

DENE LANGUAGES STUDY

presented
to

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

by

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following report is the outgrowth of discussions with many individuals, educators, civil servants, and officials within both government and native organizations. I wish to record here their deep dedication to the preservation, development, and recognition of Aboriginal Languages. I would especially like to thank the many individuals who took the time to share their ideas and experiences to help me better understand the Dene Languages situation from region to region. I hope this report adequately conveys their concerns and perspectives.

2. Introduction

The Government of the Northwest Territories has recently recognized the seriousness of the Dene language situation in the Mackenzie Valley, and the Executive Committee has initiated work towards developing a long-range aboriginal languages policy. These matters were discussed at some length in the various sessions of the Ninth Assembly.

It has also been recognized that there are urgent short-term problems faced by Dene who do not speak English in obtaining government services. This study was initiated in October, 1980, to address these concerns as follows:

- (a) To assess present levels of service and demands for both services and programs from the Government of the Northwest Territories.
- (b) To make recommendations to the Executive Committee on steps or actions which can be taken now within government to overcome problems experienced by non-English-speaking Dene in obtaining government services.

Along with these general objectives, the GNWT identified three major issues:

- (1) Government as a COMMUNICATOR
- (2) Government as an EMPLOYER
- (3) Government as a PROVIDER of services

Research for this study was carried out over a period of slightly under three months, late-October 1980 to mid-January, 1981 and involved extensive travel both within and outside the Northwest Territories.

It was realized from the outset that while the Dene Language concerns are very serious, the time-frame for this study was inadequate to do an in-depth assessment of all government services, or to visit each of the twenty-nine (29) Dene communities for meetings to discuss matters related to language and government.

As a result, I instead identified a number of government departments which supply essential services. In addition to these, there are a number of established groups both within and outside the Northwest Territories that represent or are doing work with the Dene. After having identified the various groups, organizations, and individuals I made contact and set up interviews to explain this study and to solicit their ideas and perspectives concerning the Dene Language situation.

Although this study was undertaken specifically to address the issues 1 to 3 listed above, it was often difficult or impossible to maintain discussions around these topics alone. It quickly became very clear that the issue of language involves all aspects of government and politics in the North. The Dene in particular are greatly concerned that language be discussed within a general framework of political development for native peoples. Educators and civil servants, on the other hand, tend to view native languages within the contexts more familiar to them, such as teacher training, interpreting services, and research efforts. Political leaders, native and non-native, recognize and discuss the role of aboriginal languages both within daily government affairs and in the long-range political evolution of the North. But it was perhaps in discussions with people at the community level that I became most aware of the importance that language plays in the daily lives of the Dene, and by the many ways that they are affected by the use of their language in making decisions regarding issues of importance to them.

As a result of this diversity in viewpoints, I have attempted in this report to present as balanced a set of recommendations as possible, recognizing that my own perspective will not be shared by all the people and organizations interviewed.

3. Languages and Degrees of Bilingualism

Members of the Dene Nation speak four distinct languages: Loucheux (Kutchin), Slavey, Dogrib and Chipewyan. The four languages are members of the Athapaskan language family. There are as well various dialects of the languages, varying from one community to another, and from region to region. Further, within a single community it is often possible to find speech differences between the young and old. It is important to realize, however, that these types of differences and dialect groupings are not unique to Dene or Native Canadian languages, but are characteristic of languages generally. The map on page 7 shows the various Dene language and communities of the Northwest Territories.

The extent of English language use and understanding varies widely from community to community. For example, there are communities such as Fort Franklin in which nearly everyone from the youngest to the oldest prefers to use the native language (Slavey) in everyday communication, and in which the use of English is quite limited. On the other hand, a community such as Fort McPherson presents a nearly opposite picture: English usage is widespread, and Loucheux is in many cases limited in use to communications between middle-aged and older members of the town. We do not have a full and accurate language assessment for each community, as neither the GNWT or the native political organizations have compiled this information. This lack of information will be discussed further below in section 5, Conclusions and Long-Range Considerations.

For the purpose of this study it is useful to identify the degree of Dene Language fluency among children entering the school system, usually ages 5 to 7. This is clearly only one of several criteria that might be used to judge native language competence, but it does yield a rough first-language vs. second-language classification. Put simply, if the children in the community speak a native language when they enter school, it can be assumed that the level of native language usage will be quite high throughout the community, that the level of English usage will be quite low, and that the need for interpreter and other language assistance services will be imperative.

