultural, and social development. They can facilitate learning content areas and acquisition of English for these students. These teachers are also models of a native English speaker, and representatives of the dominant culture. Finally, they are mediators in the acculturation and socialization of students, and advocates of linguistic minority students' weak and strong points (Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 2002). Nevertheless, research has shown that another language education challenge facing the Aboriginal students might pertain to the teachers in regular classrooms because of at least two reasons: their attitudes towards linguistic minority students (Penfield, 1987), and an apparent lack of training to teach language along with content (Beardsmore, 2008). Each of these reasons is elaborated on below.

Mainstream Teachers' Attitude towards Aboriginal Students
Teachers' assumptions about additional language learning and linguistic minority students have a great impact on the teaching–learning process in a classroom (DeAvila & Duncan, 1980). According to research results, some mainstream teachers do not have a positive attitude towards these students, and relate their academic challenges "to laziness and lack of effort" (Penfield, 1987, p. 31), or do not understand them (Silver et al., 2002). In a survey on mainstream teachers and EAL students, a teacher mentioned, "Some [EAL]

students have problems but this is not an excuse for not learning or to hide their lack of effort" (Penfield, 1987, p. 31). In another study with some Aboriginal students in Winnipeg Inner City High Schools (Silver et al., 2002, p. 17), when asked if teachers understood them, some Aboriginal high school students made the following comments.

> *Socially, I don't think most teachers know how it is to grow up on a reserve or poor (17; M).*
>
> *They do not understand us because they are white (15; F).*
>
> *They have different views on life and different attitudes. They have a different upbringing (17; M).*
>
> *Not really, because they are white (16; F).*
>
> *Some of them try to, but not really. Only a few teachers would understand. If they grew up on a reserve they might understand better (18; M).*
>
> *Teachers make no conscious attempt to learn about Aboriginal culture (16; M).* (Italics original; numbers represent the participants' age. M stands for male and F, female)

Mainstream teachers might even believe that linguistic minority students including the Aboriginal ones should not be mainstreamed because it would interfere with their teaching style, and influence mainstream students' learning negatively (Penfield, 1987).

Negative attitudes towards linguistic minority students could lead some mainstream teachers to ignore the Aboriginal students' language needs, or feel irresponsible (Duff, 2005; Duff, 2001) for addressing them. In other words, instead of viewing language and content learning "as an integrated process in which both [EAL students] and the teacher should participate" (Penfield, 1987, p. 28), some mainstream teachers assume that content and language learning are separate (Duff, 2001). They might also presume that working on language is not their responsibility; rather, it is EAL specialists' responsibility to address the linguistic minority students' language needs (Penfield, 1987). Furthermore, they "may be reluctant to prioritize relevant professional development if there are just a few [Aboriginal] EAL students in the class" (Haworth, 2009, p. 2179). As a result, the Aboriginal EAL/SESD students

might not be able to understand the lesson because they lack a sufficient language background. Moreover, if ignored, these students would "remain isolated and segregated", and could not have ample social interaction in class (Penfield, 1987, p. 28). This, in turn, can impede their additional language development because social interaction provides learners with "linguistic input", leading to additional language learning (Penfield, 1987, p. 28).

The Lack of Enough Training to Teach EAL

EAL teaching has unique features "that separate it from other venues of teaching". EAL "teachers work in an environment wherein the means of instruction is also the subject of instruction" (Chafe & Wang, 2008, p. 19). Therefore, it needs more than knowledge of language to teach EAL (Chafe & Wang, 2008), and specific training is required for teaching it to linguistic minority students including the Aboriginal EAL ones. However, EAL is not a teachable subject in most provinces in Canada. It is a teachable only in Quebec, and a minor in Alberta. Therefore, many teacher candidates, regardless of their attitudes towards Aboriginal students, might not receive ample specialized instruction on how to teach EAL (Beardsmore, 2008) unless they themselves pursue it through organizations such as the TESL Canada (Chafe & Wang, 2008). When they start their teaching career, many teachers find it difficult to handle ethno–linguistically diverse classes because they seem unprepared for their EAL students' language needs (Haworth, 2009; Fumoto, Hargreaves & Maxwell, 2007; Duff, 2005; Harklua, 1994; Penfield, 1987). They seem "to have little knowledge of how to integrate content and [additional language] development" (Penfield, 1987, p. 28). As a result, these teachers "may operate on a trial–and–error basis, become frustrated easily, feel negative, and have little confidence in their ability to be successful with [the Aboriginal] EAL students" (Howorth, 2009, p. 2179). Similarly, Penfield (1987, p. 22) pointed out that such teachers at times 'express anger, frustration, and unwillingness to deal with "the new burden" placed upon them in having a few [EAL] students in their classrooms' (quotes in original). Sometimes, mainstream teachers realize that the traditional approaches do not work for EAL students, and feel the need to make changes to better serve them "but [have no] appropriate training to do so" (Penfield, 1987, p. 28). In other words, these teachers seem to understand "the need to improve academic learning for [EAL] students, yet they [appear] to have

little knowledge of how to integrate content and [additional language] development". Similarly, the mainstream teachers in Franson's (1999) study mentioned they had no idea about specific teaching and evaluation strategies that would be beneficial to EAL students.

