

The Gift of Language and Culture

Jurisdiction: First Nations/INAC/SK

Contact: Gift of Language and Culture

Level: K-12

Theme: Culture and Language

Description of Practice:

The Gift of Language and Culture is a joint project between the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, Onion Lake First Nation, Prince Albert Grand Council and Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation. The project is developing nursery to grade 12 instructional Cree language curriculum and a nursery to grade 9 Cree immersion program/curriculum.

Background:

In 2003, three of Saskatchewan's largest First Nations bands joined collaborative forces with the province's biggest tribal council in an effort to fill the sizable linguistic curriculum void that currently exists in the province.

Student demographics in Saskatchewan indicate an increasing First Nations presence in the provincial school system. The learning needs of these students have often excluded the opportunity to be taught in their first language either in an immersion or instructional setting. The absence of relevant First Nations language curriculum has often led to levels of frustration as a result of being unable to connect culturally and linguistically with schools.

For some time the Lac La Ronge Indian Band (LLRIB), Onion Lake First Nation (OLFN), Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation (PBCN), and the Prince Albert Grand Council (PAGC) were proactively discussing the future direction of First Nations languages. (Saskatchewan Learning had also partaken in the discussions). The result from these discussions was a project called the Gift of Language and Culture, a vast multi year project that is generally meant to address Cree language needs across the province. The specific concept behind the proposal was to create a resource-based Nursery-to-Grade 9 instructional and immersion Cree language curriculum.

Development:

The K-9 Cree immersion curriculum is being developed at Onion Lake First Nation, and K-12 Cree instructional curriculum is being developed at Lac La Ronge First Nation. The language programs were piloted initially at Onion Lake, Lac La Ronge and Peter Ballantyne. One provincial school, Confederation school located in Saskatoon, is a pilot site for the Nursery and Kindergarten immersion curriculum.

Evidence:

Currently the Gift of Language and Culture project have materials developed from K to Grade 4/5. The proponents are prepared to provide copies of materials, including materials developed individually prior to the Gift of Language and Culture project, for the cost of reproduction to the requestor. As part of the project the proponents are also providing the materials to the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre for translation into other languages/dialects and subsequent distribution to requesters.

Adaptability:

The executive steering committee of the Gift of Language and Culture project is currently being expanded to include other Tribal Council/First Nation Directors of Education from across the province and other First Nations are being provided the opportunity to pilot the curriculum.

The plans for this project include addressing the First Nations language needs across the province. Various provincial school divisions have indicated an interest in the developed materials, with the Saskatoon Public School Board requesting copies of the developed materials/units for use in their schools.

Final products will be on CD-ROM in the English version to allow other First Nations ability to modify the content, dialect and/or language to meet their local needs. The project team anticipates the curriculum will be available on the Saskatchewan Learning website (Evergreen Curriculum) and will provide the framework for First Nations language instruction and immersion across the province.

Further information:

Gift of Language and Culture: <http://www.giftoflanguageandculture.ca/index.html>

Gift of Language and Culture, 1-877-768-6888 (ext. 298)