



Language & Education Forum 2023
Chiefs of Ontario

NIWEWINAN EZHI-DEBNIGAADEGIN
HOW LANGUAGES ARE ACQUIRED

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February, 2023

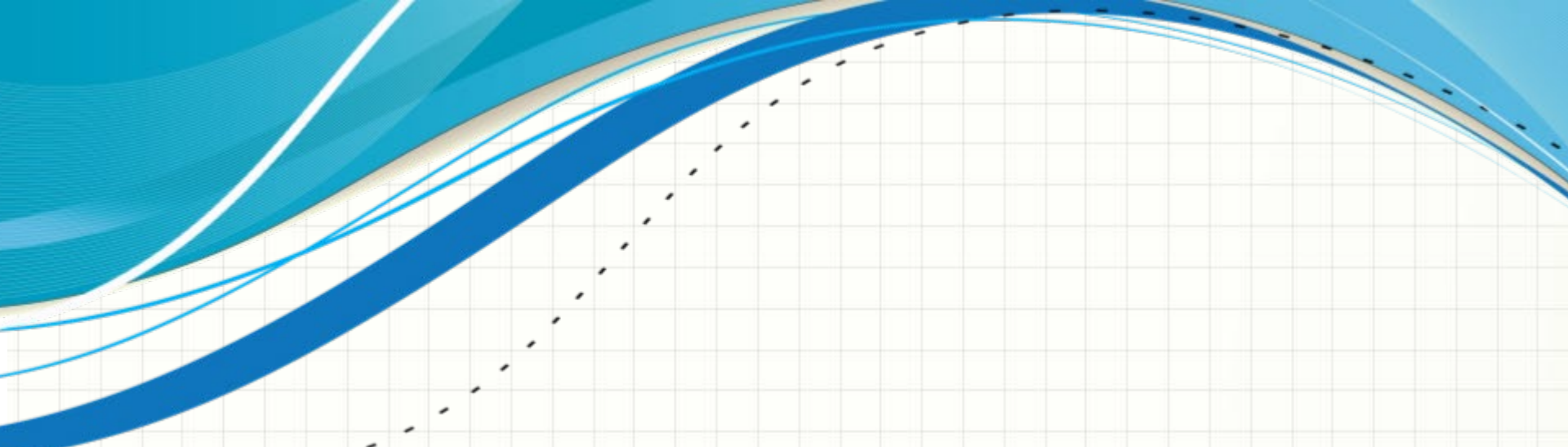


Niwewinan Ezhi-debnigaadegin How Languages are Acquired

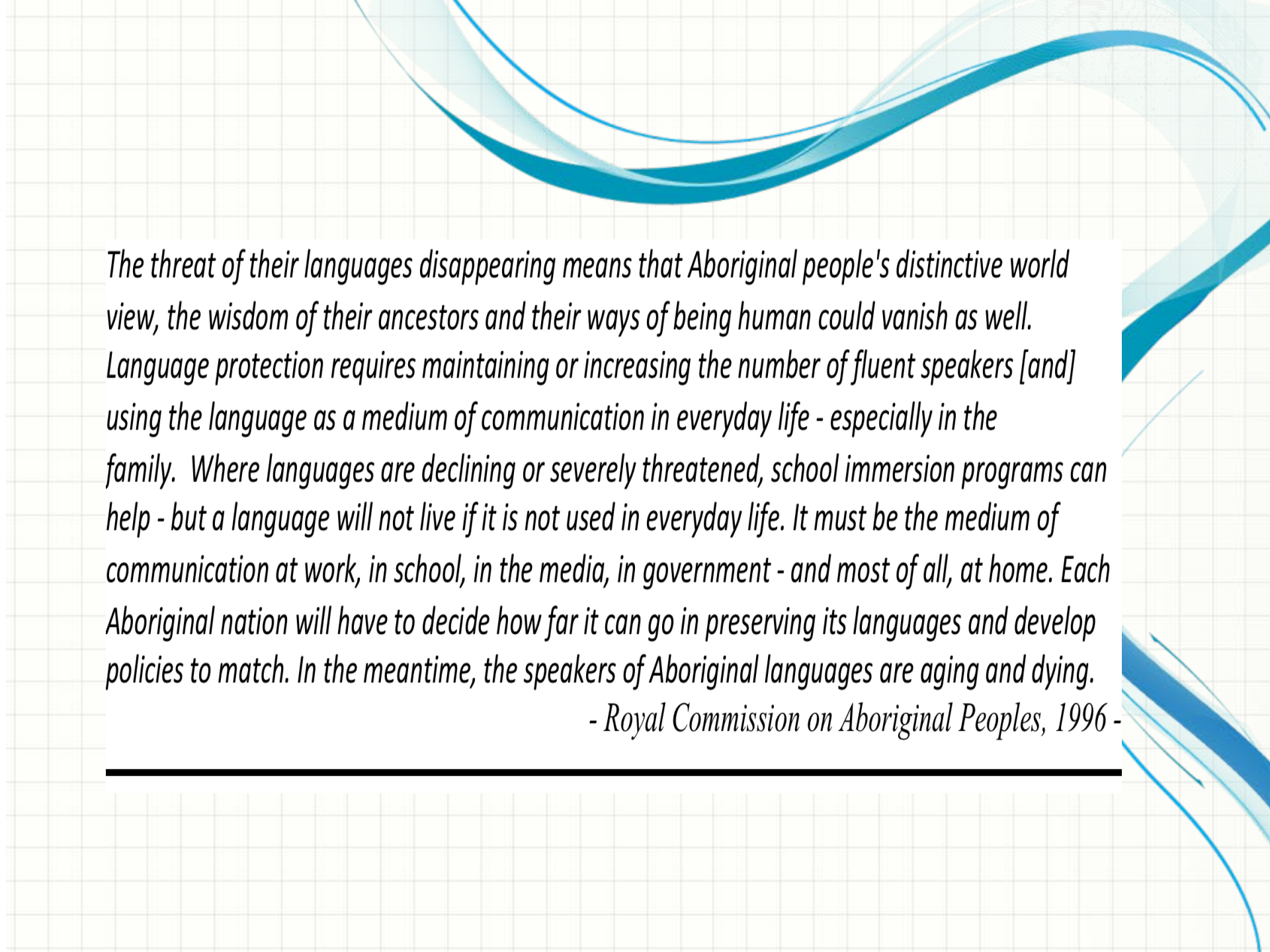
Description

This presentation is designed for individuals who are interested to know how languages are acquired. By the end of the presentation, participants will:

- understand the very basics of language acquisition
- understand the theoretical foundations of second language acquisition;
- gain an understanding of the differences between learning a language and acquiring a language



MANY RESEARCHERS SEE RELATIONSHIPS AMONG LANGUAGE, CULTURE AND COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT (GARCIA, 2005). THEY BELIEVE THAT AS CHILDREN LEARN A LANGUAGE, THEY ALSO COME TO UNDERSTAND THEIR SOCIAL SITUATION AND IMPROVE THEIR THINKING SKILLS. FROM THEIR PERSPECTIVE, FIRST LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IS A FOUNDATION FOR FURTHER KNOWLEDGE. SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS BRING WITH THEM NOT JUST KNOWLEDGE OF THEIR HOME LANGUAGE, BUT ALSO IDEAS ABOUT THEIR WORLD THAT ARE SHAPED BY THEIR CULTURAL EXPERIENCE. TO TEACH THEM MOST EFFECTIVELY, THEREFORE, IT IS IMPORTANT TO RESPECT WHAT THEY ALREADY KNOW, AND INSTEAD OF TRYING TO REPLACE IT, BUILD UPON IT.



The threat of their languages disappearing means that Aboriginal people's distinctive world view, the wisdom of their ancestors and their ways of being human could vanish as well. Language protection requires maintaining or increasing the number of fluent speakers [and] using the language as a medium of communication in everyday life - especially in the family. Where languages are declining or severely threatened, school immersion programs can help - but a language will not live if it is not used in everyday life. It must be the medium of communication at work, in school, in the media, in government - and most of all, at home. Each Aboriginal nation will have to decide how far it can go in preserving its languages and develop policies to match. In the meantime, the speakers of Aboriginal languages are aging and dying.

- Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996 -



What is the State of Aboriginal Languages in Canada

According to Statistics Canada:

1. 2001 statistics showed that close to half of the 50 - 70 First Nation Languages in Canada are endangered or near extinction
