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Published online: April 20, 2015

Edition period: Volume 1, 2015

To cite this article: Chambers, N. A. (2015). Language nests as an emergent global phenomenon: Diverse approaches to program development and delivery. *The International Journal of Holistic Early Learning and Development*, 1, 25-38.

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Language Nests as an Emergent Global Phenomenon: Diverse Approaches to Program Development and Delivery

Natalie A. Chambers, Ph.D.

Abstract

Language nests are early language learning programs where young children, from infancy to five years of age, are fully immersed in an Indigenous language. This article presents a literature review of Indigenous language nests that are focused on the renewal of endangered languages from different communities across the world. These programs are intended for young children who have been raised not speaking their Indigenous language as their first or mother tongue language. To demonstrate the diversity of approaches to language nest development and delivery, this review includes well- and lesser-known programs. By contributing to Indigenous global networks of sharing, this article is intended to provide the encouragement and information that is greatly needed during the early years of language nest development and delivery.

Language nests are early language learning programs where young children, from infancy to five years of age, are fully immersed in an Indigenous language. Since the 1980s, language nest programs have been developed and delivered in Indigenous communities all over the world. In this article I highlight the diversity of approaches to language nest program development and delivery by exploring the experiences of the Samoans in the Pacific Islands, Mohawk peoples in Kahnawà:ke in Canada, the Māori in New Zealand, the Hawai'ians, the Seneca in the United States, and the Sámi in Norway and Finland. Of these, the Te Kōhanga Reo in New Zealand and the Pūnana Leo in Hawai'i have received the most attention in the literature, while others, such as the Samoan and Sámi language nests, are almost completely unheard of here in Canada.

Historically, Indigenous peoples have experienced a range of oppressive colonial state policies that aimed to eliminate their languages. Since the 1970s, language nest programs have been developed to support young Indigenous children who are not raised speaking their Indigenous language as their first or mother tongue language. The nests provide a unique language domain in which fluent and semi-fluent speakers engage young children in conversation and daily activities so that children may learn their Indigenous language as a second language. Many adult nest workers are also learning their Indigenous language as a second language. The language nests reviewed in this paper are therefore primarily concerned with the renewal of endangered languages.

In keeping with Indigenous methodologies, I begin by briefly locating myself in relationship to the research (Absolon & Willett, 2007). I am a non-Indigenous woman, an immigrant to Canada from England, and a language nest parent. For the last four years I have worked in various capacities to support the development of language nest programs in my children's community in the Interior of British Columbia in Canada. When the community first applied for funding for a stand-alone language nest, I knew very little about these programs and I began to search for more information. It soon became apparent that more research could be useful to other communities wanting to start their own programs.

Our eldest son attended a language nest program that was created in the Infant/Toddler and Head Start rooms at the community's English-speaking daycare. The nest project enabled him, at age one, to spend time with two fluent Elders and a language apprentice for three hours every day immersed in *nsyilxcən*, the Okanagan language. He was five years old when he began attending a second language nest, a stand-alone program that was run out of a portable trailer on the grounds of the immersion elementary school. The following year, my youngest son attended a third language nest program for two years, until he was no longer able to participate due to his entry into full-time kindergarten. For the past three years, this most recent program has been operated by the Band out of a home in the community. My high level of participation in these projects, as a parent, advocate, volunteer, program consultant, and proposal writer, led me to experience firsthand many of the struggles that accompanied each of these various approaches. Consequently, I decided to do my doctoral research on language nest programs in order to present the insights, challenges, and promising practices that may be involved in the development and implementation of language nest programs (Chambers, 2014).

This literature review demonstrates that approaches to language nest program development and delivery are shaped by many factors such as: Indigenous language status within the community, population size, availability of fluent speakers and early childhood educators, state legislation and funding, and access to materials and resources in the target language. My own experiences of supporting the development and implementation of three language nests in my

children's community support these findings. Increased awareness of some of the commonalities and differences between global approaches to language nest development and delivery may provide much needed information and encouragement to Indigenous peoples in other parts of the world where language nests are not yet established.

