

GODIWENNAEN' GAYOGOHO':NON' LANGUAGE NEST

REPORT



SIX NATIONS RESERVE, ONTARIO
2010 - 2011

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COOL Principal Investigator: Dr. Carrie Dyck

Report compiled by Laurel Anne Hasler (Project Coordinator, Memorial University)

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Introduction

Funded in part by the SSHRC CURA Project *Cayuga: Our Oral Legacy (COOL)*, *Godiwennaen' Gayogohó:non'* Language Nest (the Cayuga Language Daycare) ran from September, 2010 until June, 2011 at the Stoneridge Daycare on Six Nations Reserve, Brantford, Ontario.

The purpose of this program was twofold: 1) to increase the number of *Gayogohó:non'* speakers; and 2) to investigate how preschool children at Six Nations Reserve acquire *Gayogohó:non'* from fluent, older speakers in a context that mirrors first-language acquisition.

The children who attended the daycare were between the ages of two and four and were all from Six Nations Reserve.

Methodology

The children attended *Godiwennaen' Gayogohó:non'* five days a week (either half or full days), for a period of ten months and were immersed in a Cayuga-language only environment at the daycare. Coordinator Carrie (Janie) Johnson, a fluent speaker of *Gayogohó:non'*, was the main teacher at the daycare, assisted by one of three helpers and sometimes by trainees, CURA personnel, or parents of the children. After an initial period in which some English was used, Janie, the helpers, and trainees all spoke *Gayogohó:non'* at all times, thus creating a language-rich environment for the children, who learned to understand and to begin to communicate with the daycare workers and other children in *Gayogohó:non'*.

The children learned the language naturally through free play, conversation, activities planned by the daycare workers, and also through the use of audio, video and other media materials. Some English was accepted from the children for about a month and a half, but was then slowly discouraged until the children were not allowed to use any English at all while at the daycare.

The Daycare

Inspiration for Godiwennaen' Gayogohó:non'

Project Leader Janie Johnson, together with a delegation of language teachers from Six Nations, travelled to Hawaii in 2003 to visit a *Punana Leo* Preschool¹, a language nest where 3- and 4-year old students are immersed in Hawaiian, and only the Hawaiian language is spoken in the environment. The group from Six Nations was very impressed by the *Punana Leo* program, and by seeing the children in the program learning to use their language. As a result of their visit, the *Punana Leo* program inspired and became the model for the *Godiwennaen' Gayogohó:non'* Language Nest at Six Nations.

After their trip to Hawaii, Janie Johnson, Tracy Deer, and Tom Deer held a summer camp where they learned how to set up the language nest. They also held interviews with parents who were interested in having their children attend the daycare in order to determine their level of commitment to their children's language-learning at home, in the daycare, and in future schooling.

However, Janie and the other teachers were not able to secure funding for the program at that time. Prior to the 2010-2011 Cayuga Language Nest, Janie did run a pilot project in her own home the previous year. Five children attended this program including Janie's daughter, a helper, and an Elder.

Program Leader

The 2010-2011 *Godiwennaen' Gayogohó:non'* Language Nest was run by Janie Johnson, an advanced-intermediate speaker of Gayogohó:non', who worked as the coordinator and main teacher at the daycare. Janie has been involved with the Cayuga language for a number of years and has worked as a Cayuga Immersion teacher at the primary level at I.L. Thomas.

Students

Eleven children were initially enrolled in the program. Janie decided to admit a few more children than the desired number, under the assumption that a few of the children would not continue attending the daycare on a regular basis. One student dropped out after about three weeks and another three children left the program a bit later on. Seven children attended the program regularly throughout the year.

¹ http://www.ahapunanaleo.org/index.php?/programs/youth_programs_-_punana_leo/

Of the seven students who attended the daycare for the full ten months, there were two boys and five girls, one of whom was Janie’s daughter. The fact that there were only two boys in the program was a bit of a challenge, because when one of the boys was absent, the other boy was left on his own, and would withdraw from the group.

Age range of the children		
2-year olds	3-year olds	4-year old
2	4	1
1 boy; 1 girl	1 boy; 3 girls	1 girl, who was 3 when the program began but turned 4 during the year

The two-year olds had more difficulty in the beginning than the older children. They learned a lot by being immersed in the language, but they often missed their mothers and had a difficult time when they were being dropped off. Furthermore, the younger students didn’t talk as much as the older children in the beginning, although they improved substantially over time. The two-year olds only spoke two-word sentences until they were about two and a half years old. They listened and seemed to understand well, though.

