Building the Nests: Indigenous Language Revitalization in Canada

Through Early Childhood Immersion Programs

by

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous languages in Canada are critically at risk of extinction. Many Indigenous communities are working hard to save their languages through various methods. One method proven to be largely successful in other parts of the world is early childhood heritage language immersion programming, which is commonly known as a 'language nest' program. However, this method is sparsely employed in B.C. and Canada as a method of language retention and revitalization.

Using qualitative research methodologies involving observations and interviews this study included key community members in two Indigenous communities which have developed 'language nest' programs. The goal of the observations and interviews was to identity factors contributing to successes and challenges in initiating and maintaining 'language nest' programs. The findings of the study indicate that the 'language nest' model is adaptable to the First Nations context in Canada. The findings combined with a literature review yielded practical recommendations for other communities and possibilities for future action.

Examiners:

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION

Nimosompanan ikwa nohkampanan, we know you did your best.

Sakitinawaw mistahay. Nikaskomtinan.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Great Spirit and those who have walked before me, to my ancestral spirit guides who have nudged, held and walked with me on this journey, thank you.

I wish to acknowledge the people of Adam's Lake and Lil'wat Nation who graciously accepted and welcomed me into their communities.

To my committee members – Jessica Ball, Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw and Peter Cole, who are each exceptional academics in their own rite with purpose and soul. Thank you for your inspiration.

Lastly, for the unwavering support of friends and family who often wondered if I would ever finish. Thanks for your shoulder to cry on and words of encouragement when they were so desperately needed.

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Personal Connection to the Topic

"My husband and I never wanted to teach our children the language because we did not want them to be punished." Margaret Joe Dixon, Sechelt Nation, quoted in Scott (2001).

My maternal grandparents grew up speaking Cree. They left our ancestral homelands when my grandfather returned from WWII and moved to a small mining town in Northern Ontario where they tried to pass as a good Christian "white" family. My grandmother was the main architect of this plan; it seemed that her dream was to have the "white picket fence" and the "happily ever after." My grandfather gave in, but always longed for the woodlands of home and the traditional lifestyle they had left behind. He became a miner and slowly drank himself to death over a period of 20 years.

My grandparents had four children and did not speak to any of them in our traditional language. My mother recalls only ever hearing Cree when her parents were drinking, or during one of the infrequent visits "home" to Northern Manitoba. My mother moved away as soon as she was able and began a life and a family of her own in Northern Saskatchewan. This was where I grew up, surrounded by Cree people and Cree culture, but I did not fit in. I could not "pass" for Indian due to my lighter skin and blue eyes.

My mother, of course, did not speak our language and therefore could not pass it down to us. She was, however, proud of our heritage and never let us forget where we came from. This was her way of rebelling against my grandmother's attempt to "whitewash" our family. In my late teens and early twenties, I was furious with my grandmother for the decisions she made on behalf of our family. I thought, "How dare

you decide for us? What gave you the right to take it all away? Do you know how hard I'll have to fight to gain back the language and learn about our culture? To trudge away at rebuilding a sense of identity that isn't filled with shame, to raise strong, healthy children with pride in who they are?" At this same time, however, I began to learn about the colonial history of Canada, and I started to understand the social climate in which my grandmother grew up and later raised her family. I came to the realization that she thought she was doing the best for all of us, giving us a chance at a better life by attempting to erase our heritage and connection to our homeland. I began to have greater empathy for her and my energy turned inward, away from anger and towards grief. Later in my twenties I began the process of cultural reclamation and took advantage of any opportunities I could to learn Cree, while living on the west coast. Many First Nations people say that my generation is the "healing" generation. The language was lost in our family within one generation. It is my responsibility to turn this around. This thesis project on language revitalization is a starting place; learning the language myself and passing it down to my children is the next and most important measure to be taken.

Link to Child and Youth Care

One might expect a thesis project on language revitalization to be located in a discipline such as linguistics rather than child and youth care. However, a core issue of language revitalization is the deeply psychological issue of identity (Shaw, 2004). Childhood is widely known to be an informative and critical time for identity formation. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) describes early childhood as the foundation on "which identity, self-worth, intellectual and strengths are built" (Vol. 3, p. 447). Language also carries with it cultural values (Reyhner, 1995); therefore, children

learn the values of their culture largely by learning the language (Fowler, 1996). Values are well-known to be a major force in shaping self-awareness, identity and interpersonal relationships, which maintain an individual's level of self-assurance and success later in life (Scollon & Scollon, 1981). In addition, knowing the language of one's ancestors greatly contributes to a sense of belonging (Brittain, 2002; Cumming, 1997; Crystal, 1997; Genesse, n.d.; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996) and a connectedness to one's primary group offers stability for coping with adult responsibilities later in life (Wong Fillmore, 1986).

Knowing one's ancestral language is essential to positive cultural identity development (Fishman, 1991; Stiles, 1997; Wong Fillmore, 1986). Children gain pride and confidence in cultural identity, have an increased sense of self-esteem and gain security in knowing their heritage and culture (Jacobs, 1998; Watson-Gegeo, 1989). Additionally, by immersing children in Indigenous language, negative impact on self-identity and self-image can be reversed (Jacobs, 1998). This is an important strategy to developing resiliency in Aboriginal children who may combat racism and other disadvantages of being Aboriginal in a colonial society.

Effects of Language Loss

Language loss does not have to be personally experienced within one's lifetime for one to feel its effects. Especially in the case of First Nations communities, the residual effects of language loss are passed down through generations. Some effects of language loss on the individual and the collective include cultural dislocation, social rootlessness, and deprivation of a group identity (Haugen & Bloomfield, 1974) as well as the dangers

of loss of pride and cultural identity (Bernhard, 1992; Foundation for Endangered

Languages, 2004; Hale, 1998).

A language that is losing its child speakers is in danger of disappearing (Wurm,

1998) as children keep a language alive (Wong Fillmore, 1996). Dr. Burt McKay,

Nisga'a language teacher and Elder quoted by the First Peoples' Cultural Foundation

(2003), explains: "In our language, it is embedded, our philosophy of life and our

technologies. There is a reason why we want our languages preserved and taught to our

children – it is our survival" (p. 8).

Given the important effects of heritage language acquisition on children's healthy

identity development, the devastating effects of language loss, and the critical role

children play in keeping a language alive, the following study explored one possible way

to further Indigenous language revitalization strategies, focusing on children as the

critical link.

Terminology

Indigenous, Native, Aboriginal, First Nations: These terms are used interchangeably to refer to the First Peoples of any nation who were on the land prior to contact with explorers and settlers from other continents and countries. (i.e., New Zealand Maoris, Hawaiians of Polynesian descent, individual Canadian tribal groups such as the Secwepemc, etc.)

Heritage language, mother tongue, traditional language, ancestral language: These terms are used interchangeably to refer to the language indigenous to the community being discussed or, more generally, to refer to Indigenous languages anywhere.

Language nest programs: These programs, which originated in Aotearoa (New Zealand) over 20 years ago, are immersion preschool childcare programs conducted entirely in the home language of an Indigenous group.

Note – The phrase "the language" is used throughout the document. It was an intentional move to centralize heritage language in the discussion by not having to identify it as such each time. If any other language (such as English) was discussed, it was made explicit.

Goals of research project

The goals of the research project were twofold. The main goal was to report on the experiences of two B.C. First Nations communities who had developed and implemented early childhood heritage language immersion "language nest" programs by

identifying successes, outcomes, issues, obstacles and implications as identified by the participating communities.

Secondarily the research sought to provide practical information and inspiration to other Canadian Indigenous communities who might be interested in language nest programs as an avenue for maintaining or revitalizing First Nations languages.

The research undertaken was purposefully not evaluative in nature. The researcher did not set out to uncover how well these programs were working or whether they were effectively regenerating the language of that community. The researcher did not believe that she had the necessary qualifications to do so nor did it seem a respectful approach. Rather the aim was to find out how these communities were able to launch language nest programs and what it took to keep them operating in their community.