A Brief History of Language Nests as an Emergent Global Phenomenon

The emergence of language nests across the world happened simultaneously in many different places. In 1973, a group of Samoan and Cook Island women appear to have set up the first language nest *Aoga Amata* or "punanga reo" (playgroup) in Tokoroa, New Zealand (Coxon, Anae, Mara, Wendt-Samu, & Finau, 2002; Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014; Utumapu, 1998). However, the expansion of the Pacific Island language nests has been attributed to the success of the Māori Te Kōhanga Reo movement that emerged in New Zealand shortly afterwards (Coxon et al., 2002). The Te Kōhanga Reo concept was developed in 1981, and the first nest opened in 1982 with funding from the Department of Māori Affairs (King, 2001). In Hawai'i in 1982, a group of Hawai'ian parents formed a non-profit society and opened the first Pūnana Leo nest program that was inspired by the Te Kōhanga Reo and the "Canadian-French 'super-immersion' schools" (Warner, 2001, p. 138).

In Canada, the first language nest appears to have been developed by Dorothy Lazore and Kahtehron:ni Iris Staceyas in the Mohawk community of Kahnawà:kein the early 1980s (Hoover, 1992; Richards & Burnaby, 2008; Rickard & Deer, 2008). In 1987, Kathy Michel and Janice Dick Billy opened the Secwepemc Ka nest in the community of Adams Lake in British Columbia (Michel, 2012). One year later, the Cree in Quebec also developed a language immersion program at the preschool and then kindergarten level (Stiles, 1997).

In the present day, Indigenous language nests have been developed all over the world by Pacific Ocean Islanders (Coxon et al., 2002; Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014; Utumapu, 1998), the Māori (Cooper, Arago-Kemp, Wylie, & Hodgen, 2004; Fleras, 1987; King, 2001; Lee, Carr, Soutar, & Mitchell, 2013; McClutchie, 2007), Hawai'ians (Hohepa, Smith, Smith, & McNaughton, 1992; Iokepa-Guerrero & de France, 2007; Kamanā & Wilson, 1996; Kimura, n.d.; Warner, 2001; Wilson & Kamanā 2001; Yamauchi & Ceppi, 2006), Native American peoples (Borgia, 2014; Borgia & Dowdy, 2010; Navarro, 2008), the Irish Gaelic (Hickey, 1997, 1999; Mhathuna, 1995), Welsh (Hickey, Lewis, & Baker, 2013; Jones & Martin-Jones, 2004), Scottish Gaelic (Stephen, McPake, & McLeod, 2011, 2012; Stephen, McPake, McLeod, & Pollock, 2010), Lule Sámi (Braut, 2010), Inari Sámi in Finnish Lapland and Russia Karelia (Esko, Tuunainen, & Miettinen, 2012; Pasanen, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2010) and First Nations in Canada (Chambers, 2014; McIvor, 2005a, 2005b, 2006; Mortensen, 2008).

Language nests exist for which there is little or no published information available in Canada, aside from short newspaper articles (Aikio-Puoskari, 1998; Bates, 2013; Pereltsvaig, 2012; Welch, n.d.), and there are currently no translations available for the Norwegian and Finnish literature (Mattus, 2007; Morottaja, 2007; Paltto, 2007; Pasanen, 2003, 2010).

The Welsh, Scots and Irish operate Indigenous language medium preschools that are concerned with language renewal and enrichment: Welsh programs are called *cylchoedd meithrin* (Hickey & de Mejía, 2014), the Irish use the term *Naíonraí*, and the Scots simply describe their early language immersion programs as Scottish Gaelic-medium (GM) preschools (Stephen et al., 2010). Due to limitations of space, these programs are reserved for future discussion.

Pacific Island Language Nests

Over the last 30 years, a large number of Indigenous peoples from the Polynesian Pacific Islands have taken up permanent residence in New Zealand. The first Pacific Island language nest was started in 1973 by a group of Samoan and Cook Island mothers who “believed that other forms of preschool education were not meeting the needs of their children” (Utumapu, 1998, p. 28), in partnership with local church groups in New Zealand. The nests rapidly expanded, and in 1987 they received funding from the New Zealand Department of Education as a means to increase the participation rates of Pacific Island children in early childhood education (Coxon et al., 2002). In 1984, the *A’oga Fa’a* Samoa language nest was established as the first Licensed and Chartered Pacific Island centre (Taouma et al., 2003).

