

AN INTENSIVE NATIVE LANGUAGE PROGRAM FOR ADULTS: THE INSTRUCTORS' PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT. For Aboriginal people, the understanding and practice of traditions are closely connected with language learning, as the ways of thinking and viewing the world are encoded in Native languages. However, because few fluent speakers remain as language teachers, new ways of learning are needed to restore the languages to use. The article describes the perceptions of the instructors about the structure of an adult language program and changes that have been made as a result of the findings from the first cohorts. Strategies for language development are discussed, along with recommendations and cautions for future adult language programs.

UN PROGRAMME INTENSIF DE LANGUE AUTOCHTONE POUR LES ADULTES : LE POINT DE VUE DES ENSEIGNANTS

RÉSUMÉ. Pour les peuples autochtones, la compréhension et la pratique des traditions sont étroitement liées à l'apprentissage d'une langue, car les modes de réflexion et de perception du monde sont codés dans les langues autochtones. Toutefois, étant donné qu'il reste peut de locuteurs pour enseigner les langues, il faut trouver de nouveaux modes d'apprentissage pour rétablir les langues à employer. Cet article décrit les perceptions des chargés de cours sur la structure d'un programme de langue destiné aux adultes et sur les changements opérés à l'issue des résultats des premières cohortes. Les auteurs analysent les stratégies d'acquisition du langage, et formulent des recommandations et des mises en garde au sujet des futurs programmes d'apprentissage des langues pour les adultes.

TSI NIKARIWAYEN. Tsi ase shononnihatye' tsi nihoti'nikonhrayenta's tsi nihotirihòten's, otya'ke ne Rotihrohkwayen ronnehre' ahonateriyèntarake' ne tsi nikarihòten' tsi nioht tsi ikare ne Owenna'onwe. Akwah ronaterihwayenni tsi ken' nishati'ah Rontatis ne Onkwehonwehneha tsi shekon enhatikweni' ne ahshakorihonnyen', ne'e aoriwa tsi nikentyohkwa'ah, nène ratiweyentehta's ne Owenna, wahonnityohkonni' ne Kanyen'keha ahshakotirihonnyen' tho nayawen' ne aonsahatiwennaketsko' are ne tsi nihotiweñdòten'. Ahsen niyohserake yotohetston tahnon tohkara niyoteratstònne' tsi wa'thatiteni' tsi nioht tsi ratirihonnyennis.

Ken'en kahyatonnyon ne'e enwathrori' tsi nahòten wahonttoke' nène shakotirihonnyennis tahnnon tsi naho'tenhshon wa'thatitenyonko' tsi nahe nène thonatyerenhtònne' Ronterihwayenhstha, tahnnon oni tsi nahòten enhshakoti'nikònron' nène ronnehre ahshakotirihonnyen' ne Owenna'onwe.

Only a few elders remain who are lifelong speakers of Mohawk, one of the Iroquois languages. This article describes a remarkably successful adult language program, one which was designed to provide an environment where Mohawk learners would attain fluency while further developing conversational skills through interaction with fluent speakers from the local community. This program is especially significant in that its developers, who are also the main instructors, have themselves become fluent speakers as adults. Being highly reflective and aware of their own learning processes, they have used their personal experience of language development as the basis for instructional practice. The strategies they relied upon as learners (Richards, 2000) have been incorporated into the adult program.

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) have shown that good language learners develop strategies that suit them even when those strategies are unlike methods used in the classroom. In the present case, the learner/instructors have gone farther, and have used their own experience and the strategies that worked for them, as the basis for curriculum and instructional development.

BACKGROUND

The adult Mohawk language program began in September 1999, at Six Nations, an Iroquois community in southern Ontario. Its purpose was to provide adult learners with the opportunity to learn to speak the Mohawk language with sufficient fluency to participate in traditional cultural activities in Mohawk. Increasingly, educators recognize that adult learners contribute greatly to their own success in second language acquisition (e.g., Naiman, Frohlich, Stern, & Todesco, 1978). The program designers therefore hoped to establish a strong foundation in oral language use and writing that would enable learners to continue their language development both by practicing with one another and by interacting with fluent speakers in the community. Although the number of speakers whose first language is Mohawk is dwindling, there are still a number who are glad to support language learners. Moreover, the community is now making an effort to record fluent speakers' voices so that there will continue to be speech samples of Mohawk as spoken in the different communities.

