Student Evaluation Case Competition 2011

Final Round Case

Evaluation of Language Nests Initiative
Government of the Northwest Territories

Welcome to the Final Round of the 2011 CES Case Competition!

We thank the Senior Management Team of the Department of Education, Culture and Employment and the Program Review Office of the Department of the Executive, Government of the Northwest Territories for the information provided to support this case. Please note that this request for proposals is hypothetical and in no way reflects the process used by the Government of the Northwest Territories to evaluate this program.

SCENARIO

Your consulting firm has responded to the attached Request for Proposals issued by the Department of Education, Culture and Employment for the evaluation of the Language Nests Initiative.

The Deputy Minister, Director of Programs and Director of Evaluation for the Department of Education, Culture and Employment (aka the judges for the final round) have requested a briefing from the three consulting teams that have been invited to submit proposals.

Their interest is in learning about the overall strategy you propose for conducting this evaluation, the challenges that you anticipate in conducting the evaluation and how you might address them, and the type of evidence expected from the evaluation regarding the achievement of program objectives. In particular, they are looking for your recommendations on how the evaluative judgment might be made based on the outcomes of the program and the resources assigned to it.

Based on the presentations, they will 'award the contract' and select the winning team for the 2011 Student Case Competition.

We look forward to your presentation later today.

1. Organizers may interrupt teams briefly to take pictures of members at work preparing their presentation. The final round presentations will be videotaped.

2. Teams should arrive at the presentation room at the agreed on time.

3. Presentations should be no longer than 20 minutes. A time-keeper will give warning as the end of the presentation period approaches.

4. Judges and the audience will have up to ten minutes after the presentation to ask questions of the team.

JUDGING CRITERIA FOR THE FINAL ROUND

The following are the criteria for judging of the presentations, the awarding of the 'contract' for this evaluation and the Case Competition plaque.

Criteria	Weight
Clarity, completeness and appropriateness of evaluation matrix	20%
Appropriateness of the evaluation design, data collection and analysis plan	20%
Proposed approach for making the evaluative judgment on the program based on the accomplishments of the program and the resources assigned to it	10%
An assessment of challenges to conducting the evaluation and how these will be addressed	15%
Attention to issues of diversity and culture and programming involving young children	15%
Overall quality of the presentation (clarity, flow of information, persuasiveness, interaction with the judges).Team members involvement and collaboration in the presentation and the questions and answers session	15%
Innovative ideas or detailed practical suggestions that go above and beyond the above criteria	5%
Total	**100%**

Reference Documents

The following reference documents are provided to use as you see fit in preparing your proposal (teams are not expected to reference each document):

- NWT Map showing use of Official Languages and Highway Map
- Copies of two Language Nests funding proposals as examples of the types of approaches being used – Hay River and Inuvik
- Results of a sample of responses to a recent survey of teachers delivering Language Nests programs (4 of the 16 responses are provided)
- Excerpt from GNWT Program Managers Guide to Program Evaluation on evaluative criteria (judgment)

Education Culture and Employment, Government of the Northwest Territories

Request for Proposals: Evaluation of the Language Nests Initiative

May 2011

1.   INTRODUCTION

Aboriginal languages are the foundation of northern cultures. They define Aboriginal people, they describe northern values and beliefs and they provide the framework through which northern people express their views and visions.[1]

The use and revitalization of the languages is important to northerners. Aboriginal languages reflect distinctive histories and cultures of this land. To speak one's own language provides a sense of identity, self-esteem and supports social cohesion. The knowledge expressed through languages benefits not just the culture from which it comes, but also contributes to the sum total of all knowledge.[2]

Revitalization of Aboriginal language is a priority within the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT). Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) has a strategy specific to Aboriginal language entitled *The Northwest Territories Aboriginal Language Plan – A Shared Responsibility*. The vision statement of the plan reads as follows: *"Aboriginal languages are used extensively, on a daily basis, to communicate in NWT homes and communities as well as within the organizations and agencies providing services to the public."*

Aboriginal language and culture is one of the four pillars of ECE's Aboriginal Student Achievement Strategy and also figures prominently in the GNWT's Early Childhood Development Framework for Action.