Limitations of the Research

There is a growing field of study, which is beyond the scope of this research, about the added challenges and suitability of bilingualism for children with learning disabilities. While this is a fascinating and worthwhile area of study, no attempt is made to offer any authority or conclusions on this subject. Statements made in this study about language acquisition strategies beneficial to children are based on the assumption that the children are in the normative range of language development.

For the purposes of this study, the definition of early childhood was expanded to eight years of age due to the approach of one of the communities to include children from 4 to 8 years old in their 'language nest' program.

This research focused on language revitalization rather than maintenance. Arguably most First Nations languages in British Columbia are in an endangered state and therefore stand to benefit from efforts focused on revitalization rather than maintenance, as might be the case elsewhere (such as with Inuit in the North or Cree in many prairie communities).

CHAPTER 2 – BACKGROUND TO THE CURRENT STUDY

Literature Review

The following literature review includes documented research from peer-reviewed journals and papers compiled in books. Aboriginal voices were included whenever possible, ranging from academics and Elders to general community members. While some of these sources are research-based, others are personal commentary and experiences, as it is important to include the knowledge and point of view of Aboriginal people themselves (Peter Cole, October 27, 2004, personal communication).

Linguistic global context.

Linguistic experts predict that of the approximately 6,000 languages presently spoken in the world, up to 90% will disappear within the next 100 years (Crystal, 1997; Dixon, 1997; Jacobs, 1998; Krauss, 1992; Woodbury, 2002). Additionally, 96% of the world's languages are spoken by 4% of its people (Bernard, 1996; Crystal, 1997), which leaves most of the world's language diversity in the stewardship of a very small number of people (UNESCO, 2003). It is generally the socially and politically marginalized ethnic minority groups, including members of the world's Indigenous groups, who hold the majority of today's threatened languages (Crystal, 1997; Davis, 1999; May, 2000; Woodbury, 2002). In many cases language death occurs when one group is colonized and assimilated by another and adopts its language (Crystal, 1997).

Second only to Mandarin, English has become a dominant global language (Alberta Education, 1997). English is prominent in over 80 countries, is dominant or well established on all six continents, and is the main language of print: 80% of the world's electronic retrieval systems are in English, two-thirds of the world's scientists write in

English and three-quarters of the world's mail is written in English (Crystal, 1997). Through its dominance of publications and audio-visual media, English is constantly pushing other languages out of the way (Pennycock, 1994). English is now the most widely taught foreign or second language, and 25% of the world's population is fluent or competent in English (Crystal, 1997). No other language matches this level or rate of growth (Crystal, 1997).

One of the impacts of the rise of English, especially in North America, has been a steady decline of Indigenous languages. Many authors point to the commonly held evolutionary view of language that the "survival of the fittest" is nature's way and minority languages should be left to die out (Crystal, 1997; Dixon, 1997; Haugen, 1972; May, 2000; Woodbury, 2002). Conversely, the threat posed by English to Indigenous languages is what Day (1985) calls 'linguistic genocide' and researchers also warn that English will continue to replace Indigenous languages until there are no native speakers left (Wright, Taylor, & Macarthur, 2000). Although there can be advantages to a common language such as opportunity for international cooperation (Crystal, 1997), there has been no proof that a common language prevents war and conflict or ensures equal economic prosperity for those who adapt to trade in that language. Rather, many groups around the world have been forced to learn English due to globalization and economic competition (Scott, 2001) with no guarantee of payoff. Many Indigenous people have abandoned their languages in hopes of social mobility (UNESCO, 2003). A strong example of this "myth of prosperity" is the case of Native Hawaiians who largely gave up their language for the promise of economic success, only to find that it has not improved their overall welfare (Warner, 2001).

Nationalism.

In Canada, the United States and beyond, we continue to live in an era of the 'nation state' which promotes one common language (Eggington & Wren, 1997; May, 2000). The mainstream Western capitalist point of view is that language differences stand in the way of progress and should be eradicated through a firm and ruthless policy of assimilation. Haugen (1972) argues that multiple languages impede the national machine of organizing people into one homogenous workforce. Another aspect of nationalism is that bilingual speakers are often mistrusted as suspicion exists of divided loyalties. This is relevant to Indigenous peoples who politically organize and have interests in self-governance and sovereignty within colonial countries. Such goals and political action are a threat to nationalism.

Although Canada celebrates multiple language heritage by encouraging bilingualism and biculturalism (Boseker, 2000), parents will have a hard time raising children to acquire and maintain a mother tongue other than French or English (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Bernhard, & Freire, 2001). Historically, Indigenous languages have received less attention than both the French-English debates and the more recent debates about immigrant languages despite multicultural policies and an awareness of rich First Nations heritage and traditions in Canada (Boseker, 2000). There are many dangers to a move towards global monolingualism, not the least of which are that it breeds intolerance, complacency and narrowed points of view (Crystal, 1997; Poth, 2000). However, there is much more at stake than this.

What do we stand to lose?

In considering the worth of a language, it is important to recognize that no languages are inferior. Haugen and Bloomfield (1974) convey that Native American languages may not have been used for atomic science but their subtleties of expression are beyond a mono-English speakers' comprehension. A common illusion linked to the argument of 'survival of the fittest' is that insignificant groups of people (i.e., small and marginalized) have threadbare languages, yet the reverse tends to be true (Dixon, 1997). Small linguistic groups tend to have intricate social structures with highly articulated systems of relationships and communal responsibilities (Dixon, 1997).

Language is a main link to identity, both personal and collective (Genesse, n.d.). Although it is not always a person's first language, there is an inherent emotional and spiritual connection between the mind, body and soul of a person and their ancestral tongue (Myhill, 1999; Stiles, 1997). Language is also often recognized as one of the most tangible symbols of culture and group identity (Blair, Rice, Wood, & Janvier, 2002; Krashen, 1998; Norris, 1998) and the main vehicle for cultural transference (Norris, 2003; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Without the language of one's ancestors, individual and collective identity gets weakened and it is likely that the culture would die out within a few generations. As conveyed by a group of Indigenous language preservationists, "songs will no longer have words, no one will speak the proper words when sending off the spirits and there will be no one to say or understand prayers for ceremonies" (Indigenous Language Institute, 2002).

Language is the repository of a people's history. It is their identity; it carries with it oral history, songs, stories and ritual and offers a unique view of the world (Crystal,

1997). Language expresses a way of life, a way of thought, an expression of human experience like no other (Blair, et al. 2002; Ermine, 1998; Jacobs, 1998; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Scott, 2001) and a connection to the land. As illustrated by one Elder in the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996):

> *Does it confuse you when I refer to animals as people? In my language it is not confusing...we consider both animals and people to be living beings...when my people see a creature in the distance they say: Awiiyak (someone is there). It is not that my people fail to distinguish animals from people. Rather, they address them with equal respect. Once they are near and [identifiable]... then they use their particular name. (Vol. 4, p. 123)*

The cultural, spiritual, intellectual, historical and ecological knowledge of one's ancestors are irrevocably lost when this worldview vanishes (Hale, 1998; Jacobs, 1998; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; UNESCO, 2003; Woodbury, 2002). Examples of this knowledge include prayers, songs, ceremonies, teachings, styles of humour, ways of relating, and kinship structures. Recounting all that is lost when a language dies helps to realize the damage done and project the future losses and effects on Aboriginal people. Clearly, the vitality of Aboriginal languages is closely linked to the health of its people (Brittain, 2002).