On one hand, therefore, the two-year olds were at a slight disadvantage compared with the older children, because they had less language in the beginning, but on the other hand their younger age was an advantage for them because they received so much exposure to the language early on at a time when they were able to learn quickly and take in a lot of information.

Challenges:

- 1) *One of the girls enrolled in the daycare was just starting to speak a lot more Cayuga in the classroom, but subsequently missed a month of classes when her mother had a new baby and was unable to continue bringing her to the daycare for a while. When this student returned to the daycare, she had forgotten a great deal of what she had learned, and was talking in two-word sentences, as well as in English, again. However, once she was back for a little while, she was able to catch up with the other children.*
- 2) *Attendance was a real challenge. Continued exposure to the language is extremely important for learning, and being absent from the daycare on a regular basis held some children back from what they could have otherwise achieved. One of the three-year olds, for example, would likely have learned a lot more Cayuga if he had been at the daycare more often.*

Helpers and Trainees

Three Elders (all grandmothers) worked as paid helpers at the daycare. Two of them came two days/week, and a third helper worked one day/week, so that there was a helper present in the daycare every day. All three were great workers and very good with the children. They had varying levels of fluency, but each added something important to the program, as each had different knowledge of the language, and all were a huge asset to the daycare.

One of the helpers was less confident than the others regarding her speaking ability, because she had been away from the language for a long time. However, she could speak quite a bit and spoke like a natural speaker. She was particularly good at conversational speaking, because she had worked at a nursing home and relearned some Gayogohó:non' while there. Janie tried to reassure her that, even though there were things she didn't know how to say in Gayogohó:non', she could speak what she knew very well, and Janie encouraged her by telling her she had an important gift to share with the students.

The second helper had been away from the reserve for a while, but still spoke the language quite fluently and had good knowledge of the names in Gayogohó:non' for things in nature, what people used to say in the language long ago.

The third helper had raised twelve children and was a working mother. She had a lot of traditional knowledge and spoke Onondaga as well as Cayuga. She was also very good with the children.

The program also seemed to be beneficial and enjoyable for the helpers, themselves. Although they sometimes had a hard time dealing with the children, which could be exhausting for them, the helpers were nevertheless determined to share their knowledge of Gayogohó:non' with the children. Janie felt that the daycare was also enjoyable for the women on a social level, in that it gave them the opportunity to feel proud that they were giving a gift of great value to the children and helping the Cayuga language survive and be passed on to the next generation. Hearing the children speak Gayogohó:non', and seeing the results of their help seemed to mean a tremendous amount to the helpers. One helper was the great-grandmother of a girl in the program. When she saw her begin to speak in Gayogohó:non', she was surprised and delighted.

There were trainees in the beginning, who were a great help in the daycare, too, but they left early on because they didn't feel their language skills were good enough. This was unfortunate as they would have been of tremendous assistance.

Challenge:

Because there was a lack of staff, it was sometimes very difficult for Janie to take a break, even to go to the washroom. Four of the children's parents came to help out from time to time, which made things easier, but having another full-time staff member to help run the daycare would be a huge improvement. While the helpers were a great asset to the daycare, it is too much to rely on these elders to take care of the children, because it is too strenuous for one of them to handle so many children on her own. Having trainees who stayed would have been a great help.

Daily Schedule

The children would arrive in the morning, have a snack, and then the group would sit down and go through the Ganq̄h̄nyq̄hk (Thanksgiving Address). The children would then have free time in the playroom, where there would be guided learning. After their free time, the children would come together as a group to work on something Janie had prepared, or they would do Total Physical Response (TPR)², a method of second-language teaching developed by Dr. James J. Asher that involves lots of movement, jumping around, and so on. They would use TPR to work on learning things like the pronouns, verbs, etc. What they worked on as a group depended on how the children were feeling, what the weather was like outside, and so on. If the weather was good, the group would often spend time outdoors, as well. Around 2pm, the children would have a nap, after which it would usually be time for them to be picked up by their guardians.

The children also did a lot of crafts and other hands-on projects at the daycare, which would usually be something related to whatever they had recently learned. On Mondays, there would be a focus on using the past tense (i.e., “what did you do on the weekend?”) and on Fridays, the children would be asked to use the future tense (i.e., “what will you do this weekend?”). Also, one technique that was used on a daily basis to elicit speech was to ask each child to select words to form his/her own sentence. The student would choose from a group of pronouns (I, we, etc.), a verb (go, see, etc.) and a place (home, school, etc.) and make their own sentence.

