Dene Kedə Survey Report

Déline Self-Government Career Week
Survey conducted by Dene Knowledge Project
October 31, 2007

Background

The Dene Knowledge Project is engaged in research aimed to understand how Dene language can be kept strong in the community. We need to have a better idea of how many students are speaking Dene language in high school, and what students think might be good ways to promote the language. We conducted a preliminary survey with Grade 10-12 students who participated in the Dene Knowledge Project activities during Career Week, 10 am-noon on October 31.

Participants

Twenty students from Grades 10-12 participated in the survey. Of these, seven were young men, and thirteen were young women. There were about the same number of students participating from each grade.

Survey Participants
Sample Size = 20

Grade 12 35% — Grade 10 30% — Grade 11 35%
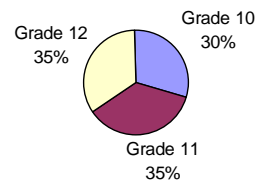
Survey Method

The students were divided in small groups of four to five, and each student was asked to fill out a survey form. The facilitator assisted by discussing the questions with each group. The five survey questions are appended to this report. Question 5 was often considered to be the same as Question 4, so was merged with Question 4 in the analysis.

Survey Results

1. Language Spoken

Question: Do you speak Dene language? Check yes or no.

This question was very broad, and didn't ask whether students understand but do not speak the language. Nor did we ask about level of fluency or literacy. Sixty-five percent of students said that they speak Dene language, and only 35% said they speak English only. This is much higher than expected. All of the Grade 12 students said they speak Dene language - a somewhat smaller majority speak Dene in the lower grades.

Language Spoken
Sample Size = 20

English Only 35% — Dene Language 65%
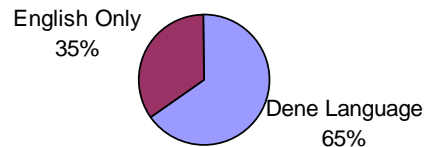
2. Where Dene Language is Spoken

Question: Check the various places where you usually speak Dene language: At school; at home; at work; hanging out with friends.
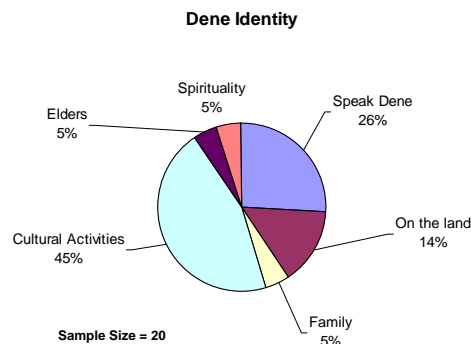
More than half the students said that they speak Dene language at home. One person said that they speak at work, but it is likely that few of the students have jobs. It is interesting to note that some high school students do speak Dene language at school (if only occasionally) despite the fact that there is no Dene language programming at school for these students. Students were equally likely to say they speak Dene language with their friends and at school.

Where Dene Language is Spoken
Sample size = 20
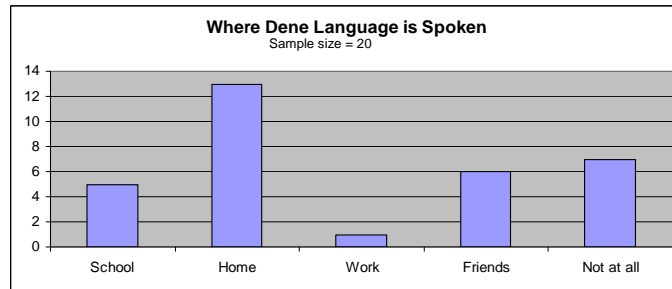
3. Dene Identity

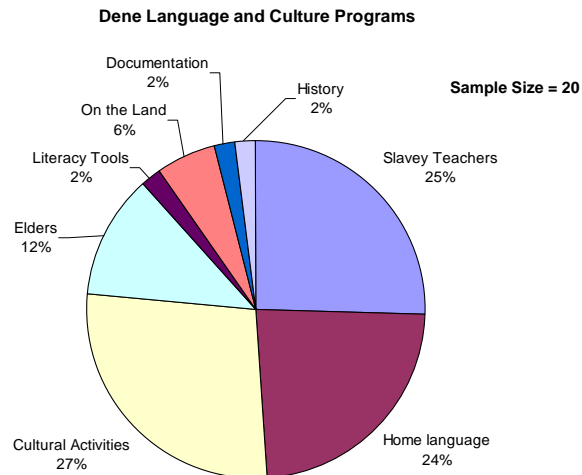*Question: What are three things that make up who you are as a Dene person?*

Almost without exception the students had to struggle to think of answers to this question. This is evidence that the students have not been given opportunities to discuss their Dene identity at home or in school. The students tended to link their identity with cultural activities. Cultural activities most often mentioned were drum dances and hand games. Dene language and on-the-land activities were also seen to be important. It is surprising that more students didn't mention on-the-land activities, since this is a component of the high school curriculum.

Dene Identity

Spirituality 5%
Elders 5%
Speak Dene 26%
Cultural Activities 45%
On the land 14%
Family 5%
Sample Size = 20

4. Dene Language and Culture Programs

Question: What are three things that you think would help to keep Dene language and Dene culture alive? What would you like to see happen now?

Every student responded that teaching Dene language in the school would help to keep the language and culture alive. Family and community support for language and culture were seen to be equally as important. Elders were noted by some to be important supports for language and culture preservation.

Dene Language and Culture Programs

Documentation 2%
History 2%
On the Land 6%
Literacy Tools 2%
Elders 12%
Slavey Teachers 25%
Cultural Activities 27%
Home language 24%

Sample Size = 20

Conclusion

We need to do more work with the high school students to get a better understanding of their capacity in Dene language, and their knowledge of Dene culture. However, results of this preliminary survey indicate that this is a gap in their education and training. Students are not confident enough in their language, culture and identity to take on the role of our future leaders as envisioned in the framework for Déline Self-Government. Students are aware of this, and have their own ideas about how their needs can be addressed.