Although the impacts on those most closely affected are the greatest, every citizen of the world should take language loss seriously. It is often the monolingual, comfortably accommodated language speakers who are most complacent as well as resistant to acceptance of multilingual atmospheres and policies. However, the loss of a language is a loss to humankind (Yaunches, 2004). Additionally, it is a scholarly and scientific loss (Jacobs, 1998) that leaves no discipline untouched. Unique and irrecoverable knowledge in science, linguistics, anthropology, prehistory, psychology (Foundation for Endangered Languages, 2004), sociology, history, cosmology, ecology and religious studies dies

when a language is lost. One of the benefits of multilingualism is that it provides different perspectives and insights as well as a more profound understanding of the world (Crystal, 1997).

First Nations history of language loss in Canada.

Prior to contact, Aboriginal languages flourished. Following contact, the numbers of Aboriginal people were reduced dramatically through warfare and the introduction of new diseases, both incidental and intentional (Boseker, 2000; Burnaby, 1996b; Ignace, 1998; Shaw, 2001b). Colonial legislation followed with aims to assimilate First Nations people into the fabric of the developing Euro-Canadian national character. The two most damaging and impacting policies on Indigenous language loss nationally were the reserve system and the public school system. However, it is important to recognize that in the British Columbia context the banning of potlatches also greatly affected intergenerational language transference, as such ceremonies were an important vessel for passing down values and oral histories in the language (Judge Alfred Scow, cited in Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

The link of the language to land is unmistakable. Indigenous languages are intertwined with nature, as literal translations of various words indicate. For example, the Cree work for thunder *piyisowak* literally means the thunder beings are calling out to each other (Pesim Productions, 1999). In addition, the continued loss of land imposed on First Nations communities through colonization practices of settlement and treaties as well as the destruction of traditional habitat has eroded First Nations language use (Stikeman, 2001; Warner, 2001). Additionally, the residential and day school system which children were legally forced to attend largely forbade the use of Indigenous

language (Brittain, 2002; Maurais, 1996; Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs,

1990). Many examples are available of the colonial policies created and enforced in

Canada and the U.S. The U.S. Federal Superintendent of Indian Affairs in 1895 argued,

"If it were possible to gather in all the Indian children and retain them for a certain

period, there would be produced a generation of English-speaking Indians, accustomed to

the ways of civilized life..." (Ashworth, 1979).

Many children were punished and publicly humiliated for speaking their language

in residential schools (Boseker, 2000; Brittain, 2002). First Nations people across Canada

have given testimony of tactics used to extinguish the language from their tongues. One

Tlingit man commented, "Whenever I speak Tlingit, I can still taste the soap"

(Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer, 1998). It is no wonder that language recall and regeneration

of use for some First Nations people is so difficult.

Current context in Canada.

Canada's First Nations languages are among the most endangered in the world

(Wurm, 1996). Unlike other minority language groups, Aboriginal people cannot rely on

new immigrants to maintain or increase the number of speakers (Norris, 1998), nor is

there a 'homeland' of speakers somewhere else in the world that they can visit if the

language ceases to be used in Canada. All Indigenous languages in Canada are seriously

endangered and most are at risk of extinction (Brittain, 2002; Shaw, 2001b; Standing

Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, 1990). It is estimated that at the time of contact there

were an estimated 450 Aboriginal languages and dialects in Canada belonging to 11

language families (Office of the Commissioner of Official languages, 1992). In the last

100 years alone, at least 10 of Canada's Aboriginal languages have become extinct

(Norris, 1998). There are now approximately 50-70 Indigenous languages still spoken in

Canada (Kirkness, 1998; Norris, 2003; Royal Commission of Aboriginal peoples, 1996;

Shaw, 2001b); the precise number is difficult to determine because many languages are

not standardized and due to the complication of counting dialects (Royal Commission of

Aboriginal peoples, 1996). Only three of these 50-70 languages (Cree, Inuktitut and

Ojibway) are expected to remain and flourish in Aboriginal communities due to their

population base (Burnaby, 1996b; Norris, 1998; Stikeman, 2001). These language groups

are almost exclusively found spanning the region from Alberta to Quebec. British

Columbia has the greatest diversity of Indigenous languages in Canada (Norris, 2003;

Royal Commission of Aboriginal peoples, 1996), with between 26 and 34 languages

belonging to eight distinct language families, and all are seriously endangered (First

Nations Education Steering Committee, 2001; Poser, 2000; Shaw, 2001a).

Many linguists agree that the average age of language speakers largely indictates

a language's health and predicated longevity. UNESCO's "Atlas of the World's

Languages in Danger of Disappearing" (Wurm, 1996) considers a language endangered if

it is not being learned by at least 30% of the children in a community. The 2001 Canadian

census (Norris, 2003) indicates that only 15% of Aboriginal children in Canada are

learning their Indigenous mother tongue, a decline from 20% in the 1996 census. As

reported in the census, the number of children in the 0-4 age group with an Aboriginal

mother tongue dropped from 10.7% to 7.9% between 1986 and 2001 (Norris, 2003). The

situation in British Columbia is even more desperate. Of the Indigenous languages

exclusive to B.C. listed by the Yinka Dene Language Institute, only five have speakers

under the age of 15 and these five have less than 50 young speakers each. Concentrating

efforts on children's Indigenous language acquisition is now at a critical state in B.C. (and beyond).

Indigenous language revitalization movement in Canada.

Over the last few decades, First Nations people have become increasingly concerned about the decline of their languages. The language used predominantly in Native communities over the last two or more generations has shifted from Indigenous tribal languages to national languages such as English (Fishman, 1991). As a part of the sovereignty and self-determination movement of the 1960s and 70s came the demand for Indigenous control over education (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972). The language revitalization movement quickly followed and was fully established by the 1980s and early 90s (Assembly of First Nations, 1991; First Nations languages and literacy secretariat, 1992; Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, 1990).

The loss of a language often symbolizes defeat by a colonial power (Woodbury, 2002). Not only does language embody the culture and knowledge of a people but it symbolizes political autonomy, self-determination and ethnocultural identity (Boseker, 2000; Brittain, 2002; Hinton, 2001b). Crystal (1997) strengthens this argument in adding, "There is no more intimate or more sensitive an index of identity than language, [therefore] the subject is easily politicized" (p. vi).

There are multiple reasons for the Indigenous language revitalization movement in Canada. In order to further the Indigenous sovereignty movement; to save their cultures and livelihood; and to safeguard the future of coming generations of First Nations children; communities are working hard to save their languages.

Strategies used for language revitalization.

Speaking the language at home so that children will acquire it as a first language is the best option of keeping a language alive (Norris, 2003; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). However, very few Indigenous communities are able to do this at present (Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer, 1998), mainly due to the average age of the traditional speakers in the community who have already raised their children without the language. Therefore, other preventive and restorative measures must be initiated and sustained to save Indigenous languages from extinction.

Communities in Canada and abroad are using creativity, ingenuity, innovation and fierce determination to maintain and revive Indigenous languages. Elders, language teachers and language activists should be especially commended for the work they have done towards this movement (Kirkness, 2002; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Community-involved language planning is key (Blair et al., 2002); as without community initiative and direction, the strategies are not likely to succeed (Fettes, 1992; Shaw, 2001b). A long-term plan and strategies that involve the whole community are most beneficial; however, a start, no matter how small, is still a beginning. One Mohawk community reports having started with the introduction of 15 minutes a day of language instruction in their school and it has grown from there (Jacobs, 1998).

The following is an inventory of the types of strategies employed in North American Indigenous communities:

Language classes

These initiatives involve teaching the language as a 'subject.' For children it is often a set number of hours per week included as part of the curriculum in school or as an

after-school program. For adults it is most often evening classes held once a week either in the community or through a local post-secondary institution if accredited (Ignace, 1998). This is probably the most common form of language teaching, as it is the most accessible initiative for many communities; however, it is not a method that generally creates fluent speakers (Blair et al., 2002; Hinton, 2001b).