By the end of the first year's class (Cohort I), the learners' success confirmed the value of the methods developed for the program (Maracle & Richards,

2000). However, the instructors were not fully satisfied, and hence instituted several changes for the following two years (Cohorts II and III). This article discusses their experiences with the second and third cohorts, who benefited from the changes made after the first year. As noted later in the sections "Changes" and "Conclusion," differences in academic background are related to learning in this program and it is not suitable for those without previous language courses.

RESEARCH METHOD

Sinclair Bell (1997) comments that "language teachers possess a wealth of knowledge about language learning, which is still largely unwritten and unacknowledged" (p. 5). To delve into that implicit knowledge, reflective interviews were conducted with Brian Owennatekha Maracle and David Kanatawakhon Maracle towards the end of the spring terms of the second cohort, after the summer session, and at the end of the third cohort. The interviews were then transcribed and subjected to content analysis to discover the instructors' insights into their students' learnings and their own evolving teaching approaches. The interview data were verified through interviews with the students in the program and by classroom observations conducted by Merle Richards. This article therefore focuses on the experiences of the instructors over two years. Quotations in italicized font are from the third-year interviews with Owennatakha and Kanatawakhon; when not noted otherwise they are from Kanatawakhon. It is notable that the two instructors have collaborated so closely that, although they were interviewed separately and at different times, they did not contradict each other at all.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. What was the reason for developing a full-time language program?

When a language has so few speakers left that it is no longer used for many ordinary functions of daily life, and when the remaining speakers do not have the energy or background for formal classroom teaching, the only way to maintain a community language is to recruit people to learn the language to a high level of fluency so that they can use it and pass it on to others (Richards & Schutz, 1997). Years of regular once-a-week language classes for adults have not been successful in developing fluent speakers of Mohawk. Most students drop out after the first few weeks, and those who remain seldom develop enough oral language skills to practice further with fluent speakers in the community. The classes usually focus on the basics of language (i.e., greetings, how to ask questions, vocabulary, etc.), but do not provide enough opportunity for active language use. An adult immersion

program was therefore envisioned to provide an environment where students could actually learn the language through conversation while benefiting from the presence of fluent speakers.

Such a program demands extraordinary commitment from the learners, especially as it often means time away from employment and perhaps family, but even more on the part of the instructors, who must constantly seek funding, develop resources, plan instruction, and also look to their own continued language development. The motivation for such devotion, expressed by every participant, is the sense that the language and culture must be kept alive, and that with fluent speakers becoming fewer and fewer, the time is now. Owennatekha asserts:

In terms of creating a speaker, if you happen to have a community where it's a minority language, where it's a dying language, nothing else will work anymore if you want to get somebody to learn it. . . . We have to create our own speakers who will obviously know the grammar and the method and then use them to teach.

2. How did the language program work?

The program for Cohort II had two parts: a nine-month daily language program developed and directed by Owennatekha over the school year 2000-2001, and a six-week follow-up in the summer of 2001 led by Kanatawakhon, and supported by several speakers from the community. Several young men, who had already had years of previous Mohawk study in school and university, joined the summer group and continued on into the following school year; with a few additional students who arrived in September 2002, they constituted Cohort III.

The groups met daily in a house where the presence of different elders created a conversational context. Occasional group outings and activities also provided content to discuss and review. One regular situation that involved conversation was preparing, serving, and eating lunch together every day. Students took turns in the kitchen, with fluent speakers from the community overseeing and describing the operations. Even the shy or slower students were able in that setting to relate vocabulary and sentence forms to the experiential context.

During the first term, the students were introduced to the basic grammatical structures of Mohawk, with practice and drill in all the common sentence and word forms. In the second term, the focus shifted to developing oral and written proficiency. Owennatekha explains:

The first half of the program is delivering grammar, a body of information that's got to go out there in certain sequences. Then once we're at that stage . . . we break the group into two.