Samoan mothers and Elders played a significant role in the delivery of the Pacific Island language nest programs. Mothers helped to teach the language and Elders “meet, exchange news and recite legends to children” (Utumapu, 1998, p. 29). Children learn:

respect, cultural pride; family dignity; self esteem; sharing and caring for others; Samoan language; art of singing and dancing; family member roles; the Samoan preparation and presentation of food; handicrafts; cultural games; Samoan way of hosting visitors; listening to and obeying Elders. (Utumapu, 1998, p. 32)

At first, parents were “opinionated and suspicious of the language nest movement, until they had actually witnessed themselves how the language nest operates and the positive results in their children” (Utumapu, 1998, p. 86). Language nests also served as a much needed form of social support for parents, as parenting or mothering groups held at the nests created opportunities for parents to learn about “health, budgeting, child development, domestic and child abuse” (Utumapu, 1998, p. 87). By 1996, 176 Pacific Island language nests had a total of 3,736 children in attendance; that is 38% of all Pacific Island children attending preschool institutions were enrolled in the nests.

It is worth noting that the Pacific Island language nest movement was rarely mentioned in the literature that I accessed on language nests. My inclusion of the Pacific Island language nests in this review is intended to acknowledge the contributions of Samoan programs, raise awareness, and encourage further research on these programs.

Kahnawà:ke Mohawk Language Nest

In the early 1980s, the first Indigenous language nest was established in Kahnawà:ke territory in Quebec, Canada as a “pilot project to use only Mohawk with English-speaking nursery school children” (Hoover, 1992, p. 271). Data on the state of the Mohawk language that was published by Statistics Canada in the 1970s had provided the Kahnawà:ke community with the impetus to create a language nest program. According to Grenoble and Whaley (2006), up until this point the Mohawk “had been relatively complacent about language vitality, not realizing that they were already in a state of accelerated language loss” (p. 86). Over the next two years, the Mohawk language was introduced into the schools for 15 minutes, which then increased to 30 minutes. However, it was soon realized that such short periods of instruction would not create sustained language renewal and “concerned parents began to look for ways to increase Mohawk language use in the elementary schools” (Hoover, 1992, p. 271). The Kahnawà:ke Survival School opened in 1978, followed by the development of a pilot full-language immersion nursery

school program in 1979 (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006), that was based upon the successful French early immersion models in Quebec (Hoover, 1992). As the original cohort of nursery immersion children grew, the language program expanded into kindergarten and then grade one as partial language immersion, and in 1984, became full-day language immersion.

Few parents selected the program for their children in the beginning. However, confidence in the nest grew over the first 10 years of its development, and by 1992, over half of the community's children were enrolled (Richards & Burnaby, 2008). Parental concerns over their children's English language skills and related future opportunities were a large factor in the slow growth in attendance. Research that gave evidence that Mohawk language immersion was not at the cost of English language performance appears to have played a role in increased enrolment (Hoover, 1992). A case study on the Kahnawà:ke Survival School revealed that teacher training, the development of a standardized orthography, and written curriculum materials were key challenges that very likely impacted the development of the language nest program (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006). Despite its role as a leader in the language nest movement in Canada, very little research has been published that focuses on the Mohawk language nest program at Kahnawà:ke. Further research on this project would contribute to an analysis of the long-term impacts of language nest programming on language renewal at an Indigenous nation level.

Te Kōhanga Reo

Te Kōhanga Reo directly translates as “the language nest” (Hohepa et al., 1992, p. 333). The first nest opened in 1982 (Fleras, 1987; King, 2001). The Te Kōhanga Reo concept appears to have emerged from an annual Department of Māori Affairs meeting in 1981 in response to Māori concerns for their language (King, 2001; McClutchie, 2007) and as an integral component of the Department's “Tu Tangata (‘standing tall’) philosophy as a blueprint for future Māori-government relations” (Fleras, 1987, p. 6). Consequently, the Department funded the program from the beginning. Te Kōhanga Reo attracted children who had not previously participated in conventional early childhood education (King, 2001) and the number of programs grew dramatically from one in 1982, to 400 by 1985, to 600 by 1998 (McClutchie, 2007). The nests became the first choice for 20% of all early childhood services and provided care for “between 1992 and 1995 [to] an average of 46% of those Māori preschoolers participating in preschool programs” (King, 2001, p. 122).