2. 10 languages have become extinct over the last 100 years & at least 12 are on the brink of extinction
3. Cree, Ojibway and Inuktitut were the only languages that were considered safe.
4. **HOWEVER**, recent statistics showed a significant decline in Ojibwe and Cree; these are now becoming threatened.

What is the status of the language in our Community? and in our homes?

Take a few minutes, do a quick scan of the houses & estimate the number of speakers in your community? What is their average age? Where is the language spoken? What is the rate of language loss in our community? What information about our history, our values, about who we are will be lost if our language is lost?



The Very Basics of Language Acquisition

What is Language Acquisition

How did you acquire your first
language?



How Do We Acquire a Second Language?

- Noam Chomsky
- Stephen Krashen
- Dell Hymes

Some Differences Between “Acquiring a Language” and “Learning a Language”

ACQUIRING A LANGUAGE	LEARNING A LANGUAGE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is Subconscious 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is Conscious - Cognitive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You don't realize that you are acquiring the language. You do not think about it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You realize when you learn something. You are using your thinking processes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It happens relatively SLOW Acquisition is a slow process, it happens over a long period of time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It happens relatively FAST. Learning happens over a fast period of time.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is Relatively Permanent. Once you have acquired a language, you keep the majority of the knowledge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is Forgotten Very Quickly. Most of the information learned is forgotten quite quickly.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spontaneously Comes Out. What you have acquired comes out spontaneously. You do not need to think about it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You need time to think of your responses. You THINK about what you are going to say

Some Critical Moments in Language Acquisition

- After hearing the language for a certain amount of hours, here are some milestones:
- 2,000 Hours - Understand 90% of language
- 6,000 Hours - Functional Bilingual
- 12,000 Hours - Fluent Speaker