Documentation and preservation

Communities with few speakers left often take the approach of documenting the language. Although sometimes accused of "pickling" a language, some First Nations people have advocated for preservation to save what remains of the language before it is too late (Blair et al., 2002). Preservation activities include creating dictionaries, taping Elders speaking the language and, more recently, incorporating the use of computers and interactive CD-ROMs (Morrison & Peterson, 2003). The latter initiative offers the opportunity for interactive learning as well. A prominent example of this is the FirstVoices™ project, which documents and archives Canadian Indigenous languages using text, sound and video on web-based multimedia technology (First Peoples' Cultural Foundation, 2003). Although these activities do not directly create fluent speakers, they can support language learning and serve many uses towards a community's language revival strategy. For instance, archival materials produced can serve as both a resource for curriculum development and a direct resource for language learners who can look up words or hear them on tape to reinforce and enhance other learning initiatives. These materials can also assist even fluent speakers who can use them as dictionaries to look up a word or find its equivalent in English for translation purposes (Poser, 2000).

Creation of resources

Another method of language preservation and revitalization being undertaken by communities is the creation of teaching devices such as books, audiotapes, CD-ROMs, videotapes and the like, not for the purposes of archiving but as curriculum resources. One First Nations scholar insists that curriculum development is necessary to successfully create a language transmission process (Kirkness, 2002). Beyond the print resources most often created by communities (Wilson & Kamana, 2001), some multimedia examples include the award-winning Cree for Kids video (ScreenWeavers Studios, 2002) and the Arapaho version of the Disney movie *Bambi* created by Stephen Greymorning (Hinton, 2001b).

Other community resources created that are not curriculum specific but contribute to the greater language maintenance and revitalization strategy by bringing the language into common, everyday use are endeavours such as radio and television programming. One remarkable example is the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation, which produces five and a half hours a week of television programming (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

Teacher training

Some communities are beginning to include the training of traditional speakers as teachers as a strategy for language retention and revitalization (Stikeman, 2001). One community using immersion approaches to language learning recognizes that being a fluent speaker does not automatically make for a skillful language teacher and, in fact, a first language speaker is often unaware of the difficulties of learning the language (Jacobs, 1998). Kirkness (2002) recommends having "appropriate, certified training

programs available to enable our people to become language teachers, linguists, interpreters, translators, curriculum developers, and researchers" (p. 19). In 1999, the British Columbia College of Teachers helped to co-develop and approve one such certificate for teaching First Nations languages and culture called the Developmental Standard Teaching Certificate (First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2001). More recently the En'owkin Centre also co-created a new post-secondary training certificate in Aboriginal language revitalization for adults who are interested in working in community towards preserving and revitalizing Indigenous languages.

The Adam's Lake immersion school near Chase, B.C. also offers annual teacher training which is largely subscribed to by Indigenous language teachers in B.C.. The teaching paradigm they adhere to is the 'Total Physical Response System,' a language learning method that coordinates speech and action based on the assumption that learners respond physically to spoken language and that once listening comprehension has been developed, speech will naturally and effortlessly develop (Asher, 2003).

<u>Focus on policy and political advocacy</u>

Some First Nations people choose to focus on policy change and may work for organizations that strategize, plan and fundraise at federal or provincial levels for far-reaching effects on the language revitalization movement at a macro level (Assembly of First Nations, 1991; First Nations languages and literacy secretariat, 1992). One such success of political advocacy and lobbying is the creation of the federal Aboriginal Languages Initiative in 1998, which disburses funding nation-wide for community-based Aboriginal language projects (First Peoples' Heritage Language and Culture Council, 2002/2003; Norris, 2003). Kirkness (2002) supports trying to influence policy by

informing public opinion as to the state of Indigenous culture. Additionally, she stresses

pressing for legislation to protect Aboriginal languages as well as the right to use them.

While legislation alone cannot produce fluent speakers, it can play an important role in

multi-faceted strategies for language maintenance and revitalization (Royal Commission

on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

Research

Some Aboriginal communities are choosing specific research partnerships, largely

with linguistic scholars, to learn about linguistic theory, to archive, and to produce

effective learning materials in the language (Anthony, Davis, & Powell, 2003; Blair et al.,

2002; Czaykwska-Higgins, 2003; Shaw, 2001b). Kirkness (2002) states that seeking

answers to important questions through research is critical to addressing issues of

recovering and maintaining Indigenous languages.

Language engineering

All languages evolve and grow to include new concepts and vocabulary (Hinton,

2001b). However, many First Nations languages have become so sparsely used, being

largely replaced with English especially by younger generations, that they have not

evolved (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). It is important to continually

modernize Indigenous languages so that dominant-language substitutions for the heritage

language are not necessary. Rodriguez and Sawyer (1990) give the example that English

is substituted for Chipewyan (now more commonly referred to as Dene) in important

transactions such as giving directions because of a lack of contemporary Dene

vocabulary. It is especially important to incorporate contemporary expressions and

concepts to capture young people's attention and interest (Anthony et al., 2003) and to

find ways for them to discuss any aspect of popular culture, such as rap music or snowboarding, without having to revert to English. Many communities have initiated the process of establishing 'language authorities' who can make more widely informed decisions on important matters such as new vocabulary creation and documentation (Ignace, 1998).

Bilingual schooling

Several examples of completely bilingual, community-controlled schools exist, such as the well-known Rock Point Community School of the Navajo Nation in Northeast Arizona (Boseker, 2000) and the first bilingual Cree-English school which opened in Thompson, Manitoba in 2001 (Desjarlais, 2001). Bilingual schools are an important contribution to language revitalization strategies in First Nations communities. However, due to the dominance of English, they tend to have varying degrees of success in reviving languages.

Immersion practices

One cross-generational strategy commonly offered is summer immersion-style programs (Jacobs, 1998; Raloff, 1995), which are usually intensive, one- or two-week sessions that often have the advantage of learning outside the classroom for a daily-life experience of the language. These programs are most often run for adults but are sometimes run for children as well.

Two adult-specific immersion initiatives were found during the search for language revitalization approaches. A one-on-one immersion program called the Master-Apprentice language learning program (Hinton, 2001c) has been successfully implemented in California, pairing young people with traditional speaking Elders to

spend time together exclusively in the language. The other initiative was an adult

immersion program in which a small group of learners met in a house five days a week

from September to June, sharing meals and conversing with Elders and other community

resource people (Maracle & Richards, 2002).

Immersion programs are also implemented at the preschool and elementary levels

in select places across Canada. For example, total immersion programs exist from nursery

to grade three in the communities of Onion Lake and Kahnawà:ke (Jacobs, 1998;

McKinley, 2003). Adam's Lake offers immersion programs from preschool to grade

seven in their community-based school (Ignace, 1998). Although somewhat sparse, there

are also early childhood immersion programs known as 'language nests' in Canada. One

such program was founded in 2001 in Hopedale, Labrador (now Newfoundland and

Labrador) in which three infants were immersed in Inuktitut for most of their waking day

(Brittain, 2002; Canada Heritage: Corporate review branch, 2003). The Government of

the Northwest Territories also reports supporting 18 language nest programs over the past

few years (NWT Literacy Council, 2004), certainly the most abundant concentration of

these programs found in the country.

Making a case for early childhood immersion practices.

<u>Early childhood.</u>

Early childhood has long been acclaimed as the best time for language learning

(Fishman, 1996; Lee, 1996; Stiles, 1997). The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples

(1996) states that "young children absorb information at a greater rate than at any other

stage of life" (Vol. 3, p. 447). Up to three years of age is a critical time for children to lay

the foundation of sound making, and language acquisition is easier for young children

(Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Within months of being born, babies begin to acquire language; by age five they master the basic sound system structures and grammar of their native language (Cazden, 1974; Ignace, 1998). There is much debate about "critical" periods in language learning but widespread agreement that the earlier the better (Crystal, 1997). Norris (1998) conveys that the younger the speakers the better chance a language has to survive. Therefore, as Fishman (1991) indicates, everything points to the need to focus efforts on getting parents and young children involved in native language renewal.