Well, some of them had a lot more language when they came here, and some of them did a lot more with it once they were here and the gap is even more pronounced now. In both groups, everybody advanced quite a bit, some more than others, but that distance in terms of functional language is light years apart now – they both learned the vocabulary and the rules, but some learned a lot better and they're just much more functional in the things that they want to know, and much more complex and sophisticated, while some people are still in the basics.

. . . We say, 'Let's take you who've got this stuff in your head, and let's hone that, [moving ahead and manipulating] sentence structure, word order, syntax, expressions . . . and let's take you who don't have it yet in your head and let's get it into your head [reviewing and drilling] basic word construction . . .

Owennatekha also works on study strategies with the students:

It's now 'develop it, refine it, get better at it, using it,' which means – well, we say if you're at home and you are watching TV, just try and translate in your head what those people are saying – watch TV and say, 'How do I say this, how do I say this?' and translate as you go along . . . Or if you're driving along on the road, try and describe what you see out the window: 'There's this bird sitting on a fence; how do I say "a bird sitting on a fence," how do I say, "There's a tree lying down in the middle of the yard"' – so we say that this is the kind of "homework" that they have to do.

3. What were the instructional problems and how were they dealt with?

PROBLEM 1. Inexperienced learners often assumed that all languages have similar structures, and expected both words and forms to translate directly.

Most of the problems that arose would be familiar to language teachers. Even though the learners had all studied Mohawk before, they were still approaching it from the perspective of unilingual English speakers, with expectations of similar grammatical structures and vocabulary. However, Mohawk grammar differs greatly from English, and its vocabulary is constructed differently. Therefore, although translation is possible, one-to-one correspondences between English and Mohawk expressions are rare. Moreover, in English, word order and sentence structure indicate grammatical relationships, while in Mohawk, as in most Aboriginal languages, the word structures (morphology) indicate relationships, while word order can be varied to imply style features such as emphasis.

Instructional strategies to resolve this problem: All the students had previously taken courses where vocabulary learning and simple sentence forms were the main focus. They had learned structures such as questions, possessives, and some verb tenses, but had not understood that Mohawk verbs and nouns include at least a prefix, root, and suffix. This basic principle became the basis for both oral and written language learning, as it reduced the burden of memory work that often discourages vocabulary development.

Rather than memorize whole words, it was found effective for students to write down only the root forms of nouns and verbs, but to practice them orally with their full, inflected forms. Memorizing the pronominal prefixes and certain endings became a priority, as they are essential for verb use. Although memorization was initially resisted by many of the students, they soon understood that learning the prefixes and using them with many roots gave them a powerful tool for rapid expansion of vocabulary. Practicing the forms with about twenty roots at first allowed them to become familiar; adding three hundred of the most frequent roots was then not an enormous task, and permitted the students to build words and create real utterances. Thus, students would have to listen to one another and think out the word forms, pronouncing and changing them by using them with different affixes.

As there are only perhaps twelve hundred common roots in Mohawk, these skills provide access to a large body of language. But unless the structures are understood, every form is perceived and learned as a separate word. An analogy in English would be having to learn every noun in a singular and plural form, rather than just learning how to use plurals and memorizing only the exceptions (e.g., children, mice, oxen).

In Mohawk, the number of noun and verb inflections appears daunting at first, so it was important to begin with a few common forms. Kanatawakhon describes a set of cards he developed to encourage students to combine word parts:

You know, they need to learn the language in bits and pieces, like kids do . . . they're all playing this weird game, from that box of stuff that I made up. It's all the pronominal prefixes, verb bases and all that. I had the students line them up . . . Each student needs at least a table-top of space to lay the cards on and something like a hundred and forty cards – They had a great time; it was amazing, I found that they were putting stuff together . . . We show the students how to put the pieces together, and the next time, they get, say, fifty words to work on, the next time seventy-five words, and so they keep building words. Then you ask, "Well, how would you say this?" and then everybody's got to kind of search it out – like bingo!

