

Evaluating the Role of First Language in Native Education: Developmental Results in a Canadian Inuit Setting.

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Abstract: A study of language learning in Arctic Quebec examines relationships between early Inuktitut competence and later learning of English as a second language, general and local characteristics of native language competence, and early Inuktitut instruction and later competence. It also looks at the reliability of native educators' assessment of language competence and the identification of features of Inuktitut competence for use in improving native language instruction. Participants in both phases of the study numbered approximately 90 Inuit children. As students in grades 3 and 4 they provided Inuktitut writing samples that were compared with English samples written a year later. Each group of samples was organized by knowledgeable raters into "strong," "average," and "weak" categories. In general, it was found that: (1) the native language situation in the region is not homogeneous, with settlement groups varying in both proficiency and style of Inuktitut; (2) a nonlinear relationship exists between fluency and complexity in judgments of Inuktitut competence, and apparently in Inuktitut development; and (3) a strong correlation exists between early Inuktitut proficiency and later English proficiency, both individually and within settlements. However, facts and policy resulting from such research should be tempered with consideration for the community's linguistic and social values. (MSE)

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