Fleras (1987) described Te Kōhanga Reo as “a kind of childcare centre which fuses together the structural format of preschool and day care, and combines them with a Māori style of operation” for the purpose of “producing bilingual and bicultural individuals who possess the confidence and skills to achieve success in either world” (p. 7). Te Kōhanga Reo experienced considerable difficulties in the first 10 years of establishment. Programs were staffed by a blend of fluent Elders and younger, more energetic women, and there was a need for Elders to share their language through context-rich environments using natural language acquisition, as well as for younger workers to improve their language skills. As a result, three-year training programs were created that covered the history and philosophy of Te Kōhanga Reo, Māori ways of knowing, early childhood education, and administration (King, 2001). The content of the training was developed from within the *whanau* (extended family) in which the individual is already working. These training programs have enabled Te Kōhanga Reo to become increasingly staffed by fully qualified early childhood educators proficient in Te Reo Māori and Māori culture and customs with the support of fluent speakers and a unique, community-based *whanau* governance structure.

Te Kōhanga Reo serve children between one and six years of age. Children may attend for six hours per day on weekdays, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., with most Kōhanga Reo offering 30 hours of program delivery per week (Lee et al., 2013). The programs are usually housed in a “Māori-owned premise such as a marae (Māori ceremonial complex) or, less frequently, at community centres or private homes (Interim Report on Te Kōhanga Reo, 31 October 1983)” (Fleras, 1987, p. 9). The number of children per nest may range from six to 60, dependent upon the setting. Many Kōhanga Reo find it necessary to charge fees, as government funding is not entirely adequate. The initial success and rapid growth of the Kōhanga Reo in the 1980s was the result of the efforts of Māori parent and Elder volunteers, as only 10% of the workers in Te Kōhanga Reo were paid (Stiles, 1997).

‘Aha Pūnana Leo Hawai’ian Nest Programs

Pūnana Leo means “nest of voices” (Iokepa-Guerrero & de France, 2007, p. 43). The Hawai’ian language nest movement was inspired by the Te Kōhanga Reo in Aotearoa after the founders of the Pūnana Leo traveled to New Zealand and visited the programs in person (Stiles, 1997). In 1982, a group of Hawai’ian speaking young educators incorporated a non-profit society ‘Aha Pūnana Leo and opened the first language nest two years later. The first Hawai’ian nest began with no sustainable funding and just a few private donations (Kimura, n.d.). This shortfall in funding was made up through parental contributions that included “paying tuition (based on a sliding scale), providing 8 hours of in-kind labour each month, and attending monthly meetings” (Yamauchi & Ceppi, 2006, p. 16). Within three years, two more nests were opened. By 1996, ‘Aha Pūnana Leo had served 175 children in nine different programs (Kamanā & Wilson, 1996).

Pūnana Leo programs weave Indigenous, family-based ways of knowing with Montessori methods in early childhood education. A typical program provides service for 10 to 12 children from ages three to five years (Wilson & Kamanā, 2001). Children have “a school day from 7:30 to 5:00 Monday through Friday from September through July. The multi-aged group allows for the retention of a number of children each year who help transmit the language to incoming students” (Wilson & Kamanā, 2001, p. 151). While children under age three are not able to attend due to state restrictions, the Hui Hi’I Pepe (Baby Embracing Clubs) welcome mothers with infants to toddlers aged three years, to “join with a teacher to learn Hawai’ian and simple teaching strategies in preparation for the children’s entering the Pūnana Leo” (Wilson & Kamanā, 2001, p. 151). Parents are required to attend language classes on a weekly basis and support language use at home (Stiles, 1997).

Children in the Pūnana Leo language nests learn literacy in Hawai’ian from an early age due to the early establishment of an accepted orthography (Wilson & Kamanā, 2001). The lack of available textual resources, however, necessitates the creation of Hawai’ian materials, such as books that were created by parents “for their children using photographs of the child pasted to construction paper with a few lines written underneath” (Wilson & Kamanā, 2001, p. 152). Pasting Hawai’ian orthography on English children’s books enabled the creation of needed materials.