Such an activity stimulates speech and pronunciation, as learners accompany their moves with talk. For example, moving from a context indicating an immediate past event (*I bought plaid shirts*) to one implying a habitual action (*I used to buy plaid shirts*) would require different prefixes and suffixes, which could also involve phonological changes and pronunciation rules that the students would have to apply. Therefore, even if they were not yet using Mohawk freely, they would at least be developing and manipulating word forms. Kanatawakhon comments,

We tried to focus on putting language together and organizing it so that the students could say what they want to say instead of spending all this time learning whole words.

Sequencing elements of grammar and language organization carefully can help build a sense of the language. For example, all verbs include pronominal prefixes indicating person, number, and relationship; hence, they are part of every sentence. Therefore, it is essential to teach pronominal prefixes early to familiarize learners with person, gender, and number. Unfortunately, several of the students practiced enough to attain familiarity with the forms, but not enough to achieve automaticity, which is essential for easy use of functional morphemes.

Similarly, aspect as well as tense is very important in Mohawk verbs, but is very difficult for English speakers to perceive, because in English it is expressed through phrases rather than morphology (Salaberry, 1998). Hence, it is useful for students to learn concepts of time and aspect in both English and Mohawk, along with cues to those constructions such as *is*, *was*, *will be*, *would be* and *do*, *did*, and *have done* using key words, like *yesterday*, *tomorrow*, *always*, *sometimes*, and *used to*.

English and Mohawk also feature contrasts in naming principles. When learners ask the names of objects, qualities, and states, they expect nouns, as in English. In Mohawk, there is often another form of reference, such as a mention of the object's function or state. For example, "refrigerator" might be *It keeps food cold*, and "It's in the refrigerator" could just be *It's staying cold*.

On the other hand, English uses phrases like "dry up," "dry out," "dry away," "dry off," where the language relies heavily on particles that enable a speaker to use a few verbs in many contexts, while in Mohawk, each meaning is represented by a separate word. Such contrasts were not obvious to the students until made explicit with examples.

PROBLEM 2. Students' knowledge of English grammar was not sufficient for understanding of contrastive features.

Owennatekha commented that a rich vocabulary and understanding of English grammar and usage is essential for Mohawk learners, but that many of the students do not have adequate knowledge to comprehend grammatical explanations of the contrasts between English and Mohawk.

For example, English uses "who" as both an interrogative and a relative pronoun. However, in Mohawk, different forms are required. The problem was heightened because naïve students did not notice that in a sentence like "The woman you saw was my cousin," the relative pronoun (who) has been deleted in English but must be pronounced in Mohawk. Some basic grammar lessons pointed out these structures and contrasts in both languages.

PROBLEM 3A. Students rely on writing to learn vocabulary and grammar, rather than working to develop pronunciation and listening comprehension.

An initial period devoted to practicing the sound system and some oral dialogues to introduce phonology accustomed learners to hearing Mohawk. In future, the instructors may continue with this practice even after spellings have been introduced, using dictation to reinforce phonic awareness. Owennatekha noted that writing became a problem because having written down items in their notebooks, the students then neglected to review and memorize them: "If everything in their books was in their heads, they'd be fluent!" A review at the end of each day was therefore instituted to reinforce learning.

PROBLEM 3B. Students continue to use English pronunciations when reading Mohawk.

For example, *K* in Mohawk is pronounced [k] or [g], depending on the context; the English pronunciation is irrelevant. When reading, some students forgot that the familiar letters did not represent English sounds. To counter this problem, recitations and oral practice exercises were used to make students listen and speak to one another, focusing on making and decoding comprehensible pronunciations.

PROBLEM 4. Students had unrealistic expectations about an immersion program.

During the interview, Kanatawakhon commented that "immersion is the wrong term," both because it leads students to expect that they will become fluent speakers by the end of the program and because it suggests a situation where the entire environment supports the target language.

It gives people a false sense of what's going on. The term implies that learners are immersed in all facets of the language: they are hearing it all the time, they're using it, they're using only the language that they are learning. We don't have the ability or capability right now to provide a totally Mohawk-speaking environment. I think we should use a title like intensive rather than immersion. We have to use English in class.