Additions and Changes to the Program

Because the program was a pilot project, the Program Leader (i.e., Janie Johnson) explored the use of different techniques in the classroom to see what worked well and what needed to be changed to better suit the learning of the children. Janie learned a lot about how the children learned, what worked and what didn’t, including which techniques helped the children learn the fastest. She therefore made adjustments as the year progressed, changing things like the daily schedule, the types of activities the children did, how much she would push the children to learn, and so on, accordingly. She also made notes on how she might change or reorganize activities for the following year’s program.

In addition to the regular program at the daycare, the class also participated in culturally-relevant activities that took place either at the daycare, or on short field trips. On two occasions, for example, Joanne Longboat from the Master-Apprentice Program brought a group of her students to the Daycare to sing with the children. These visits were recorded by Janie. The group sang 5 songs the first time they visited the daycare and 5 more on the second visit. The children loved this.

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Total_Physical_Response

Video Recordings

Video recordings were taken of both the helpers and some of the children at the daycare.

Due to a lack of staff, video-recording the helpers in the daycare presented a challenge. Janie would try to do recordings while the children were taking their nap, but they would often wake up, and even though they were in the next room, the sound of the children often affected the sound quality of the recordings. This was really unfortunate, as these elders are some of the last fluent speakers of Gayogohó:non' and recordings of them speaking the language are extremely valuable to the community as a whole.

There are also video-recordings of some of the children at the daycare. For the most part, the parents seemed comfortable with the videos of their children being used for learning purposes. In the case of parents who did not seem comfortable with this, however, Janie did not video-record their children, even if their parents had signed the consent forms.

COOL project staff assisted with some of the recording and will be editing all of the recordings that were done over the course of the daycare in the near future.

Funding

Funding Sources for Godiwennaen' Gayogohó:non' 2010-2011

The organizations listed below provided funding and/or in kind contributions that combined to cover the costs of running the Godiwennaen' Gayogohó:non' Language Nest's:

1. SSHRC CURA (COOL Project)

- funded Janie's salary
- provided occasional support from various CURA staff, including technical support with A/V materials, administrative support, and resource development, as well as in assisting the Project Leader in other capacities as required

2. Six Nations Language Commission (SNLC)

- provided funding

3. Stoneridge Daycare (Six Nations)

- provided a beautiful space for the daycare free of charge

Future Directions

Godiwennaen' Gayogohó:non' 2011-2012

At the time of writing this report (November 2011) only a small amount of funding has been secured from the Six Nations Language Commission to begin another program. Janie is currently contacting parents in order to get children back into the daycare again as soon as possible, possibly for half-days only this year.

Immersion for Graduates of the Daycare

The hope is that all of the children who graduated from the daycare will go on to immersion school. As is done in the preschools in Hawaii, Janie interviewed each parent before their child was accepted into the program and only children whose parents had an academic plan that included immersion, were considered for admission.

Although it would be wonderful to be in a position to accept every child into the daycare, with limited space and resources it was necessary to target those children who would continue to learn the language. Therefore, only children from families who showed a real commitment to language-learning, who indicated that there would be some attempt to have Gayogohó:non' spoken in the home, and who intended to send their children to immersion school after they graduated, were admitted into the daycare.

Conclusions

Overall Assessment of the Program - Outcomes, Outputs and Impacts

All seven children who regularly attended the daycare over a period of ten months learned to understand and speak some Gayogohó:non'. That these children have learned the basics of understanding and communicating in the language in such a short period of time is a great achievement, and a tremendous benefit to the language community as a whole. By increasing the number of young speakers of Gayogohó:non' it is our hope that the children will continue to learn the language and pass it on to others in the community, and eventually to their own children.

The children also benefited from being exposed to the cultural knowledge and traditions taught at the daycare, and there may have been indirect benefits for the children by spending time immersed in a linguistically-stimulating environment.

Finally, there is solid research showing that children (even language-impaired children) tend to benefit academically from learning more than one language, so it is our hope that this will be a benefit to the children who participated in the daycare as well.

Comprehension

The children were at different levels in terms of comprehension. Of the seven students, 4 were new to the daycare, and 3 had attended the pilot project that Janie had run in her house the previous year. At the beginning of the 2010-2011 program, the 4 children who were new to the daycare understood very little, other than a few words their parents might have said to them. However, having children like these attend the daycare is the key to helping the language program get stronger. By beginning to learn at such a young age, the language will stay with them a lot longer, and the early exposure to the language benefits them as they continue to learn as they grow older.