There are eleven official languages in the NWT, nine of which are Aboriginal. These include: Cree; Chipewyan; T'licho; G'wich'in; Inuktitut; Inuvialuktun; Inuinnaqtun; North Slavey and South Slavey. Language retention is strongest in the T'licho region. The majority of aboriginal people in the NWT speak one of the Dene languages" (see map provided in background materials).

The GNWT has funded three Aboriginal language initiatives:

1. Language Communities – language classes for adults and community members, resource development and language-based culture camps;
2. Teaching and Learning Centers – develop Aboriginal and culture-based materials for schools and offer training for school-based Aboriginal language instructors;
3. Language Nests – early childhood immersion programs designed to restore the use of Aboriginal languages.

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[1] Northwest Territories Aboriginal Languages Plan: A Shared Responsibility, October 2010, p2.
[2] Ibid. p6.

It is the Language Nests that are the focus of this request for proposals.

2.   PROGRAM DESCRIPTION - LANGUAGE NESTS

Early language immersion was introduced in the NWT in January 2003 through a program modeled after New Zealand's Maori Aboriginal Language Nests. This report will refer to the NWT Early Language Immersion Program as 'Language Nests', and it is important to note that concept of Language Nests involves full-time immersion in the Aboriginal language. The concept was introduced into licensed early childhood care facilities/programs for the purpose of encouraging acquisition of Aboriginal language in the early years.

The majority of children in these settings are in the age range of two to five years. Language Nests funding is available only to licensed pre-school facilities to ensure safety and standards of operation.

Proposal-based funding for Language Nests is distributed from ECE via and Contribution Agreements (CAs). Child care facilities apply yearly for funds to supplement their programs to introduce Aboriginal language into the child care setting (hiring of staff who speak the language). Contribution Agreements disperse money twice yearly, with reporting required at mid- year and end of year. A stipulation of CAs is that no new funds are released until year-end reporting is filed.

There are approximately 67 licensed child care centres in the NWT. On average, nineteen child care centres per year are funded under the Language Nests Initiative. In the case of Tlicho Community Services Agency there are seven Language Nest sites under one Contribution Agreement. Likewise, the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation applies for and reports on funding for five sites. The following outlines the funding commitments for 2010/11.

Deh Gah Got'ie First Nation	$66,018.00
Deninu Ku'e First Nations	$48,400.00
Fort Good Hope Day Care Society	$7,000.00
Inuvialuit Regional Corporation	$187,775.00
Inuvik Child Development Centre	$57,103.00
Katlodeeche First Nation	$82,992.00
Liidlii Kue First Nation	$66,544.00
Salt River First Nation #195	$42,416.00
Sister Celeste Child Development	$67,977.86
Tlicho Community Services Agency	$222,854.00

Tl'oondih Healing Society	$77,885.98
	$926,965.84

In total, 350 children are enrolled in the funded programs, ranging from groups of seven to 34.

Objectives

The overall objective of the Language Nests Initiative is to provide Aboriginal pre-school children with opportunities to learn their Aboriginal language.

The expected outcome of the program is that enrolled children who have a basic understanding of the Aboriginal language by the time they enter the K-12 school system.

Reporting

Funded programs are required to provide a mid-year and final financial and narrative report on their activities and achievements. The experience has been that some but not all narrative reports are submitted.

3.   PROGRAM THEORY

Children learn language best in the very early years, from birth to age six, as their brains progress through developmental stages that support language acquisition.   Language acquisition begins at birth and some would argue, prenatally. From birth to eight months of age, a child's brain recognizes phonemes, which are the smallest component speech sounds. During this developmental stage, it is important that the child hear a language spoken to learn the 'building blocks' of language. At this stage in life, children are capable of reproducing the phonemes of any language. Children then begin repeating the sounds they hear (sometimes referred to a 'babbling'). Gradually children attach meaning to sounds as they associate the sounds with symbols (objects or words). A short video clip on language development is found at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XuaFatcGVbA

Language Nests support consistent daily exposure and practice with language in the early years. They expose young children to the language during the years when the developmental stage of the brain is best at learning language.