Onodowa’ga: Wadehsaye Oiwa’sho’oh Seneca Language Nest

The Seneca language nest in Western New York State in the United States provides an intimate glimpse of an Indigenous, family-based language immersion program. In 2009, Sandy Dowdy, a fluent speaker of Seneca, started the program with the support of her late husband, Dar (Borgia,

2014). Dowdy is a certified early childhood educator in Montessori and Asher's Natural Approach teaching methods, including Total Physical Response (TPR) (Borgia & Dowdy, 2010). Although an Elder, Sandy is described by Borgia (2014) as "arguably one of the youngest fluent speakers of Seneca" (p. 93). The present day Onodowa'ga: Wadehsaye Oiwa'sho'oh, or the Seneca Language Nest program, was developed after 10 years of pilot language immersion programs that were created and delivered by Sandy and Dar. During those early years, various programs were developed for a range of participants, from school-age children (ages 7 to 14) to Elders, but "their mission, stated on the school's website, stayed the same: 'to re-establish our identity as traditional Allegany Senecas by preserving our language, culture, and customs as specified in our spiritual guide the *Gaiwi:yo:h*'" (Borgia, 2014, p. 93). It was the successful language nest models of the Māori and Hawai'ians, however, that provided the spark of inspiration for the present day *Onodowa'ga: Wadehsaye Oiwa'sho'oh* early Seneca language immersion program (Borgia, 2014).

Dowdy started the Seneca language nest with four 3-year-old preschool children, including three of her great-granddaughters. By 2011, the number of participating children had increased to 10 (Borgia, 2014): five of the children were 2 and 3 years of age, and an additional five children who joined the program in the afternoons were 4 and 5 years of age. At this time, the Seneca Language Nest, *Ganöhsesge:kha:' Hë:nödeyë:sta':*, or the Faithkeepers School (Borgia, 2014), was operated in a small, longhouse-shaped building and offered full-day language immersion for 18 children, including "nine two- to three-year olds and nine four- to five-year olds" (Borgia, 2014, p. 93). Correspondingly, the number of workers at the program increased from one cook and cleaner, to include language apprentices, as per Hinton's (2001) Master-Apprentice model.

Dowdy's nest day includes spending time outside, activities that follow the seasonal cycle, environmental sustainability, and seasonal ceremonies (Borgia & Dowdy, 2010). Specific activities during the day at Dowdy's nest follow a regular routine but she is also flexible to the children's needs and other goings-on in the community. This approach enables the children to "grow and attend to activities when they are ready" and "to freely express themselves during free play situations" (Borgia & Dowdy, 2010, p. 121). Throughout the day, language is reinforced through non-verbal gestures, TPR methods, repetition and flashcards. Children learn "about clothes, foods, numbers, pets, commands... names, family terms, miscellaneous items such as questions and observations, songs and [a daily Seneca recitation] the *Gano'nyok*" (Borgia & Dowdy, 2010, p. 122). Children's families are included in the language learning process through the production of a series of parent brochures, through informal meetings with parents during drop off and pick up, and through participation in seasonal ceremonies throughout the year (Borgia & Dowdy, 2010).

The *Onodowa'ga: Wadehsaye Oiwa'sho'oh* Seneca language immersion program is an innovative approach to language nest development and delivery that blends traditional and Western approaches to early language learning and child development. This program has contributed to the academic literature through publications by Borgia (2014) and Borgia and Dowdy (2010) that share the successes, challenges, and innovations of this program in great detail.

Sámi Language Nests

In the present day, the vast traditional territory (Sámpi) of the Sámi peoples is divided by the nation states of Finland, Sweden, Norway and Russia. There are nine different Sámi languages

or dialects (Todal, 2010). In the 1990s, the successes of the Māori and Hawai’ian language nest programs spread to Finland and Norway and inspired the Sámi Indigenous peoples to start their own nest programs. In 1993, Skolt Sámi language nests began to be developed, and shortly afterwards, Inari Sámi and then Lule Sámi nests were started (Pasanen, 2010).

Inari Sámi

In 1997, two Inari Sámi language nests were opened in Inari and Ivalo in Finland (Pasanen, 2004). The Inari program was funded by the Finnish Cultural Foundation to support two teachers to work with eight to 10 children from 3 to 6 years of age (Pasanen, 2004, 2010). The program was a full-day language immersion in Inari Sámi. Teachers were allowed to use Finnish with the children only in the office as it was considered critical to have the children only see their teachers speaking Inari Sámi within the program (Pasanen, 2004).