<u>Bi/multilingualism</u>

Children are born ready for bilingualism (Crystal, 1997; Genesse, n.d.) and is a common and normal childhood experience (Genesse, n.d.). Tucker (1998) speculates that even more children grow up bilingual or multilingual than monolingual. Crystal (1997) further reports that two-thirds of children are born into a bilingual environment and develop to be completely competent in both languages.

Parents fearing that heritage language immersion might compromise their child's English skills may be reassured to know that research has shown that literacy skills learned in a mother tongue are readily transferable to a second language (Cummins, 1980; Danesi, 1988).

There are many advantages and few risks to being bi/multilingual. Bilingual and multilingual individuals have access to a much wider volume of information, tend to have more flexible minds, are more tolerant, and their thought patterns and worldview are generally more balanced (Wurm, 1997). Bilingualism is reported to have no negative effects on an individual's functioning in society (Krashen, 1998). Cummins (1990) states

that children do not suffer in any way from bilingualism as long as they continue learning in both languages. His comment further implies that the risk involved can come if neither language in being taught or learned well and the child begins to fall behind in their overall language development.

Immersion practices.

Next to the natural option of raising children at home in the language, immersion practices are the most effective method for creating fluent language speakers in a short time period (Hinton, 2001b; Lee, 1996). It also widely known that a child's caretaker provides a linguistic model for the child (Cairns, 1986). It is not that children should not learn language from their parents, rather that if they are given the opportunity to attend early childhood heritage language immersion programs such as language nests they will have the chance to acquire their heritage language in addition to English at home. Of course, if parents are willing and able to learn alongside their children and reinforce the language at home to the best of their ability, this will only increase the chances for language maintenance beyond the language nest program. However, studies have shown that it is possible for the second language to become the principal language even if parents use a different language (Leopold, 1971; Ronjat, 1913, cited in Cairns, 1986).

The Government of Northwest Territories, which offers extensive support to early childhood immersion programs, reports that they have seen the positive impact language nests have had on language revitalization (NWT Literacy Council, 2004). An additional advantage to immersion programs that communities have noticed is the difference in the ways that language nest children relate to family and community members as they learn

the positive facets of culture, traditional spirituality, and respect for teachers and elders in addition to the sounds and phrases of the language (Jacobs, 1998).

Exemplary models.

The Maori have had the most success in revitalizing an Indigenous language and much of their success has come from Te Kōhango Reo or 'language nests' programs (Kirkness, 1998). This program, which began in the early 1980s, is an early childhood total immersion program exclusively using the traditional language as the vehicle for interaction and instruction (Fleras, 1987; King, 2001; Kirkness, 1998; Te Kohanga Reo, 2004). Te Kōhango Reo is considered one of the most successful language revitalization models in the world and has been an inspiration to efforts both within Aotearoa and internationally (King, 2001; New Economy Development Group, 1993; Yaunches, 2004).

Although Aotearoa is often cited as a model for preschool language immersion that has been an important part of the revival of Maori language (King, 2001; Meyer, 1998; Stiles, 1997), both Aotearoa and Hawaii have developed a whole generation of speakers through immersion programming (Hinton, 2001b). After hearing about the language nests in Aotearoa when they first began in the early 1980s, a small group of Indigenous Hawaiian educators and community members set about to create a similar initiative in Hawaii (Warner, 2001). Due mainly to the success of 'Aha Punana Leo (Hawaiian language nests), Hawaii is now seen as a leader in the U.S. and abroad as a model and a symbol of hope to other endangered language groups hoping to revitalize their languages ('Aha Pūnana Leo, 2004; Hinton, 2001a; Wilson & Kamana, 2001). Although they now have K-12 immersion schools and university-level programs in the

language, 'Aha Pūnana Leo preschools continue to be the foundation of Hawaiian language revitalization ('Aha Pūnana Leo, 2002).

Interestingly, both the Hawaiian and Maori language leaders first studied the French immersion model in Canada before embarking on their journeys toward language revitalization (Benton, 1996; Warner, 2001). Canada has had a successful model of immersion programming for nearly 20 years which has contributed greatly towards reviving and continuing the French language in eastern Canada (Warner, 2001). Krashen (1984) states that Canadian French immersion models may be the most successful programs ever recorded in heritage language teaching. Yet, Canadian First Nations have largely looked outside of the country to places such as Aotearoa and Hawaii to draw inspiration and bring back ideas about how to revitalize language through immersion.

Summary.

It is important to become rooted in a foundation of understanding both the global context of language loss and the particular historical and contemporary contexts of language loss and revitalization efforts in Canada prior to looking more specifically at any one revival strategy. Thoroughly documenting all types of language revitalization strategies currently in use and focusing on the highly successful models was key to laying the groundwork for this study of a particular language revitalization strategy, language nest programs.

Research Rationale

It is widely known that First Nations languages in Canada, and particularly in B.C., are in extreme danger of extinction (First Nations languages and literacy secretariat, 1992; Norris, 2003; Poser, 2000; Shaw, 2001b). As Brittain (2002) states, serious

language decline can occur within one generation. It was reported that in 1951 in Canada 87.4% of Aboriginal people spoke their mother tongue (Burnaby, 1996a). However, it is important to note that the accuracy of this statistic is questionable due to the fact that it was based on linguists estimations, rather than census data (Burnaby, 1996a). By 1991 that number had dropped to 36% (Burnaby, 1996a) and had dropped again to 26% by 1996 (Norris, 2003). Today's language speakers are aging; it is mainly Elders who use the language in everyday conversations (First Peoples' Heritage Language and Culture Council, 2003).

It is also widely accepted that early childhood is the best time for language learning (Cazden, 1974; Ignace, 1998; Lee, 1996; Stiles, 1997). Additionally, it is children who keep a language vibrant. For a language to have a stable future, children need to be learning it (Brittain, 2002).

Immersion is widely accepted as the best method for rapid language regeneration as it can produce new fluent speakers within a few years (Hinton, 2001b; Lee, 1996). Although early childhood language immersion programs have been recognized the world over as the most successful means available today for language revitalization, this method has not yet been well subscribed to in Indigenous Canada. French Canadians, Aotearoa Maoris and Native Hawaiians have all successfully implemented immersion programs over the past 20 years with early childhood initiatives as the foundation (King, 2001; Krashen, 1984; Warner, 2001; Wilson & Kamana, 2001).

In a 1990 survey of language revitalization initiatives, 80% of First Nations respondents reported that the programs in their communities were 'subject' based from preschool to the secondary school levels even though bilingual and immersion

approaches were recognized as much more effective (First Nations languages and literacy secretariat, 1992). Although some language nest programs have been established in the past few years (Canada Heritage: Corporate review branch, 2003; Ignace, 1998; NWT Literacy Council, 2004), there are still relatively few early childhood immersion initiatives in Canada. This is particularly notable in B.C. where, due to language diversity and smaller population bases, the threat of language endangerment requires immediate, focused and effective action (First Peoples' Heritage Language and Culture Council, 2003).

Over a decade ago, Fleras (1987) began the debate of whether Aboriginal language nest immersion preschool philosophy and structure could be applied in the Canadian context as a strategy for widespread language revival and maintenance. Furthering this debate, and collaborating with two communities in B.C. who have successfully launched and operated language nest programs, the following questions were identified as the basis for this research study:

1) What does it take to successfully launch and operate language nest programs? Are there key enablers and critical resources that must be in place?

2) What stands in the way for communities who want to launch this kind of initiative?

This study refines knowledge of what is needed to make early childhood Indigenous immersion language programming possible as one viable solution to the problem of Indigenous language loss in Canada. The outcomes of this study may assist other communities to overcome fears and barriers and may also provide inspiration and hope for an achievable and effective solution towards the revitalization of their language.