Based on the information at my disposal, the following communities are ones in which at least some of the children entering school do speak a native language as their first language:

1. Colville Lake (Slavey: Hare)
2. Fort Good Hope (Slavey: Hare)
3. Fort Norman (Slavey)
4. Fort Franklin (Slavey)
5. Fort Wrigley (Slavey)
6. Jean Marie (Slavey)
7. Trout Lake (Slavey)
8. Nahanni Butte (Slavey)
9. Fort Liard (Slavey)
10. Kakisa (Slavey)
11. Rae Lakes (Dogrib)
12. Snare Lakes (Dogrib)
13. Lac La Martre (Dogrib)
14. Edzo (Dogrib)
15. Fort Rae (Dogrib)
16. Dettah (Dogrib)
17. Reliance (Chipewyan)
18. Snowdrift (Chipewyan)

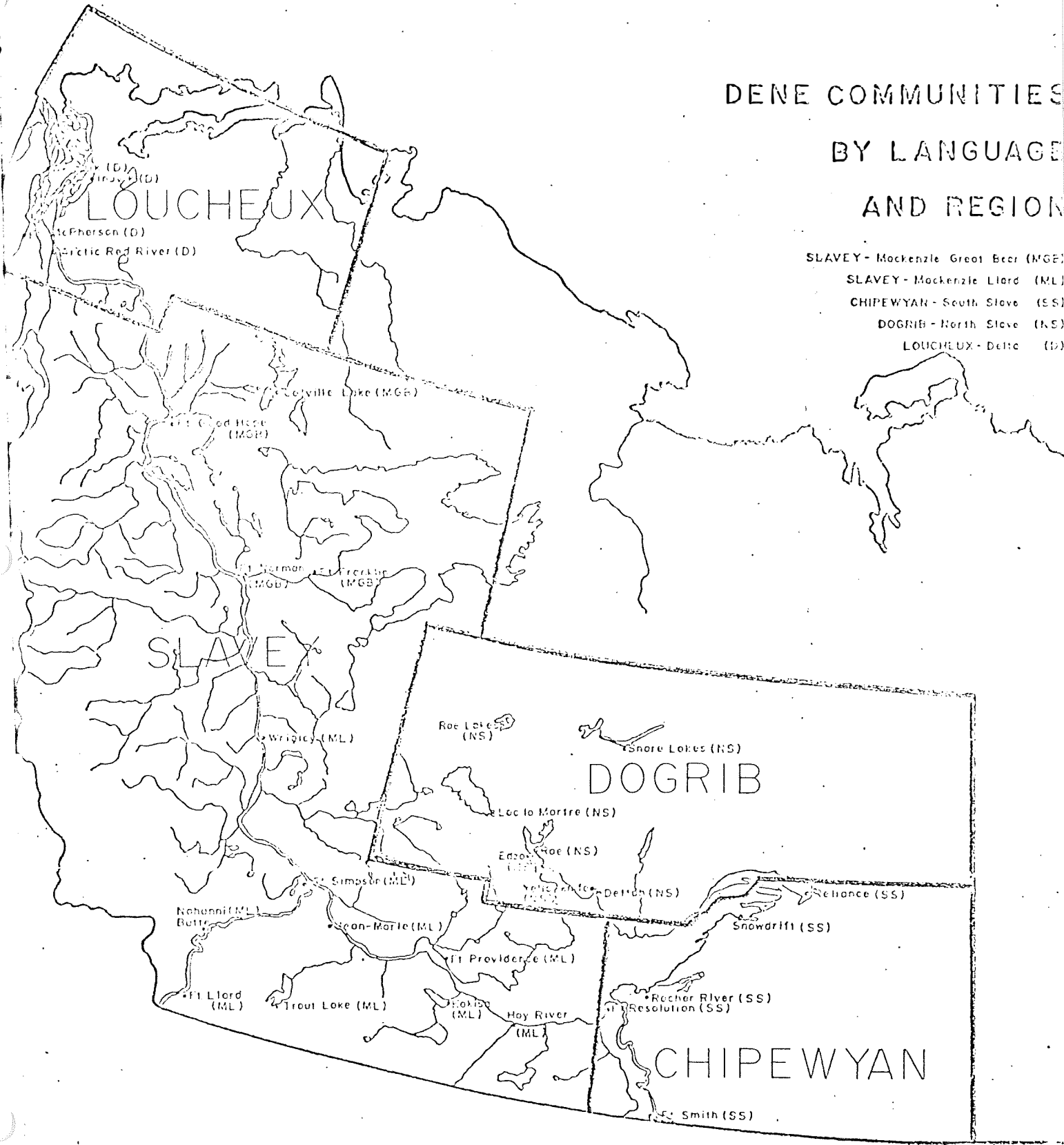
The eleven remaining communities (including what also might be termed "urban centres") exhibit a variety of bilingual native/English situations, characterized primarily by the fact that children do not enter school speaking a native language. They are:

1. Aklavik (Loucheux/Inuvialuit)
2. Inuvik (Loucheux/Slavey(Hare)/Inuvialuit)
3. Arctic Red River (Loucheux)
4. Fort McPherson (Loucheux)
5. Norman Wells (Slavey)
6. Fort Simpson (Slavey)
7. Fort Providence (Slavey)
8. Hay River (Slavey)
9. Yellowknife (Dogrib/Slavey/Chipewyan)
10. Fort Resolution (Chipewyan)
11. Fort Smith (Chipewyan)

The above classification is based solely on the language competence of children, and not on that of young adults, middle-aged, and older people. In fact, in all the above communities the majority of native adults are fluent in their own language. An over-all assessment of Dene language use and strength in the Northwest Territories, would reveal that the degree of native language maintenance is in general quite high in this particular region of Canada. By way of contrast, we should note that in neighboring Yukon Territory, no children enter school speaking a native language, and in certain Yukon communities native language use is restricted to the older population. It may come as a surprise to some to learn that the community of Rae-Edzo contains the largest concentration of Athapaskan language speakers (Dogrib) outside the Navajo reservations in the American Southwest. It is by looking elsewhere that we can realize what a unique situation we have in the Northwest Territories.

DENE COMMUNITIES BY LANGUAGE AND REGION

- SLAVEY - Mackenzie Great Bear (NGE)
- SLAVEY - Mackenzie Liard (ML)
- CHIPEWYAN - South Slope (SS)
- DOGRIB - North Slope (NS)
- LOUCHEUX - Delta (D)



4. Specific Findings and Recommendations

(a) Government as a COMMUNICATOR

(a-1) Public Liaison

"At the community level, what is the point of contact for people requiring information on government services?"

A complete answer to this question would probably require individual discussion for each community. Excepting the "urban centres" of Fort Smith, Yellowknife, Inuvik and Hay River, each of the communities has a Band Council in addition to a Settlement/Hamlet/Town Council charged with the responsibility of dealing with government services at the local level. As well as these two "major" community structures, there are often a number of community committees and associations which deal with various concerns of the local people, and whose work critically involves liaison with the various departments of government. By way of illustration, we can examine a list of such committees and associations within the Settlement of Fort McPherson.

1. Hunters and Trappers Association
2. Housing Association
3. Local Education Authority
4. Economic Development Committee
5. Health Committee
6. Social Services Appeals Committee
7. Community Club
8. Juvenile Committee
9. Co-op Board of Directors
10. Tent and Canvas Advisory Board
11. Peel River Alcohol Centre Board of Directors
12. Metis Local
13. Native Women's Organization
14. Radio Society
15. Women's Institute

While some communities may have fewer, and others more such committees and groups, one begins to realize that the "point of contact for people requiring information" is never a single group, committee, or structure.

(a-2) Public Information

"Are GNWT practices regarding release of information to the public effective in reaching non-English-speaking Dene?"

Responses to this question were "no" in an overwhelming majority of cases. At the community level, the people felt they were not getting the information required in specific cases. Even though pamphlets, brochures, information letters, etc., might reach a community, the fact that they are always written in English is often interpreted as meaning that the government is not serious about communicating with non-English-speakers. On the other hand, government workers agree that information is not being effectively transmitted to the Dene in the communities, but argue that they lack the resources to effectively interpret, translate, and disseminate information to the Dene at the community level. Time and again one hears the need expressed for effective translation services, yet it remains the case that only the CBC Radio Stations provide consistent and generally reliable information to the Dene communities regularly.