In summary, mainstream teachers' lack of relevant and adequate training in teaching language to EAL students may lead them to focus on the content, instead of focusing on both language and content (Penfield, 1987). Therefore, the Aboriginal EAL students might not receive enough language education to understand the lesson fully. Rather than conceptually understanding materials (Wong Fillmore, 1986), many Aboriginal EAL students tend to memorize them superficially.

FACILITATING ANCESTRAL AND ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE LEARNING FOR THE ABORIGINAL STUDENTS

Many Aboriginal students in mainstream classes might face language challenges because they receive additional language/dialect medium instruction (Cummins, 2001; Toukomma & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1977), and some mainstream teachers seem unprepared to facilitate language and content learning for them (Penfield, 1987). To address such issues, examples of ancestral language maintenance strategies and programs and pedagogical guidelines for mainstream teachers are presented below.

Bilingual Teaching Strategies and Programs

To help Aboriginal students overcome language barriers at school, mother tongue maintenance alongside the language of instruction has been suggested by some leading scholars in the field (e.g. Cummins, 2007; Cummins, 2005). Aboriginal EAL students' first languages should be maintained because if lost[1], it could have negative social (Wang-Fillmore, 2000; Kouritzin, 1999), personal (Babaee, 2010; Kouritzin, 2006; Kouritzin, 1999), and cognitive (see, for example, Cummins, 1976) consequences.

From a social perspective, one of the immediate consequences of language loss is observed in children's relationships with their parents and

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[1] Language loss occurs when individuals lose "their ability to speak [and] write [in their mother tongues] or understand" it (Richards et al., 1992, p. 202).

the family members and relatives who cannot speak the dominant language (Wong Fillmore, 2000; Kouritzin, 1999). Since they are not equally competent in the same language, it might be hard for the children and their family members and relatives to communicate and share cultural and family values. In addition, the family structure starts to change as the children and parents talk less and less (Rodriguez, 1982) and a greater generation gap will be created (Wong Fillmore, 2000).

At a very personal level, people who did not learn their ancestral languages might face identity challenges by feeling as though part of their identity is missing (Babaee, 2010). The participants of two separate studies who had lost their ancestral languages were reported to feel ashamed (Kouritzin, 1999) and regretful (Kouritzin, 2006) although they had done so to assimilate into the dominant society (Kouritzin, 2006). The feeling of shame and regret in part came from their understanding of the importance of "familial connection" as they grew older (Kouritzin, 2006, p. 20). Conversely, those who have maintained their first languages tend to have higher self–concept, self–esteem, motivation, and positive attitude towards school (Baker, 1996).

From a cognitive point of view, language maintenance might help students learn better at school. As mentioned earlier on, one reason is the important role of the background knowledge in learning new materials (Bransford et al., 2000). In the case of the Aboriginal students, their background knowledge could also exist in their ancestral languages; therefore, it can be built upon to facilitate learning for them. Furthermore, when competence in both the first and second language reaches a minimum–threshold– level, bilingualism will lead to cognitive growth. Otherwise, in cases when competence is low in these languages, it will have negative cognitive effects (Toukomaa & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1977; Cummins, 1976).

One way to maintain the Aboriginal students' ancestral languages along with receiving additional language instruction is by using bilingual teaching strategies. These "strategies [enable] students to bring their two languages into productive contact". Moreover, such strategies communicate "to them that their [mother tongue] proficiency is an important accomplishment that is acknowledged and appreciated within the classroom" (Cummins, 2005, p. 588). Some bilingual teaching strategies have been suggested by scholars (Cummins, 2005), and implemented in Canadian classrooms. An

example would be attending to the cognate[1] relationship between the two languages, and the "creation of student–authored dual language books by means of translation from the initial language of writing to the L2". "[O]ther multimedia and multilingual projects can also be implemented ([for example], creation of iMovies, PowerPoint presentations, etc.)" (Cummins, 2005, p. 558). In one such project called "Dual Language Showcase Project" (Cummins, 2005, p. 589), Grade 1 and 2 bilingual children in an ethno–linguistically diverse school created stories in English. Having illustrated them, the students translated them into their ancestral languages with the help of those who were competent in them. "The Dual Language website" was then created with these illustrated stories for sharing with the students' friends or relatives in their home countries through the Internet. Cummins (2005) goes on to say that linguistically diverse students "can also be encouraged to explore computer translation programs (e.g., Babel Fish or Google language tools) to develop both language awareness and editing skills". Although such programs may not be accurate, students can work together with the help of the teacher "to edit the translation into [the] appropriate and accurate language" (p. 589). Creating dual language books was put into practice with regard to some international languages. The same project could also be done in the case of Aboriginal languages.