Language acquisition follows a 'direct-dose response' to exposure to the language. i.e. the more a child hears and practices a language, the more the child learns the language. Children learn on average 10 to 15 new word meanings each day, but only one of these words can be accounted for by direct instruction. The other nine to 14 word meanings need to be picked up in some other way. It has been proposed that children acquire these meanings by way of a semantic analysis; that is, when they meet an unfamiliar word, children can use information in its context to correctly guess its rough area of meaning.[3] Child care is an interactive situation; children play, listen to stories, take instruction and have the opportunities for language immersion throughout the day. Living the language may be more effective in transference than simply pointing and repeating words. "In conclusion, young children's language and literacy development occurs as they participate in the routine ongoing practices of their daily lives."[4]

The program operates under the assumption that language acquisition is "dependent on children being able to further develop their skills outside the preschool or daycare."[5]. Which means that there must be support in the family and community. The GNWT also recognizes that not all parents have language skills themselves. The GNWT's contribution towards childhood language is focused on the child care situation.

4.   RATIONALE AND PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW

Anecdotally, the GNWT is aware that full immersion does not occur in Language Nests. The GNWT is interested in learn the extent of immersion across various Language Nest sites. Broadly, the GNWT wants to know what the programs are achieving, and should the GNWT continue with this method for cultural preservation. More specifically, the GNWT is wishes the following issues addressed:

- Is the program being implemented in the way that was designed by ECE? In other words, are the individual programs being operated as immersion programs?
- What are the achievements of the programs?
- Does the Language Nest Initiative provide good value for money?
- How could the Initiative and the programs funded be improved?

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[3]Landauer TK, Dumais ST. (1997). A solution to Plato's problem: The latent semantic analysis theory of acquisition. Psychological review. 104: 211-240.

[4] Purcell-Gates, V., Melzi, G., Najafi, B. & Orellana, M.F. (2011). Child Development Perspectives. The Society for Research in Child Development. Vol 5(1), p25.

[5] Bougie, Evelyne . September 9, 2010. Family, community and Aboriginal language among young First Nations children living off reserve in Canada. Canadian Social Trends, Component of Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 11-008-X. Statistics Canada. Government of Canada. P73.

5.   POTENTIAL PROGRAM ISSUES

When testing language acquisition, it is important to recognize the constraints of language and speech development with children. No matter how good the program, most children will develop their communication skills within standardized timelines and on their own developmental schedule. A one year old child understands basic words like "bye bye" when used with gestures, and will attempt words such as "mama" and "dada". At 18 months a child understands commands such as "Where is your nose?" "Give to me", and the child starts to babble. At two years of age, children will start to string words together, such as "see doggie", "no bed", "want milk". By three, a child understands approximately 900 words and can clearly speak 200 or so. So, the outcomes of the program (aboriginal language acquisition) will be hampered by the fact that part of the audience is developmentally too young to speak!

Secondly, it has been said that Dene children are not particularly loquacious. They are taught from birth to listen. In children, listening and learning seems to be encouraged more than self expression. Therefore, researchers must not make the mistake that the children have limited verbal skills when they simply reflecting a cultural behavioral norm. There is no way to substantiate this and some people disagree, but it bears consideration.

6.   AUDIENCE

The commissioner of this evaluation will be the Deputy Minister of Education Culture and Employment.

7.   DELIVERABLES

ECE is asking for the consultants to develop an evaluation plan for their consideration. It would be helpful to have the following elements covered:

1) Suggested overall approach to the evaluation
2) An evaluation plan, including:
    a) A matrix of evaluation questions, indicators (evidence needed to address each question), sources and methods to address the broad issues noted above
    b) Types of analysis that would be appropriate for the data collected
    c) Any observations you can make from the community surveys and how these have been used to develop your evaluation plan
3) Potential issues (ethical, political, cultural, implementation) and how you would address these
4) How the evaluative judgment might be made

8.   STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

The Canadian Evaluation Societies' *Code of Conduct for Program Evaluation*[6] is the standard used by the GNWT.

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6 available on the CES website at www.evaluationcanada.ca