It was also pointed out that bilingual Dene within the civil service are often assumed to be able to translate information to the communities in the Dene Languages. Importantly, it seems on occasion to be assumed that these government workers will carry out their normal job requirements as well as provide translation services. What is overlooked in this assumption is the degree of skill, training, and expertise required to undertake interpreting and translating duties. Lacking this, bilingual Dene as a rule are unable to serve as effective interpreters.

(a-3) Interorganizational Communication

"What are the existing requirements and resources for interpretation/translation services between GNWT at all levels and Dene organizations (Band Councils, HTA's, Dene Nation)?"

As noted above, there are a considerable number of groups and organizations within the N.W.T. (at both the community and regional levels) which maintain liaison with various departments and which require constant exchanges of information between themselves and government. However, the resources for interpretation/translation services for these groups are almost non-existent within the Government of the Northwest Territories.

The Department of Information provides basic communications in printed/visual/film media to the entire Northwest Territories, yet lacks the resources necessary to provide adequate translation services in the various Dene languages. This department is also responsible for the Interpreter Corps. However, the Corps is comprised solely of Inuit who undertake limited translation services in the Inuktitut language. Although the Interpreter Corps was initially instituted to provide services in both Dene and Inuit languages, this has not evolved. The Inuit services have been provided in response to insistence from the Legislative Assembly that all information be translated into Inuktitut.

When the need for Dene language translation arises, at nearly all levels of government, the present GNWT practice is to hire a local resident to interpret and translate, or to call on a bilingual Dene within the civil service to do the job. Examples include court cases, health related cases, social welfare

situations, and occasional meetings between community representatives and officials of the GNWT. This is clearly an ad-hoc approach to a situation which has to be addressed more fully and generally.

4.(a) Recommendations

(R1) That it become the official policy of the GNWT that GNWT departments at every level employ the services of an interpreter/translator when transmitting information to the Dene communities. This includes both oral and written communications.

(R2) That Dene Language Training Centres be set up in each of the Dene Language Regions for training in interpretation/translation in the Dene Languages, as follows:

Delta Region (Loucheux)

Mackenzie Great Bear (Hare/Slavey)

North Slave (Dogrib)

South Slave (Chipewyan)

Mackenzie Liard (Slavey)

See the map on page 7 .

(R3) That the Department of Information submit to the Executive Committee a proposal for the establishment of Dene Language Training Centres within three months, or by May 1st, 1981.

(R4) That the Interpreters, once trained, be stationed at all levels - community, regional, and territorial - so that their effectiveness can be maximized.

(R5) That a policy be established specifying the duties of an Interpreter/Translator, and guidelines be drawn up outlining their use by the various GNWT departments.

4. (b) Government as an EMPLOYER

(b-1) Hiring Practices

"What opportunities for GNWT employment are available to non-English speaking or only partially bilingual Dene?"

Virtually no jobs within the GNWT are available to non-English speaking or only partially bilingual Dene. The few exceptions include those hired for custodial duties, casual labour, or various Cultural Inclusion Programs.

(b-2) Staff Training and Development

"What opportunities exist for community-based language training for GNWT employees, to develop:

- i) Dene language skills appropriate to the position and community served, including skill development and interpreter training.
- ii) English language skills necessary to permit mobility within government."

The only government employees who have received any type of training in the Dene languages are those who were part of the beginning of the Interpreter Corps. Dene workers within the non-defunct Linguistic Programs Division of the Department of Education have had some training, as have Dene students who have gone through the Teacher Education Program in Fort Smith. Also, from time to time various language workshops have been sponsored by the Department of Education and promoted by the Athapaskan Language Steering Committee.

Part (ii) of the question above clearly reveals that knowledge of English is deemed essential to advancement within the Territorial Civil Service. In fact, some have argued to this researcher that the GNWT is set up basically to serve only an English-speaking population and by being so, removes any potential incentive for knowing, retaining, or using any of the Dene Languages. Though this view may not be shared by all, it does remain the case that a disproportionate share of government funds are expended in the teaching and upgrading of English skills among all sectors of the population.

4.(b) Recommendations

(R-1) That the GNWT Employment and Recruiting Sector begin assessing all positions within the civil service to identify those positions that have the potential of eventually being filled by non-English-speaking, or partially bilingual Dene.