CHAPTER 3 – METHOD

Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is defined as a process of understanding a social or human problem based on a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reflecting the views of informants in a natural setting (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996; Jackson, 1999). Within qualitative research, hermeneutic phenomenology was the specific methodological theory that most closely matched the approach to this study, which is defined by van Manen (2001) as the study and interpretation of lived experience. This approach advocates that research should be done on topics that "seriously interest us and commit us to the world" (van Manen, 2001, p. 30). Freebody (2003) adds that researchers "should self-consciously be agents of social and educational change." As explained in the introduction to this thesis, the researcher's family history of language loss prompted interest in this research topic and inspired hope that the findings would contribute to the field of Indigenous language revitalization.

Community contributions to research process.

The research process was also guided by input and feedback from the community members with whom the researcher consulted as the study was being set up. The researcher has a small degree of familiarity with both communities prior to approaching them. However, the community administrators, who were the main research collaborators, were not known to the researcher prior to the study being undertaken. In the case of Lil'wat Nation the researcher called a community member she knew and explored with her who was the best person to call and start the inquiry process about visiting their community. With Adam's Lake, the researcher had visited the community

in the past but the connection was not strong and there was no familiarity with those doing the language nest program. However, a contact person was found in a First Nations community newspaper which had an article about the language nest program. A 'cold call' was made and the process began of finding out who was the best person to discuss the possibility of visiting this community as well. In Lil'wat Nation it was the tribal school administrator who oversaw the language nest. In Adam's Lake, it was a teacher in the language nest who was also the main administrator of that program. The community administrator helped to shape the research design by suggesting an initial observation period in the language nest, as well as the addition of an Elder to the group of people to be interviewed. The community administrators in both communities were informed and active collaborators in the research design process. The researcher was grateful to learn from them and have the benefit of their high level of interest in the process and outcomes.

Community contexts.

The two communities approached to co-research this topic were Adam's Lake Band in south-central British Columbia and Lil'wat Nation (formerly known as Mount Currie). Adam's Lake is comprised of seven reserves, with the language nest being situated in the reserve near the town of Chase, along the shores of Little Shuswap Lake. They are affiliated with the Shuswap Nation Tribal Council which is comprised of 17 Secwepemc nations. The on-reserve population is approximately 400. The language nest programs is operated out of a small house just a few steps away from both a regular predominantly English speaking band-controlled daycare centre and an Aboriginal Head Start program. They also have an administrative office and health centre nearby in addition to the K-7 immersion school just down the road. Adam's Lake will be referred to

as the Secwepemc Nation throughout the remainder of the document as requested by the community administrator. This was done to ensure that recognition be given that the immersion teachers, Elders and children who attend both the immersion school and the language nest program come from a number of bands within the Secwepemc Nation.

Lil'wat Nation is considerably larger with an on-reserve population of about 1300. Their traditional territory lies between Squamish and Lillooet, British Columbia. They are an independent nation with no formal affiliations. The language nest is housed in a portable classroom beside the K-12 tribal school. Nearby there is a large health centre, which has an abundance of programs, including a full-scale daycare centre. Elsewhere on their reserve they have administrative buildings, a few small stores and an adult learning centre.

Program descriptions.

The "Cseyseten" (language nest) at Adam's Lake is conducted entirely in the Secwepemc language. This community used a fairly "traditional" language nest model taking children from 6 weeks to 5 years old (however, their youngest child at the time of the study was 2 years old). The children leave the program at 5 years of age and transition to the immersion school available in the community (if chosen by the parents). The program runs four days a week, 9 a.m. to 2:45 p.m., September to June each year.

The "Clao7alcw" (Raven's Nest) program at Lil'wat Nation is conducted in the Lil'wat language. This community has taken a somewhat different approach. They did a one-time intake two years ago of 3-6 year olds who will move through the program together for four years with no new intakes. Therefore, they now have 5-8 year olds in the program, so it operates more like a one-room elementary immersion school. This

program runs five days a week, approximately seven hours a day from September to June each year.

Participants

Purposeful sampling (Creswell, 1994; Freebody, 2003) was used in choosing two communities that were somewhat familiar to the researcher. They were also the only communities in B. C. known to the researcher at the time the study was developed that identified themselves as having "language nests." (A third language nest program at Lake Babine First Nation was brought to the researcher's attention once the study was underway.) The two communities were chosen partly out of convenience. To survey all 198 "bands" in B. C. in order to determine which ones had language nests programs would have been a research project in itself. The researcher asked key First Nations language and ECE professionals in southern B. C. to determine whether any other language nest programs were known to them, and no others were identified.

Of the two Indigenous communities chosen, one had a long and successful history of language immersion practices, including language nest programming. The other community had a newly established language nest program partly inspired by the first community, which is seen as a flagship for language revitalization initiatives in B. C..

In qualitative research no attempt is made to randomly select participants; rather, they are purposefully selected as the candidates best able to answer the research question in useful ways (Creswell, 1994). The researcher's original study design included a parent, a teacher and an administrator, with the purpose in mind to include a cross-section of participants involved in the language nest. The researcher discussed the sampling choice with the community contact person who, in both communities, was the language nest

program administrator. At the suggestion of one of the community administrators, an

Elder who taught in the language nest was added to the research design. Once the profile

of participants was confirmed, the community administrators agreed to select at their own

discretion which parent and Elder would be asked to participate.

Therefore, the four participant profiles chosen were:

> one "champion" parent who had a child in the program

> the administrator of the program

> the head teacher of the program

> one Elder who shares the traditional language in the program

Procedures

Observations and taped conversational interviews were the procedures used to

gather data. The original design included only interviews. However, at the suggestion of

the administrators of the programs, an observational component was added. The

researcher did not assume it would be appropriate or acceptable to request permission to

observe alongside the children and caregivers in the language nest program. The

observation method used is best described as 'close observation,' defined by van Manen,

(2001) as an attempt to enter and participate in the life world of persons relevant to the

study. Creswell (1994) adds that the role of the observer is known, not hidden as it is in a

one-way glass type of observation. Close observation requires one to be an observer and

a participant at the same time (van Manen, 2001). Field notes were taken during and after

the observation periods. The time spent observing helped to further shape the

conversation topic areas for the interviews, as new questions arose and others were no

longer necessary. The observations and field notes also added relevant information to the

results and discussion sections of the thesis in terms of describing such program components as the program building or classroom set-up. Further verification of some of the results was made possible through the observations and field notes taken when a participant reported an experience or a technique used that the researcher had observed and recorded. Gall et al. (1996) explain that observations provide an alternative source of data for verifying information gathered by other means, which in this case were interviews. The field notes taken were reviewed against the interview transcriptions for further clarity, consistency, and new information.

Indigenous researcher Peter Cole (personal communication, May 2004) recommends taking a conversational approach to dialogue with communities rather than an archeological extraction approach. He uses the metaphor of digging with a shovel rather than your hands to describe the difference between a standard interviewing approach and one that is gentler and more respectful of the participants' sharing their knowledge and experience. Taped conversational interviews (Gall et al., 1996; Kvale, 1996; van Manen, 2001) were conducted using preconceived conversation topic areas.

Although there was some overlap, different conversation topic areas were used to guide the discussions with each of the four participants in each community. Teachers and administrators were asked similar questions, except when the answers for some questions from the first of the two interviews were straightforward enough that it would have been too repetitive to ask again. Topic areas for teachers and administrators were:

- getting started with language nests

- practical information about the program (e.g., age range, enrollment numbers, fee structure)

- community context (e.g., total population, 0-5 population, and so on)

- policy decisions (e.g., decisions about dialects)

- resourcing (e.g., regular guests, curriculum created)

- staffing issues

- Elders' involvement

- parental involvement

- networking

- plans for language continuation beyond the language nest

- vision for the future

It is important to keep in mind that the focus was on creating the most comfortable, natural and conversational atmosphere as possible. Therefore, topics areas and questions were used flexibly. The researcher tried to build on what was shared, what seemed most important to the participant, and focus on their areas of expertise.