In the present day, the Inari program is funded by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and has expanded to employ three teachers who serve up to 12 children between 0 to 6 years of age. Children gain an understanding of Inari Sámi within just a few months of participation in the program. “First they begin to use Inari Sámi among the words in the Finnish language and short phrases, and then spontaneous,” while some “began to speak Inari Sámi enthusiastically, others were embarrassed or just avoided the language... Others liked the language from the beginning” (Pasanen, 2004, p. 112). Children use Finnish in conversation with one another, and speak Inari Sámi in their speech interactions with the teachers. “Sooner or later they began spontaneously to talk to teachers [in] Inari Sámi” (Pasanen, 2004, p. 113). In 2004, Pasanen described the Inari Sámi language nest as a success; enrolment had grown from eight to 20 children, and family language learning had emerged as a byproduct of the nest. At that time, however, the survival of the nest depended upon the ability to secure sustainable funding.

Lule Sámi

In 1989, a group of four parents took the initiative to start a Lule Sámi “daycare” in Tysfjord. The other language nest in Bodø was started by a preschool teacher, also a parent, who wanted to bring the Lule Sámi language into the daycare (Braut, 2010). The Bodø language nest appears to be a subgroup of six Lule Sámi young children that sing, have storytelling, and a special Sámi period three times a week within a Norwegian majority daycare (Braut, 2010). During the startup period, the Lule Sámi sought support from the Welsh and “professors from Coleg y Drindod/Trinity College in Camarthen came to Norway and held a seminar for those involved with the preschool and with instruction in Lule Sámi in the schools” (Todal, 2010, p. 359). In 2010, plans were being made for the creation of another Lule Sámi daycare in Måsske, also in Tysfjord (Todal, 2010).

In the early years of the Lule Sámi language nest in Tysfjord, conflict emerged between parents regarding eligibility requirements for participation in the program. Some parents wanted the program to focus on children with Lule Sámi as a mother tongue, while others whose children did not speak Lule Sámi also wanted access to the program. Ultimately, a decision was made to open attendance to all children (Braut, 2010, p. 38). In the startup years the language policy “Here we shall speak Sámi” strictly enforced Lule Sámi as the only language used in the nest program and ensured excellent results in language acquisition (Braut, 2010, p. 37). Norwegian was permitted in a separate room. However, by 2007/2008 the Tysfjord daycare Annual Plan described a diluted language immersion program that had shifted towards “an equal

foundation in Norwegian and Sámi by contributing with Sámi words and a good vocabulary, through language groups, teamwork, school grounds” (Braut, 2010, p. 30). According to Braut (2010), this was due to the increased numbers of families that had become monolingual Norwegian speaking. As a result of these changes, Lule Sámi was increasingly “symbolically used” and was becoming an “institution language” rather than a language of the home and family (Braut, 2010, p. 41).

Other early challenges for the Tysfjord program included a lack of curriculum materials in Lule Sámi (Braut, 2010). Perhaps as a result of this challenge, Lule Sámi songs and role-play “had a central role” in the program and new Lule Sámi songs were created through translations of Norwegian or “other Sámi variant” dialects (Braut, 2010, p. 38). The Tysfjord nest program was modeled on a “homelike environment where employees were like parents” (Braut, 2010, p. 39). Daily activities included teaching children about Sámi traditional lifestyles, which necessitated spending time in nature, as well as free play activities.

The significant role of the parents as founders was diminished when the Lule Sámi Centre took over the administration of the daycare in 1994 (Braut, 2010). Nonetheless, parents were still obligated to support their children by learning and using Lule Sámi in the home. When Braut conducted her research in 2008, there were three employees working each day in the Lule Sámi daycare/language nest (a total of seven workers were employed in the program). Fourteen children participated in the program, ranging from 1 to 5 years of age. The high child-to-teacher ratio has proved to be a challenge in the children’s language acquisition. The program runs from 7 a.m. to 4:15 p.m. every day. Children arrive at different times in the morning to participate in what Braut (2010) described as “unorganized activities such as individual breakfast and play in the morning” that are held in either a big gathering room or a “lavvo or Sámi tent in the daycare area” (p. 44). Following this, children are engaged in learning songs, days of the week, and talking about the weather or daycare activities. Children also participate in making bread in the kitchen area, spending time outside, having snack time, nap time, storytelling and individual play (Braut, 2010).