(R-2) That Dene and non-Dene within the civil service be given the opportunity to take training within the Dene Languages Training Centres once established.

4. (c) Government as a PROVIDER of Services

A. Department of Education

The Department of Education will be the major focus of this section of the report because the activities of this - Department have the most serious consequences, positive and negative, for the future of Dene Languages. Moreover, the attitudes, directions, past performance, and overall approach of this Department were discussed in nearly every interview conducted for this report. Whether or not one holds that "a bureaucracy can or cannot save a language", the point remains that this one particular department of government has the most direct and long-lasting effect on the Dene languages and their chances of survival. Moreover, in the perceptions of the public at large, this Department is often viewed as being responsible in some very special ways for carrying out work in a variety of modes to assist communities, Bands, and individuals in retaining, promoting, and preserving the Dene Languages. Rather than attempt to discuss language in relation to overall "philosophy of education", I will instead restrict attention to the following five language-related areas involving the GNWT Department of Education:

- A1 Linguistic Programs
- A2 Teacher Education Programs
- A3 Cultural Inclusion and Local Advisory Boards
- A4 Continuing Education
- A5 Administrative Support for Language Efforts

A-1 Linguistic Programs Division

- This Division no longer exists as a separate unit within the Department of Education. It is now merged with Programs and Evaluation under the direction of the Assistant Deputy Minister.
- Chief of the Division was transferred to another region, some other staff have left, Program is basically decimated.
- Basic mandate of the Division still regarded as sound by insiders and outsiders alike (development of language materials, training teachers, monitoring of programs in the communities and doing research.

A-1 Recommendations

- That a Dene Linguistic Program Division be set up as a separate entity with its own budget and mandate for work within the communities.
- This Division must be given the resources required to conduct work in the following areas:
 - a) Research (dictionary work, child language acquisition, and Dene bilingualism, etc.)
 - b) Curriculum Development (curriculum, materials, training related to both first, and second, language programs in the Western Arctic).
 - c) Program Monitoring
 - d) Other areas, as requested by communities and Band Councils

- That this Division co-ordinate its work with the Department of Information (Dene Language Training Centres) and Teacher Education Program to maximize the effectiveness of a comprehensive Dene Language effort.
- Once set up, the Dene Language Training Centres might be merged with the Linguistic Programs Division.

A-2 - Teacher Education Program

- T.E.P. was set up to train Northern Native teachers, able to do standard classroom work as well as teach their own language (as a first or second language).
- The Program celebrated its 10th anniversary last year. Of a total of 92 graduates over the years, 41 are presently teaching in the N.W.T. schools.
- The Program has the unique potential to provide high-quality Dene educators sensitive to the role of native languages in N.W.T. schools.
- The Program has yet to establish a comprehensive Dene Language Component within the regular 2-year certification course. Recent six-week "native language course" in Fort Smith was poorly planned - no communication and input from local level, resource people often unsure of responsibilities, and student confusion over aims and goals.
- T.E.P. staff keenly interested in developing a Dene Languages Component, but lack the resources to do so.

A-2 - Recommendations

- That the Department of Education prepare an outline for a Dene Languages Component of the Teacher Education Program. This outline should be submitted to local Band Councils and to the Athapaskan Steering Committee for input before adoption.
- That the Department of Education be prepared to consider changing the time-frame of the T.E.P. course from two years to three so that adequate Language Training can be carried out.

A-3 - Cultural Inclusion and Local Advisory Boards

- Cultural Inclusion Funds are allocated to the L.E.A. annually on a per-capita basis. A community the size of Fort McPherson receives approximately \$5,000 for the year.
- The L.E.A. decides how the funds will be used in the school.
- In some cases these funds have been used to support Dene Language Programs.
- Funding level is not adequate to support a Language Program for the full school year.
- The Cultural Inclusion "approach" has led to confusion and mixed feelings at the community level in some cases - that is, some may feel that "culture" means making snowshoes or sleds, others feel it means teaching language.
- L.E.A.'s in the larger centres are usually composed on non-Dene majorities, who make decisions on whether or not a Dene language will be taught.
- It is possible in these centres for the majority of students to be native, while the L.E.A. consists of majority non-native members.

A-3 - Recommendations

- That Cultural Inclusion funds be used for purposes other than teaching Dene languages.
- That Dene Language Programs be funded directly by the Department of Education, which must also provide for the training of the language teacher.