TRAINING AND GUIDELINES FOR MAINSTREAM TEACHERS

As the school population is becoming more diverse, the need for training mainstream teachers to teach ethno–linguistically diverse classes is felt more than ever (Fumoto et al., 2007; Claire, 1995; Penfield, 1987). Therefore, "in–service training" (Penfield, 1987, p. 36) and EAL–related Professional Development (PD) series have been designed for the teachers of linguistic minority students. The aim of these PDs are to familiarize the teachers with the role of mother tongue and culture in learning, language proficiency, fundamental constructs of bilingualism and additional language learning, and challenges mainstream education has for EAL students (Claire, 1993). For instance, Second Language and Intercultural Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association holds annual conferences where EAL teachers can

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[1] Cognate refers to "a word in one language which is similar in form and meaning to a word in another language because both languages are related." (Richards et al., 1992, p. 59)

learn more about teaching EAL (Government of Alberta Education, 2011). Moreover, many materials for EAL students (Penfield, 1987) and resources for teacher educators and teachers have been published. These resources include "both theoretical foundations, case studies, and highly practical model lessons, assessment tools, and lists of other resources" (Duff, 2005, p. 52). Among these exist Walqui's (cited in Duff, 2005, p. 52-54) ten principles of effective instruction for EAL students, which include:

1. The culture of the classroom fosters the development of a community of learners, and all students are part of that community.

2. Good language teaching involves conceptual and academic development.

3. Students' experiential backgrounds provide a point of departure and an anchor in the exploration of new ideas.

4. Teaching and learning focus on substantive ideas that are organized cyclically.

5. New ideas and tasks are contextualized.

6. Academic strategies, sociocultural expectations, and academic norms are taught explicitly.

7. Tasks are relevant, meaningful, engaging and varied.

8. Complex and flexible forms of collaboration maximize learners' opportunities to interact while making sense of language and content.

9. Students are given multiple opportunities to extend their understandings and apply their knowledge.

10. Authentic assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning.

In summary, to help linguistic minority students, including the Aboriginal ones, overcome language related challenges at school, and facilitate ancestral language learning for them, bilingual instructional strategies have been suggested by some scholars (see, for example, Cummins, 2005). Moreover, to further prepare teachers to meet the language needs of these students, various instructional resources have been designed (Duff, 2005), and EAL–related PD sessions are offered in Canada (see, for example, Government of Alberta Education, 2011).

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The population of Aboriginal peoples in Canada has been increasing, which in turn has increased the diversity of the school population. Many Aboriginal EAL/SESD students who are mainstreamed into regular classrooms might face language challenges at public schools. Moreover, some mainstream teachers seem to have negative attitudes towards linguistic minority students, including the Aboriginal ones (Penfield, 1987; Silver et al, 2007), or are unprepared to teach them language and content at the same time (Penfield, 1987). Therefore, they might not attend to these students' language needs (Duff, 2005; Duff, 2001). In an attempt to address these challenges, it is suggested that both ancestral languages and the dominant language be taught to linguistic minority students (Cummins, 2005). The reason is that research results emphasize the importance of maintaining the mother tongue in bilingual students' personal (Kouritzin, 2006), social (Wong Fillmore, 2000; Kouritzin, 1999), and cognitive (Bransford et al., 2000) growth. Some strategies have been designed to fulfill this goal, including bilingual teaching strategies (attending to cognate relationships in both languages, creation of dual language books, and sister class projects) (Cummins, 2005). Furthermore, EAL–related PD sessions (see, for example, Government of Alberta Education, 2011), along with guidelines and resources (Duff, 2005), have been designed to train EAL and mainstream teachers.

Although many steps have been taken to meet the language needs of the Aboriginal students in the K-12 educational setting in Canada, more needs to be done. First, EAL should be a teachable subject at all universities so that teacher candidates will be trained how to integrate teaching language with content. Even though teachers interested in teaching EAL can find out more about it through programs such as the TESL-Canada, not all teachers might have the interest, will, or time to pursue this. Conversely, if a required EAL teaching course exists at university, all education students will have to take it along with other required education courses.

Required courses should also be designed at university to address diversity and multiculturalism in society, multicultural education, and issues Aboriginal students might face in mainstream school settings. Such courses are as important as EAL teaching training ones because they will prepare prospective teachers to handle linguistically diverse classes better. Addressing EAL students' linguistic, cultural, and emotional needs in such

courses might enable teacher candidates to understand such students' challenges better, and prepare them to handle these issues in their future classrooms more successfully.

Finally, although EAL–related PD sessions exist to prepare mainstream teachers to teach EAL students, many teachers still do not have the opportunity to participate in them. Those located in urban areas seem to have the most access to these PDs while teachers from rural areas appear to have the least access to them (Beardsmore, 2008). Therefore, more EAL–related PDs should be held for rural area teachers to familiarize them with recent teaching techniques and strategies to handle linguistically diverse classes.

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