The experiences of the Inari and Lule Sámi have contributed to the literature on language nest development and delivery through conference proceedings and published articles that are written in Finnish and Norwegian. As language nests appear to be a fairly recent phenomenon in these regions, some of the discussions regarding what constitutes a language nest (Morottaja, 2007), language immersion activities (Mattus, 2007; Paltto, 2007), and case studies of specific language nest programs (Pasanen, 2003), have the potential to inform similar discussions that are taking place here in Canada (First Peoples’ Cultural Council, 2014).

Conclusion

This review has described some language nests, such as the Māori and Hawai’ian programs, that are well known throughout Indigenous communities around the world. Some of the other programs outlined here, such as the Seneca and Mohawk Kahnawà:ke language nests, are less well known, while others, such as the Sámi language nests, are almost entirely unheard of in Canada, where this article was written. This literature review is intended to raise awareness of all of these important language renewal initiatives and to emphasize the need for increased networking at a global level.

Most of the language nest programs in this review were started by groups of concerned parents (Borgia & Dowdy, 2010; Braut, 2010; Hoover, 1992; Utumapu, 1998; Wilson & Kamanā, 2001). Programs often began as pilot projects that grew in response to the needs and

strengths of the community, and changed over time as lessons were learned through hands-on experience. Some of the nests were delivered as childcare in licensed early childhood centers (Braut, 2010; Fleras, 1987; Taouma et al., 2003; Wilson & Kamanā, 2001), while others were informal playgroups (Utumpapu, 1998) and home-based initiatives (Borgia, 2014). Cutting across all of these differences was a shared commitment to full immersion in the target Indigenous language (Borgia, 2014; Braut, 2010; Hoover, 1992; King, 2001; Pasanen, 2004; Wilson & Kamanā, 2001). Language immersion programs tended to blend Western and traditional Indigenous approaches to early learning. In particular, the Hawai'ians and the Seneca found Montessori methods to be a promising approach for language nest delivery in full immersion (Borgia, 2014; Wilson & Kamanā, 2001).

All of the programs described here faced enormous challenges in order to survive, which included a lack of community support in the startup years, a need for written materials and resources, lack of sustainable funding, shortage of available fluent and semi-fluent speakers, shortage of qualified staff with sufficient language skills, state requirements for early childhood licensing, among many other struggles. Language nests have employed various strategies to overcome these challenges; for example, nests may start by focusing on providing services to just a few children from committed families, creating their own materials, requesting parental contributions (monetary and volunteer work), and developing locally based and culturally informed training programs that are designed to support staff to learn the language from fluent speakers.

Most of the language nests in this review also connected with other language nest programs in order to prepare for inevitable challenges. In particular, the Māori inspired all of the other language nests described in this review, and had provided direct support to the Hawai'ians and the Mohawk; the Mohawk supported the Hawai'ians; and the Welsh provided support to the Sámi. During the early years of the development of the language nest in my children's community, Kathy Michel, the Coordinator of Cseyeten Language Nest (formerly called Secwepemc Ka) in the Adam's Lake community in the Interior of British Columbia, Canada, provided invaluable support and encouragement, as well as hosted site visits to their program so that we were able to witness them in action. Since this time, I have been contacted by a number of First Nations communities in British Columbia with similar requests.

In this review, I have described various approaches to language nest development and delivery as a means to increase awareness and to make this information more readily available for community practitioners, educators, Elders and early childhood educators. Linking language nest programs from across the world has great potential for Indigenous networks of sharing to provide the encouragement and information that is greatly needed during the early years of language nest development. Hopefully, this article will contribute to increased discussions about and between the many other small language nests that undoubtedly exist in many other communities all over the world.

Author's Note

The author accepts full responsibility for any errors in information pertaining to the language nests that are described in this article.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to acknowledge the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) for partial funding of this research. Many thanks also to Dr. Kathy Michel (Coordinator of Cseyeten Language Nest) and Aliana Parker (Language Revitalization Program Specialist, First Peoples' Cultural Council) for reviewing this article prior to publication.

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