- That the Department of Education develop a strategy for the training and certification of Dene Language Teachers who are not otherwise enrolled as students in T.E.P.

- That the L.E.A. in each of the communities be able to make the decision as to whether their children are to have a Dene Language Program on reaching high school in one of the larger centres.

A4 Continuing Education

- Adult Education, or "upgrading", is conducted in many Dene communities. Instruction takes place only in the English language.
- Great emphasis is placed on the acquisition of English reading, writing, and speaking skills.
- No effort is made to include training in the native language.

A4 Recommendations

- That the Dene Linguistic Programs Division, once established, take on the responsibility of developing basic literacy materials for adults in each of the Dene languages.

A5 Administrative Support for Language Efforts.

- Dene Language Programs are "officially" recognized within the Department of Education, but in reality are often regarded by administrators as marginal parts of the total school curriculum.
- It has been shown elsewhere that the attitudes and approaches of principals and certificated teachers towards such programs have a definite effect on their success or failure. A principal can literally "make or break" a local language program.
- In past, Regional Superintendents could ignore the work of and resources available from the Linguistic Programs Division.

A5 Recommendations.

- That all staff within the Department of Education -- teachers, principals, superintendents -- come to recognize that Dene Language Programs are a valid, important component of the N.W.T. education system. All staff must be encouraged to give their full, active support to the Language Programs.
- New staff hired to teach in NWT schools should be made fully aware at the time of their recruitment that Dene Language Programs are an integral part of the NWT curriculum. New staff in particular should be encouraged to learn the language of the communities they work in, as this will increase their own effectiveness as teachers.

4(c) B. Department of Health and Social Services

- Health Service in the NWT are presently delivered by two agencies, the GNWT and the Department of Health and Welfare Canada (Federal Government).
- The hospitals in Yellowknife, Hay River, and Fort Smith are the only ones under the jurisdiction of the GNWT. All other hospitals and nursing stations are under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government.
- There are nursing stations in most of the Dene communities.
- The Dene are concerned about the lack of information on services which may or not be provided, i.e., dental work, glasses, and drugs.
- Translation service within the communities is done on an ad-hoc basis. A local casual may be hired for this purpose, or bilingual Dene civil servants may be called upon in specific cases.
- The vast amount of printed information on health-related matter in English is simply not available in the Dene languages. The whole area of preventive health care may not be dealt with adequately because of the language barrier.

4(c) B. Recommendations

- R1 That it becomes the policy of the GNWT that all health-serving agencies have interpreter/translating services available in the various Dene Languages.
- R2 That the GNWT and Health and Welfare Canada outline their services and responsibilities in providing health services to the Dene, and this be transmitted to the Dene communities both orally and in written form in the various Dene languages.

4(c) C. Social Services

- The Department of Social Services is responsible for providing services in the following areas:
 - Social welfare cases
 - Adoptions/Foster parenthood cases
 - Juvenile delinquent cases
 - Drug and alcohol treatment and rehabilitation
 - Correction centres

- The Department has also been training social workers for the Dene communities. A large majority of these workers or trainees are Dene.

- The greatest concern voiced by Dene and government workers alike is the lack of information available to the Dene at the community level.

4(c) C. Recommendations

- B1 That the services of interpreters/translators be made available in the Dene communities as well as the larger "urban centres" so that information can be quickly and accurately transmitted, as required.

- B2 That in the case of a bilingual Dene Social Worker, that adequate training be given in translating and interpreting. This can evolve with the establishment of Dene Language Training Centres.

4(c) D. Legal Services

- The GNWT Department of Justice is responsible for the system of JP, Magistrate, and Supreme Courts.
- A majority of the court cases in the Mackenzie Valley involve the Dene.
- There are only ad-hoc interpreting services available within the Department of Justice. Non-English or partially bilingual Dene are involved as witnesses or principals in court cases.
- In some cases interpreters have been hired "on the spot" to serve in court.

4(c) D. Recommendations

- R1 That the Department of Justice employ the services of interpreters/translators of Dene languages on a systematic basis.
- R2 Laws, ordinances, statutes should eventually be translated into each of the Dene languages. Part of this work could be undertaken in the various regional Dene Language Training Centres.