Parent interviews were more free-flowing than the interviews with teachers and administrators as it was hard to predict in what areas of interest they would feel most confident. The topics covered included their experience with the language, how they got interested in language nests, their current level of involvement, speculations about other parents' choices in the community, how they challenged any fears they had about the program, anything new they noticed about their children since attending the language nest, and the hopes and dreams they held for their children and their community in terms of language regeneration.

Elders' interviews were even less structured than parent interviews. Although topic areas and guiding questions were prepared, the Elders offered more of a storytelling

perspective. The interviewer was more noticeably silent in these interviews than in any of the other interviews. However, the researcher did share with both Elders her own family history of First Nations language loss, which prompted more stories as well as advice in addition to their own stories. The topics areas prepared for the Elders' interviews were:

- how they got involved in the language nest

- their experience of the language (i.e., who taught them, have they always spoken, etc.)

- effects on themselves of being involved

- their perception of the effectiveness of the nest and its effect on children

Many other topics were covered with the Elders but these were at their initiation, and the researcher merely followed up with clarifying and prompting questions. (A full list of the guiding questions and topic areas is included as Appendix A.)

Data Collection

The research design and how to carry out data collection in an ethical and culturally appropriate manner was largely guided by suggestions and guidance from the researcher's thesis supervisor. In addition, the researcher was guided by her recent work experience as a research assistant on a university-community research partnership with one of the other thesis committee members. The researcher also drew on her own knowledge of protocol and cultural understanding of the rhythm of community life to guide how the study should proceed.

Ball (in press) conveys that in absence of a community-initiated invitation, a process of introductions and consultations with appropriate community leaders is necessary. The researcher first connected with community contacts by telephone and

determined the appropriate community administrator with whom to discuss the study. Once that person was identified, the researcher had an initial conversation with these language nest program administrators. Next, a letter of introduction and a participant consent form (attached as Appendices B & C) were sent by fax to introduce both the researcher and the study. The researcher then began the process of negotiating with the community administrators whether they were willing to be involved in the study, their thoughts on the research design, and the necessary levels of approval to be sought on the community's side. One community administrator had to take the request to the tribal board of education, who sent questions back to the researcher through the community administrator before they approved the study. In the second community, the researcher was asked by the community administrator to dialogue with the principal of the immersion school over the telephone and to answer questions about the research. In both communities, the questions of concern were mainly covered in the letter of introduction and consent form, which had been sent by fax. However, it seemed important to both communities to have the opportunity to connect with the researcher and to have some points clarified for reassurance. The types of questions asked regarded clarification of the purpose of the study and its design, who else was being studied and whether the approach was comparative, what would be done with the results (i.e., who owns the data and final report, how the information would be shared), what the community would gain from being involved and what the researcher would gain. After these respective processes of clarification, the administrators in each community agreed to participate in the study.

Once protocols and permissions were in place, community visits were scheduled at the convenience of the participants and in accordance with the schedule of the

language nest programs, so that children would be in attendance at the programs when the visits transpired. Agreements were also made with community administrators about which individuals would be interviewed. The community administrators helped to coordinate the visits, observation periods, and interview times. The researcher visited each community once for a period of two days.

At the suggestion of the community administrators, the researcher began by observing each community's language nest programs for the better part of one morning in each place. Subsequently, the researcher conducted one- to two-hour individual interviews with the four purposefully selected community members involved in the immersion initiatives over the remainder of the one- or two-day visit. Interviews were conducted at the participants' preferred locations; most took place in the community's school and one was conducted in the participant's home. The interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed into Word documents for the purpose of analysis.

Triangulation

At the suggestion of the administrators in both communities, observation in the language nest programs was conducted in addition to the interviews in order to more fully understand the phenomena being studied. The use of multiple data-collection methods is defined by Gall et al. (1996) as triangulation when used as a way to check the validity of study findings. In the case of this study, observation was used to help to corroborate the findings from the self-report method of individual interviews. Once interview data were analyzed, themes were compared against the observation field notes for consistency and for purposes of extrapolation.

Data Interpretation

The two communities were not compared but rather were studied with the purpose of understanding each community's experience of what makes early childhood language immersion programs possible.

The interview data were systematically reviewed for themes and meaningful units according to van Manen's (2001) phenomenological reflection model. In addition to van Manen (2001), several other qualitative methodologists describe similar methods for interpretation of phenomenological data, for instance, looking for themes and categorizing the data, synthesizing findings, making comparisons and contrasts, and validating by checking back with the participants (Creswell, 1994; Moustakas, 1994). It is important to note, however, that data interpretation purposefully diverged from the qualitative and phenomenological theorizations when it came to conducting comparisons. Both communities were adamant that they did not want to be compared but would be willing to be studied alongside each other and reported on according to their unique cultural-sociohistorical contexts.

Van Manen (2001) notes that thematic analysis is not a "mechanical frequency counting or coding of selected terms" nor a "rule-bound process but a free act of seeing meaning" (p.78). He defines themes as a simplification or summary of experiences, a form of capturing the lived experience one is trying to understand, and explains that themes help to give shape to the shapeless (van Manen, 2001). Using the data management software ATLAS.ti, thematic analysis was conducted in a detailed, "line by line" manner (van Manen, 2001, p. 93). The interview data were reviewed for phrases, concepts, and experiences that seemed significant to the phenomena. When a section of

interest was identified in the interview transcriptions, quotes were highlighted and attached electronically to an appropriately titled 'code', or theme. Once all eight interviews were reviewed and coded in this manner, codes were examined for collapsibility and hierarchical relationships. Initially sixty-two themes were identified. Some seemed insignificant once the themes were viewed holistically for meaning, and were removed. A process of reducing and re-reducing the remaining data was undertaken until a coherent set of findings was produced. Although this method of reductionism is helpful for dealing with voluminous amounts of interview transcripts, it holds the danger of losing the "words" of the people who shared their knowledge. One limitation of using this reductionistic method for analyzing data is that in the act of condensing the information, there is a risk of losing the essence of the story told. The researcher tried to use many direct quotes and carefully draw out meaning without dropping threads of the stories. Three major themes, each with three to six sub-themes, some of which had an additional level of sub-themes, were eventually determined and included in the results section of this thesis.

Data confirmation.

Community administrators were consulted on how best to communicate the information back to individual participants for verification, giving them the opportunity to revise, rebut, or extract statements or wording. It was agreed that each individual would be given the opportunity to review their own comments before they were included in the final report. The participant consent form raised the issue and gave participants the option to review and edit any information they provided that may be included in the final thesis report or future publications. Three of the four participants in one community and

only one in the other community chose to take the opportunity to review their own comments. When given the further choice, near the end of the study, to view either just their own comments or the entire results and discussion sections in order to view their comments in context, all four participants who opted to review both chapters in their entirety.

In relation to external validity, qualitative research is not normally intended for generalizing findings, but rather to uncover unique phenomena (Creswell, 1994). However, some generalizations can be drawn from this study, as the stories of these communities in terms of language loss and the struggle to regain it are not unique. What might be unique is their road to recovery. This is the inspiration and example that they have provided to other communities.

In terms of reliability of findings, the uniqueness of most qualitative studies inhibits them from exact replication (Creswell, 1994). However, the researcher has discussed her positioning and the selection process used for communities and participants throughout the document in order to enhance the chances of replicability. These two communities are geographically separated by approximately 500 kilometres, and they have vast differences in population and livelihood. Of course, they also have differing historical experiences of the effects of colonization, residential schools, and so on. In addition, the approaches they are taking to language nest programming differ greatly. One program operates more as a primary school and, with a one-time closed intake of children, grows by one grade level each year. The other program is set up to replicate the atmosphere of a "grandma's house" with a current cohort of two- to five-year-olds who "graduate" to kindergarten at age five. However, even with these substantial differences

in both context and approach, there were remarkable similarities reported in challenges and successes related to starting and maintaining a language nest program and the positive effects on community members. This recognition indicates strong reliability of the findings and a greater chance of replicability should other studies of Indigenous preschool immersion programs in B. C. or Canada be undertaken.