Initially, the instructors had planned a "communicative" setting, with informal talk as the basis for language learning. The classroom language was to be Mohawk, with English used only when necessary for comprehension. The focus would be on meaning, even if the usage were not "correct" at first. They expected that the learners' knowledge would expand gradually and that correctness would increase as their language skills grew and became more complex. However, the learners in the first cohort did not distinguish language learning from other kinds of learning, and hence believed that they should progress in a linear fashion, mastering each segment before moving to the next. Unwilling to put up with understanding only a little of what they were hearing in the classroom, they wanted to know in English exactly what they were hearing in Mohawk, and kept asking for translations

and explanations in English. As a consequence, the instructors found themselves using English as the language of instruction rather than just speaking Mohawk; the classes were becoming traditional language lessons rather than conversations supporting the development of communication.

As a result, the instructors modified their teaching methods, moving toward a 'bilingual' approach. Several students in the following cohorts commented that one of the things that helped them most to develop their comprehension of Mohawk was this approach: mixed language at first, the Mohawk phrases gradually increasing. Initially, enough English was used to allow them to keep up, but by the end they needed less support and could themselves use mostly Mohawk. Kanatawakhon reflects:

Well . . . I knew speaking Mohawk all the time wasn't going to work. You'd be like a guest speaker at a boring convention, so I thought trying to mix it and say it – and a lot of times too I would do a quick and ready translation of what I had already said in Mohawk, just so that they're hearing it, and giving them what they need to hear just to get them the idea more and more.

The students in every cohort mentioned that one of the strongest experiences for them has been the presence of more than one fluent speaker, so that they hear the speakers interacting with each other and the language, "not just telling them how to say things." This has been cited as one of the lasting benefits of the program. The fact that there was Mohawk conversation going on and not just Mohawk instruction was a revelation for the students. The summer program in particular provided an opportunity to hear different voices, so that

. . . their ears got better tuned. Even when the conversation was beyond their comprehension level and they would sort of drift off, it was still important to them to hear different people speaking Mohawk in slightly different ways and able to understand one another . . . The funny thing is, that's something people don't often think about [in English], because being fluent speakers of English, they don't notice that people have different ways of organizing how they are going to say something.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Are there special considerations about an Aboriginal language program that might be different from other immersion programs?

I find that teaching Mohawk is just teaching a second language, but teaching Mohawk to non-Native students does seem easier and more successful than to Native students. There's a cultural difference acquired through schooling: non-Native students have been raised in a cultural situation where the teacher at the front of the room says, "Okay, we're going to have a test on these twenty-five words. I want you to know them for next week." They'll learn them. They'll do it because they want to pass, but the Native student is less motivated to do

so, because passing just doesn't fit into the cultural norm. You can't motivate the Native students with marks.

It can be very discouraging teaching Native students, because they don't follow directions the same way. Sometimes I . . . start giving them suggestions: how you can learn this much more effectively, how you can do this, and they will not do it, they'll make no attempt to follow your suggestions.

People also say, 'Oh, yes, the Native culture uses a holistic approach,' but that's not always appropriate. It's a language we're learning, and the holistic approach and some other cultural aspects don't come in till you actually know what you're saying. Then, the culture comes into play and it is important to teach culture and language at the same time. But as far as teaching the mechanics of the language, those must be seen to first. If the students don't get the mechanics of the language, the cultural meanings will never become evident, because you need to have acquired a level of sophistication about the language structures to see how the grammar reflects different world-views and concepts.

2. What will motivate Native language learners?

Both instructors felt that whereas non-Native students will learn a language academically, as an academic pursuit, Native students need strong social reasons; they need to see the language as important to their community or to their own lives as Natives. As a result, it is more difficult to motivate students unless they have a strong desire for involvement in cultural activities where language is important. Kanatawakhon explains:

A commitment has to be there and it has to be driven by a sense of pride and a desire to participate and be involved. There's a multitude of socially oriented inducements that are not the same with an academic program.