4(c) E. Local Government

- This Department is responsible for several interrelated areas, including assistance to the Settlement and Hamlet Councils, and the training of Secretary-Managers.
- Dene sometimes perceive Local Government structures to be conflict with Dene Band Councils.
- Work has begun on drawing up frameworks for the establishment of a new Incorporated Community Ordinance, and a new Hamlets Ordinance.
- These ordinances are being developed for the Dene, yet there is no interpretation or translation of these important documents into the various Dene Languages.

4(c) F. Recommendations

- R1 That the GNWT Department of Local Government have all ordinances and policies translated into the various Dene Languages.
- R2 That interpreters/translators be employed to explain the content of newly developed ordinances in the Dene languages. This can be done by way of community visits for joint meetings with Band and Hamlet/Settlement Councils.

5. Conclusions and Long-Range Considerations

- A. A fundamental commitment must be made by the GNWT to assist the Dene in the recognition, development, and preservation of their languages.
- B. This commitment must be made over the long run. This report has tried to point out that there are really no effective short-term solutions to the basic problems faced by non-English speaking Dene in the NWT.

In particular, the Executive Committee must be prepared to make substantial financial commitments spanning a 5 to 10 year period if there are to be permanent results in the development of the Dene languages. It will not do to budget from fiscal year to fiscal year. Experience elsewhere, especially in Alaska, has shown that programs quickly begin to fail once budgetary cutbacks begin to occur in years of financial restraint, or when languages assume a "non-priority status". For the NWT it is far preferable to guarantee a specific level of funding over several years, rather than to "start big" and "finish small".

- C. The commitment by the GNWT must be specific. Goals may be set in a number of areas, but these must be clearly spelled out and understood by all before they are pursued. This Report has made several basic recommendations and urges their adoption by the Executive Committee. The most important of these are:

- (1) That Dene Interpreters be employed at all levels of the various GNWT Departments. To this end, Dene Language Training Centres must be established in the Mackenzie Valley region to carry out the necessary research and staff training.
- (2) That an adequately staffed and funded Dene Linguistic Programs Division be set up to carry out the following functions:
 - a) Development and testing of language curriculum;
 - b) linguistic research (dictionaries, grammars, studies of bilingualism and child language acquisition);
 - c) monitoring of language programs in the schools;
 - d) liaison with the Teacher Education Program for the native language component of the students' training;

Conclusions

This particular recommendation urges the establishment of a separate division similar in function to the former Linguistic Programs Division, with the important exception that it would deal solely with Dene languages and be funded on a larger and more permanent basis.

The exact bureaucratic "placing" of this Division should be left open to discussion, but it is important to note that its effectiveness will depend on large part on its independence. Staff for the Division must consist of both professionally trained teachers and researchers as well as Dene speakers and language trainees.

(3) The native language component of the Teacher Education Program must be expanded and upgraded, even if this results in a lengthening of the time-frame required for basic certification.

- D. The GNWT must make a commitment to consult fully with and involve the Dene in all aspects of language development which is undertaken by or funded by the GNWT. In particular the Dene Nation and individual Band Councils must be consulted in the recruitment and training of translators, native language trainees, and native language teachers.
- E. Non-Dene will benefit from the development of Dene languages. For example, the preparation of teaching materials in the various Dene languages, and the training of Dene language teachers, will provide opportunities that presently do not exist for outsiders to learn the languages. Several years ago the Eskimo Language School at Rankin Inlet served as a centre for the learning of Inuktitut by government workers and others. Within a few years it is reasonable to expect that similar training can be conducted in one or more of the Dene languages of the Western Arctic.

F. By way of conclusion, I wish to emphasize once again the unique opportunities afforded by the Dene Language situation in the Northwest Territories. Some of the languages are flourishing and present unparalleled opportunities for growth and development. However, GNWT must realize that it is an active agent of social change and has no neutral role to play in the future of the Dene languages. On the one hand, it can help to provide the support and resources for the Dene to develop their languages for the benefit of their children and all the residents of the NWT, or it can "passively" allow the present situation to continue with the eventual absorption of most Dene into an English-speaking society.

The North now faces a number of major issues and decisions, such as the political evolution of the NWT, the settlement of Dene and Inuit land claims, and energy - and resource-related development projects. It is my opinion that the development of Dene languages should also be added to this list of major issues -- for the simple reason that involves the development of the human potential of our native people.