Speaking

The children started out by speaking two-word sentences, and Janie encouraged them to try to form three-word sentences as they learned a bit more. Some of the children only managed to form two-word sentences, and the students who were frequently absent did not progress in their speaking as much as those who came to the daycare every day. Throughout the year, Janie paid close attention to how the children were learning and progressing with their speaking. The program is still being developed and adapted to what works best, and Janie feels that there are some techniques for learning she could have started with the children earlier than she did in order to encourage them to speak more earlier on.

Unexpected Benefits from the Program

The children learned a lot of language without it being specifically taught to them. For example, they learned a lot through doing activities, or even during play time, by listening to the program leaders and helpers speak with each other, by speaking with Janie, and so on. They learned lots of things for which they were never given lessons, but which reflected things they had heard people talking about in the classroom. As a specific example of this, the children were never taught colours in Gayogohó:non, but learned them on their own. One of the students really seemed to be learning quickly. She was able to respond properly in Cayuga, even though she wasn't hearing any Cayuga at home, only in the Daycare. That was a surprise!

Additional Benefits for the Children

In addition to the language being taught in the daycare, the children were also taught a lot about clans and traditional knowledge. While Janie would have lessons in place to teach these, it always seemed that more was discussed than had been originally planned, so that the children always seemed to learn even more than we'd expected.

And of course the children also learned social lessons, like how to share and how to get along with the other children.

Janie describes her thoughts on the benefits of the *Godiwennaen' Gayogohó:non'* Language Nest in her own words: "Because they say language is part of your identity, I think it's going to help the children know who they are, and that it will help them think in the way that our people thought before. I know that we're providing this for them, like having a window open up for them in their lives. I like this. We don't really know what it was like a long time ago, but knowing the language shows us a bit of this. Watching the grandmothers share knowledge with the children, I think it's something of real value. I'm hoping this will make them stronger people when they are older. Even if I weren't running the daycare, I would have put my daughter in the program, because I care about language."

Identified Areas for Improvement

1. Need for Additional Staff

One of the biggest challenges in running the *Godiwennaen' Gayogohó:non'* Language Nest was the lack of staff, which meant it was extremely difficult for the Program Leader to take a break. In order for the daycare to run successfully, a second person working at the daycare is necessary, even more so if more children were to be accepted into the program. While the elders who worked as helpers were a tremendous asset to the program, a younger person is needed in the daycare as well.

Also, because Janie is not a technical person, it is important to have someone with technical skills who can offer support at the daycare from time to time. Various CURA Project staff came in to help out from time to time (including Michelle Thomas and Christine Jacobs), which was a big help to Janie in setting up recordings, etc. However, it would be a huge improvement to have someone else who could help out with all of the things that need to be done on a daily basis in addition to the actual teaching, material development, to give one example.

Thirdly, because this program was essentially a pilot project, and therefore involved a lot of trying things out to see what worked best for the children, having the staff necessary to do this research and discuss how to alter or change things to make the program better is extremely important. The support from CURA Project staff was excellent, but having full-time support would be invaluable to the program.

2. Better Attendance

Low attendance was a challenge in some cases. The children who did not attend the daycare regularly did not improve their language skills as much as the children who were there every day. Children who were absent for a particularly long interval were especially held back, as they would forget what they had previously learned, and therefore have to spend time learning it all over again rather than learning something new.

3. Better Financial Planning and Support

Financially, it would be better to know in advance how much funding the project will have in order to plan what can be done in the program ahead of time, to keep continuity, and so that time does not have to be spent worrying about finances and seeking additional funding.

It would have been good to have someone in charge of the finances, planning the budget, etc. This was lacking and was a difficulty for the program. Lack of funding, leading to a lack of continuity, also means you lose students, who are potential learners of the language.

One idea would be to approach the Band Council to fund the daycare in future. Language is an ongoing commitment and it is important that learning be continual, not sporadic.

A lack of funding means that, even if there is enough funding for a program to go ahead, some children will have to be turned away. This is a sad part for Janie, who would rather be in a position to accept all of the children into the program.

Acknowledgements

Most of the content of this report was taken from a recorded meeting between Program Leader, Carrie (Janie) Johnson, and COOL Principal Investigator, Carrie Dyck, on August 12, 2011 at Six Nations in Brantford, Ontario.

This report was prepared by Laurel Anne Hasler (COOL Project Coordinator at Memorial University of Newfoundland).