

**First Nations English Dialects: Implications for Supporting First Nations
Children's Development**

TEAM

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New title including chapter by Ball, Bernhardt and Deby

The international guide to speech acquisition

Cross-cultural interaction and children's speech acquisition are highlighted in a chapter by Jessica Ball, Barbara Bernhardt and Jeff Deby in an edited collection by Sharynne McLeod, *The international guide to speech acquisition*.

[Click here to order a copy of the book.](#)

Project Background

Research involving Indigenous peoples outside of Canada emphasizes the influences of Indigenous language learning and cultural aspects of language socialization on English conversational style and dialect. Dialect learning and features of language mediated interaction using varieties of the dominant language have implications for education, developmental assessment, early intervention, cultural preservation and justice issues. There is an emerging awareness that the heritage languages, language socialization, and cultures of Aboriginal peoples living in Canada influence the ways in which Aboriginal

children and families use English, as well as their experiences within dominant culture institutions such as schools.

As a group, Aboriginal children and youth have not been as successful as they could be in the school system. This may be because of a lack of appreciation by preschool and school teachers for conversational styles, preferences, and expectations surrounding the use of English by Aboriginal children and youth. The investigation undertaken by Jessica Ball and Barbara Bernhardt, along with an investigative team and a large number of practitioners and linguistics specialists in Canada, has taken a first step to explore this topic.

Project Goal

This exploratory project has successfully stimulated broader interest within the fields of linguistics and education in the nature of Aboriginal English dialects, and has begun to raise awareness of the need to appreciate the language skills that Aboriginal children may possess although they may be using a variant of English not familiar to members of the dominant culture. The project has contributed a comprehensive review of the extant literature on Aboriginal English dialects, and has formulated some general principles and specific strategies for future researchers to engage this topic through language sampling and analysis.

Project Outcomes

- 1. Literature review and synthesis.** Through a review of published and anecdotal observations of variations in English language learning and use among Aboriginal peoples in Canada, the USA, Australia and New Zealand, the project has produced a synthesis of what is known, what is thought, and where future investigators might begin a program of research about Aboriginal English dialects in Canada.
- 2. Public awareness.** The project is promoting awareness of ‘non-standard’ English as an embodiment of contemporary First Nations culture rather than as a developmental deficit.
- 3. Assessment practices.** In consultation with First Nations speech-language specialists and community members, as well as with non-Aboriginal linguists, the project has formulated some general guidelines for assessment practices that can distinguish between ‘language difference’ and ‘language delay or impairment’ in order to increase appropriate responses from teachers and speech-language service practitioners.
- 4. Early intervention practices.** Implications of dialect language learning and forms of interaction for understanding Aboriginal children’s communication and development have been explored in consultation with speech-language pathologists and early intervention specialists.
- 5. Language specialists’ training.** Guidelines have been developed to supplement curriculum for pre-service and in-service training for speech-language pathologists and educators to increase their awareness of cultural differences in

language socialization patterns, goals, and expectations, and their appreciation of legitimate 'non-standard' forms of English.

6. English as a Second Dialect funding. The project has contributed suggestions about what funding for 'English as a Second Dialect' in schools could most usefully do to protect First Nations children's home language while helping children succeed in making the transition to dominant English institutions and communities such as those represented.

Presentations and publications on this project

Overview of the First Nations English dialects project: Description, findings, implications, remaining questions. [PDF] (855 KB)

Bernhardt, B., & Ball, J. (2007). *First Nations English dialects: Implications for supporting language development - Focus on Manitoba*. Presentation to the Manitoba Ministry of Education, Winnipeg. [PDF] (937 KB)

Bernhardt, B., Ball, J., & Deby, J. (2007). Cross-cultural interaction and children's speech acquisition. In S. McLeod (Ed.). *The international guide to speech acquisition*. Delmar Thomson Learning.

>> [Click here to order a copy of the book.](#)

Ball, J., Bernhardt, B., & Deby, J. (2006). First Nations English dialects in young children: Forum proceedings. University of Victoria, School of Child and Youth Care, & University of British Columbia, School of Audiology and Speech Sciences. [PDF] (337 KB)

Ball, J. & Bernhardt, B. (2005). Implications of First Nations English dialects for supporting children's language development. Paper presented at the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education, Hamilton, Aotearoa New Zealand, November 27-December 1. [PDF] (338 KB)

Bernhardt, B.M., & Ball, J. (2006). First Nations English dialects in Canada: Implications for Speech-Language Pathologists' Practice. Workshop presented at the B.C. Association of Speech/Language Pathologists and Audiologists: Celebrating Research and Practice on the Westcoast. Victoria, October 14. [PDF] (2.9 MB)

Ball, J., Bernhardt, B., & Deby, J. (2005). First Nations English dialects: Implications for supporting children's language development. Poster and presentation at the Third Annual Research Meeting of the Human Early Learning Partnerships program, Vancouver, B.C., May 20.

Ball, J. & Bernhardt, B. (2004). Exploring Aboriginal English dialect learning in early childhood. Workshop presented at the Conference of the British Columbia Aboriginal Child Care Society, Richmond, BC, November 12.

Funding

Funding for this project was provided by the B. C. Ministry of Children and Family Development through the Human Early Learning Partnership: www.earlylearning.ubc.ca

Student involvement

This project involved extensive interdisciplinary networking, including one Aboriginal undergraduate in Social Work (UVic), one Aboriginal graduate student in Art History (UVic), one Aboriginal graduate student in Education (UVic), four current graduate students and one recent graduate in Audiology and Speech Sciences (UBC), and one recent doctoral graduate in Linguistics (UBC).

Contact Us

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