I think the students who are very successful right now have been motivated to do well because they don't want to raise their kids speaking only English. They know the kids will speak English, but they want the children to have the Mohawk language so that they can participate in the Longhouse and the community the way they feel they should be participating. Maurice, for example, is learning Mohawk because he wants to be an active participant in the Longhouse, he's really interested in medicines and the societies and all that sort of knowledge. He knows that he can't be actively involved the way he wants to be unless he speaks Mohawk, so that's pushing him.

3. Who are the best students for intensive Aboriginal language programs?

People who show up! Let's look at the students we have that have been doing well. We've got George – he's single, he's unattached, he's basically doing what he wants to do – he says "I want to learn the language," and he's doing it very well.

Both instructors found that many of the best learners are in their later twenties, students who have "begun to settle down." The older students are sometimes less successful. Though they may have more time to put towards the language, they also appear to have more difficulty, taking longer to learn

the parts and pieces or even the vocabulary. "It's just taking them longer . . . and I think that might sit harder for them in general." But at any age, those who are willing to spend extra time in the evening to review and practice do better:

Those who see the language course as 'Okay, I get there at nine, I leave at three-thirty; okay, that's my language stuff for the day!' are not going to be as successful. I think people who realize that it has to be kind of a twenty-four-hour-a-day experience seem to be doing better.

Owennatekha also notes differences in aptitude among learners:

Most people who have got some university training do better at this . . . The people who get it best and the fastest are people who can see the logic and the structure and the internal logic to it, taking things apart and putting things back together . . . [those] who have some kind of a mind set to begin with that way, or they've got training . . . that teaches them a sequence of thinking. Those people stand out and do very well at it.

I think we've got people with learning disabilities in terms of a second language. I think there must be an oral dyslexia that exists out there – there's a visual, I know, but there's an oral dyslexia – you say repeat after me, 'do, re, mi' and they'll say 'do, mi, re' – that kind of thing, and that makes it really hard to learn the language. I've seen that, I don't know why it is, in a number of people here.

CHANGES AS A RESULT OF EXPERIENCE

1. What have you learned from the previous two cohorts that you've particularly put into practice this year?

Several modifications have been made to the initial program. One has been the development of materials, such as the game cards mentioned previously, sets of pictures for vocabulary study, and also a dictionary developed by Kanatawakhon, which has become an essential reference resource. As well, he has written textbooks with sequenced lessons, whose use has evolved:

. . . The first year we were using a text book and had a whole series of things we wanted to get through, and the text book became more or less the focus of every week. We found that they didn't get it; it was either too fast or it wasn't explained well enough and of course, students don't necessarily tell you when they're not understanding – they're more apt to complain after the fact. So I'm using more language now, but using it more effectively, to focus in on certain areas, things they're doing that we'll talk about and use the language that way.

Some activities have been developed to provide opportunities for individualized language learning and application. Owennatekha describes the culminating activity done by most of the students:

[They're] putting together their own little projects: One's going to be putting together dialogues between two fictional speakers on a number of subjects. He's got one done now and it's past the beginner level – it wouldn't be useful for beginners, but it's adult language about making maple syrup, a how-to thing,

with detailed and complicated vocabulary, so it could be terrific . . . and then a couple of people may not get to a project at all they're still in the basic stage and aren't going to get past that – that's just the way it is.

Kanatawakhon would like to extend the activities:

One of the things I want to do with them is individual topics . . . they would pretty well have to do those on their own, but what I would like would be to do a new topic every week. I'd say, "Okay, your topic is butterflies. Next week you tell us in Mohawk whatever you can find out about butterflies."

The instructors have found that differences in academic background affect both the rate and amount of language learning. Although all the learners had previously studied Mohawk, most had not developed effective study habits in those classes, and did not understand the importance of review and the memorization of vocabulary. As a result, students with some university background often did better in the immersion program; they were accustomed to reviewing and studying on their own time. The instructors have therefore decided to offer pre-sessions in the Mohawk basics and institute a pre-test for Cohort IV, to ensure that students will have acquired the pronominal prefixes and some verb roots before joining the intensive program. As well, they are planning to add exercises based on audio-lingual traditions:

We need more drilling or more explanation. I find myself spending more time making sure they know what I'm talking about before we go trudging on into something else. We definitely have to come up with more drill-type exercises. Some of the students keep making comments that there's no drilling; they want drilling, they want some sort of drills.