Twelve Thousand Hours

LANGUAGE NEST HOURS

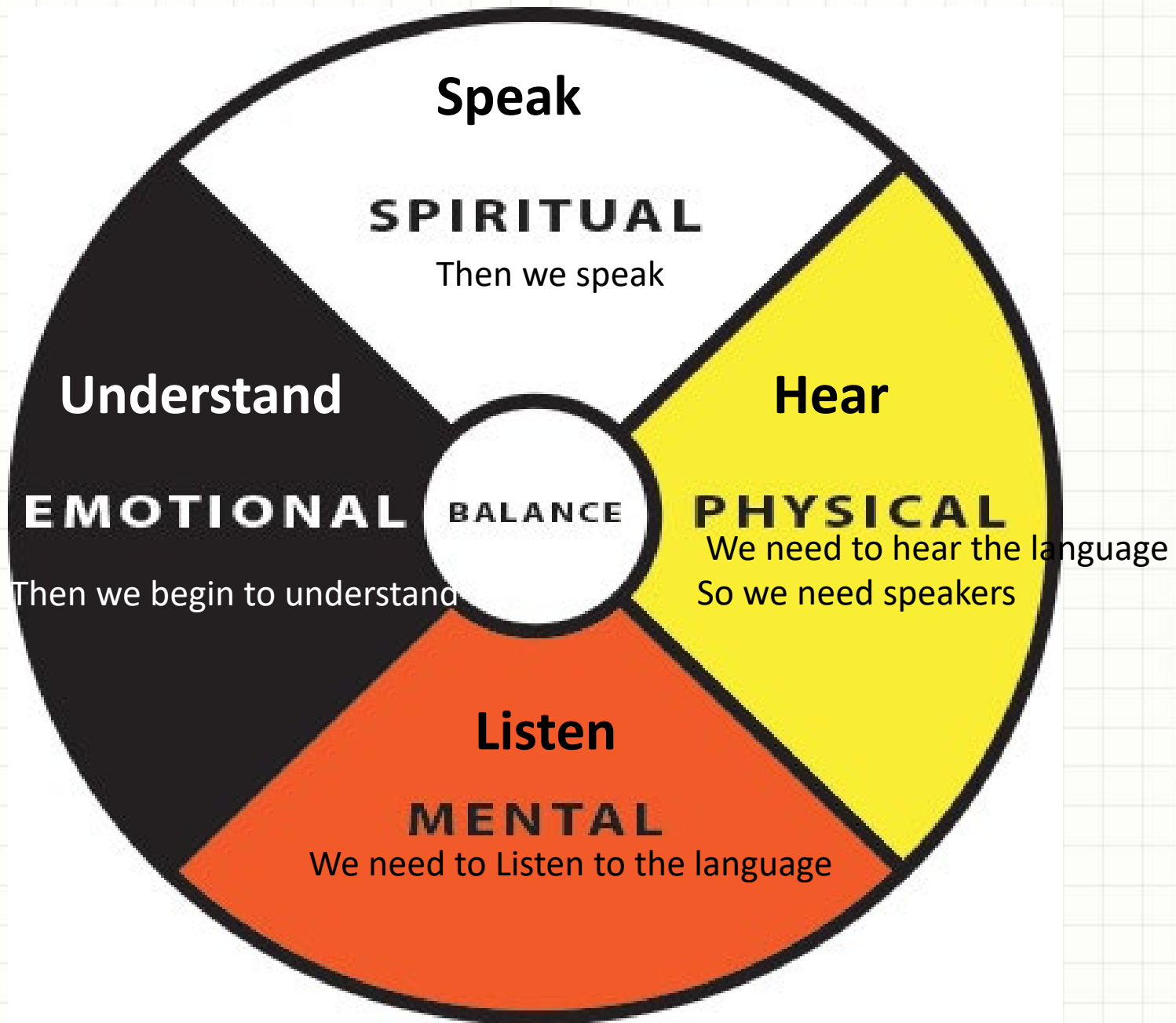
260 Number of pre-school days per year
6.00 Hours of pre-school class per day

EARLY TOTAL IMMERSION HOURS

194 Number of elementary school days per year
6.00 Hours of elementary school class per day

	1 year old	2 years old	3 years old	4 years old	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
Percentage of the day in Nishnaabemwin >>	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	92.9%	85.7%	78.6%	71.4%	64.3%	57.1%	50.0%
Daily number of hours in Nishnaabemwin >>	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	5.57	5.14	4.71	4.29	3.86	3.43	3.00
Yearly number of hours in Nishnaabemwin >>	1,560	1,560	1,560	1,560	1,164	1,081	998	915	831	748	665	582
Cumulative Nishnaabemwin hours >>	1,560	3,120	4,680	6,240	7,404	8,485	9,483	10,397	11,229	11,977	12,642	13,224

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Summary

- Define our challenges
 - Technological as well as personal
- Set realistic expectation
 - Mastery is not achieved overnight
- Keep our eye on the goal – long-term and short-term
 - Create speakers through immersion
 - Mentorship programs



QUESTIONS