Still, the instructors are satisfied that they are achieving their main goals. Owennatekha comments on the students:

That's the thing about these guys: they are not bashful about [the language] – because they are in here all day, and they are used to using it all day and they go outside. They're not bashful – they don't care who hears them. They're just going to holler across the bank or the plaza or something like that, and you'll see heads turn all over the place. That's one of the goals, [to make others aware of how they're using the language].

Kanatawakhon remarks,

Every year this course is getting better. It's as much the students as it is the fact that most of us involved are kind of learning from past mistakes and dealing with things differently.

2. Given your experience, what would you say are the best and yet most realistic objectives for an intensive Native language program?

Owennatekha articulates the aims of the program thus:

Create speakers: that's it. Create speakers and with that create that ripple effect. Those speakers will increase language in their own home, and they'll increase knowledge in the circles around them and gradually create more awareness and knowledge and use of the language throughout the community.

Kanatawakhon focuses on instructional goals that can be achieved in the course of an intensive academic year, and on ultimate goals:

I think realistically for a first year, we should aim to provide students with an excellent sense of the language and a fairly good vocabulary, so that they will be able to organize the language quite competently. For fluency, I think we definitely need to have another year, when we would be able to actually move into a full immersion situation.

I remember one time being in St. Regis and listening to old guys repairing a car. They spoke Mohawk all the way through - they just messed around with this car for a couple of hours, and it was all in Mohawk and they talked. They were chattering away while they were doing it. I thought, "Wow, that's real language, that's where people really need to have students, where they're involved because this is language in action." They've learned all the grammar stuff, they've learned all the formal stuff they need, they can read whatever they need to read, they can organize their thoughts given the time; what they need is to hear an actual living situation of the language in order to get to a point where they can do it, do the language as automatically as the people they are listening to.

CONCLUSION

Educators have long recognized experiential knowledge as the basis for adult learning. Among Canadian Aboriginal learners, this implies not only building upon learners' personal knowledge, but also developing curriculum that incorporates cultural and community knowledge and respect for their values (Te Hennepe, 1993; Stairs, 1994). Paterson and Hart-Wasekeesikaw (1994) emphasize both the social context of learning and the use of teaching methods familiar within Aboriginal cultures so that known cultural meanings are part of new learning. Moreover, community-based programs may encourage students to complete their programs because the learning environment is familiar and likely to promote success (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972). In the intensive language program, the linguistic approach was novel and at first, intimidating to some of the students. However, the familiar environment of a house on the reserve, the presence of elders, and the conversational tone of classes encouraged learning in a safe and comfortable setting. Hence, the students were able to focus on language learning without distracting anxieties about the classroom context, and the instructors were able to apply complex strategies that might not otherwise have been acceptable.

However, even given the comfortable, supportive social setting, the intensive language course was highly demanding. Both the instructors and their

students were firm in declaring that it was not for beginners who had never had a previous language course; in fact, previous study was a condition for admission to the program. Moreover, participants with little academic background tended to have greater difficulty, as they were not accustomed to systematic study or to grammatical analysis of language. For such learners, a year-long introduction, including both oral language and grammatical descriptions, is advisable if they are to obtain optimum profit from an immersion program.

Many Aboriginal cultures are enjoying a resurgence as people renew their understanding and practice of traditions. For many, this is closely connected with language learning, as the ways of thinking and understanding the world are encoded in Aboriginal languages. This program provides a model for community language restoration programs. The growing need to support Aboriginal learners who are developing their self-identity by immersing themselves in their culture and language implies that more and more communities will establish intensive programs for adults (Richards and Schutz, 1997). With the scarcity of fluent speakers to serve as instructors, the most efficient way to reach new learners will be through programs that develop a high degree of proficiency and knowledge in learners who will in turn become community resources.

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An Intensive Native Language Program for Adults

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