Ethical Considerations

In the following section, I offer a reflection on the process of enacting ethical principles in the work itself as well as what I learned engaging in language research with Indigenous communities. As Cole (2002) expresses, "ethics for us [Aboriginal people] is not an add-on or a form to fill in. It is intimate integration with the deep structure of our understanding…" (p. 457). Brant Castellano (2004) further iterates that in the world of Aboriginal knowledge, ethics in research cannot be limited to a set of rules that guides the researcher; they are intimately related to who you are and the deep values to which you subscribe. Ultimately this is why I felt compelled to include this section, as I felt personally responsible and culturally bound during the research process and needed to find ways to capture what I had learned.

Personal responsibility and preparation.

In preparing to visit the communities and conduct the research, I found myself feeling very emotional and in need of spiritual guidance. Nothing that I had been told by my non-Native professors and advisors had prepared me for this experience. Ruttan (2004) relates that for an Indigenous researcher, preparing oneself properly is essential and is similar in some ways to preparing for ceremony, in asking the ancestors to take pity on us and to help us with our ignorance. She adds that the maturity gained from this

process helps us to better understand the answers we are given. I also found the weight of personal responsibility as an Aboriginal researcher entering Aboriginal communities heavy on my spirit. Pillwax-Weber (2004) conveys that once we enter communities with the intention of conducting formal research, we are accepting personal responsibility and accountability for the impact of the project on the lives of the community members. As Aboriginal researchers we need to be vigilant of the social and political implications of the results of our studies (Ruttan, 2004). I am grateful for this new understanding about preparing myself to enter communities as a researcher. However, I am also continually mindful of the great personal responsibility that conducting research in Indigenous communities brings.

Who benefits – In whose best interests?

When conducting research with Indigenous communities, it is important to consider what benefits might result for the community. Many communities have been exploited and used as sites for excavation of knowledge, sometimes for the financial gain or prestige of non-Native researchers. Brant Castellano (2004) adds that Aboriginal people have come to disfavour research because it has often been misguided and harmful. Many Indigenous communities, however, have inherent cultural ways which are open and trusting, giving outsiders the benefit of the doubt and welcoming visitors to their territory. Unfortunately, this propensity has collided at times with a non-Native approach to treating Indigenous peoples as anthropological subjects for the benefit of the researcher. One of the community's leaders reported that they had previously had an extremely negative experience and a seriously damaging relationship with a researcher that had far-reaching and long-lasting negative implications for their community. As a

result, they were extremely cautious about the agreements they made with me as a researcher. I had to answer many questions from community representatives regarding how the information would be used and what benefits there would be to the community before gaining their approval to visit and conduct research.

Institutional ethics process and its relationship to Indigenous research ethics.

An ethics application was done and met the approval of the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Committee office. I had assumed that this process was about protecting the participants and Indigenous communities, but it seemed that it was more about protecting the university. After receiving ethics approval and having adhered to the Indigenous Research Ethical Guidelines (Faculty of Human and Social Development, 2001), when it came to contacting communities I had to rely on my own cultural knowledge of protocol and process more than anything that was required by the university. When contacting communities, I was not only required to ensure my personal agenda was explicit but that my personal history with the research subject was fully disclosed as well. There was an implicit expectation that I would explain why I was interested in this topic and why they should invite me to their community. Ball (in press) expresses that this necessary relationship building takes time; she suggests that self-disclosure is a foundational aspect of ethical research practice in Indigenous communities, and perhaps in all communities.

In both communities that participated in this research, there was remarkable openness and hospitality on the part of community leaders towards me. Although this welcoming nature is inherent in many First Nations cultures, it still came as a surprise that this would be extended to a "university researcher" who was not only an outsider but

one with labels, connotations, and power structures intact. Ball (in press) stresses the importance of acknowledging the inherent power differences between Indigenous communities and the university researcher. She refers specifically to non-Native researchers; however, I would argue that the power, prestige and often the funding support held by any university researcher, including Indigenous researchers, warrants acknowledgement. As Ball (in press) stresses, "deliberate efforts should be made to level the playing field" (p. 3).

Extra unpaid work for community representatives.

Connecting with communities and asking them to be a part of the study brought a new level of realization of what is asked of individual community members when they are approached to be a part of a study. No matter how much of the work an individual investigator tries to take responsibility for, the community contact person has the connections and the knowledge of who to approach and how. Inevitably this person ends up taking on the work of coordinating the community visit and responding to researcher's requests in their already busy schedules.

In many communities, these administrators are the key contact people in their community; they know and have the respect of most people in their community. They are the people who can get things done, which makes them great collaborators. But what do these people and their communities get back for all of this? There is a great sense of responsibility in realizing that the whole thesis process is primarily set up to benefit me, the developing researcher, by furthering my credentials and career through degree completion and recognition. Certainly, in most cases new knowledge would also be created, but it is not often presented back in a way that is accessible to most community

members. As discussed later in this chapter, I have tried to address this by suggesting an accessible way of "giving back" the information shared in the form of a booklet for parents. It is important for university researchers to consider what direct benefits there are to particular communities when they are asked to participate in research studies.

Compensation for participants.

Upon completion of this study, it seemed to me that for some First Nations community members the standard system of honoraria offered by universities in research studies can be inadequate and insulting. This method seems to be in place as a way to compensate for time similarly to an hourly wage. This worldview of payment for time is embedded in the Protestant work ethic and capitalist notions of measuring worth in terms of "time." I wondered what should actually be "paid" for sharing the rich depths of a community's struggle and of individuals' personal and often painful life experiences? Although I could do no more than offer the standard honorarium to participants, it seemed inadequate for the years of experience and wisdom some community members were able to offer and willing to share. As discussed later in this chapter, finding more substantial and lasting ways to "give back" to communities who agree to be involved in research is more respectful and honouring.

Challenge of interviewing.

I found it difficult to get answers to my questions without taking an interrogative approach. The 'question and answer' method at times seemed harsh and unnatural, even with my best attempt at conversational interviewing. I tried to use topic areas as guides in order to touch on all the subjects I hoped to cover. At times it seemed that the questions

were eyed suspiciously by participants. The interviews went much better when I was able to get people to tell stories.

In the spirit of conversational interviewing, I had to continue to remind myself to find a balance between listening and talking. However, sometimes the meaning of the question was hard to convey without lengthy descriptions, and I tried to keep the interaction as natural as possible by gaining trust through sharing some of my thoughts and ideas along the way. When participants could better understand where I was coming from, it seemed to help them let go of some of their anxieties about sharing information.

Ownership and representation.

Although the study design already included two communities, the first community I contacted expressed the importance of going to another community to balance the perspective. Their main concern was that their contributions not make up the bulk of the data source for the research. Otherwise, they felt the study should be more of a formal partnership with co-authorship and more extensive collaboration than was planned for this independent thesis project. It was important to them that the research project was not portrayed as "A Study of XYZ Community," but rather that their experiences and program initiatives would be woven into the telling of a bigger story of what it takes to do language nest programs. I also assured both communities that the stories of their counterparts in Aotearoa and Hawaii would be included to strengthen, contrast, and complement what they had shared. These agreements seemed to satisfy both communities. The contributions of both communities were acknowledged in the beginning of the thesis document, and the communities were assured that they would receive a copy of the final written research project when completed. Lastly, I offered

back the original taped interviews to ensure that the data collected would return to the individuals in the community, to be stored collectively, individually or destroyed as decided by the community participants.

Privacy and anonymity.

It is important for researchers not to assume that anonymity is preferred (Ball, in press; Ruttan, 2004). Therefore I gave communities as a whole as well as the individual participants the option of being acknowledged as the source(s) of knowledge. When the issue was explored with both communities as to their preference to remain anonymous or to receive credit for their knowledge and experience, both communities were willing to be identified by community name. All individuals who shared their knowledge in this study chose to be identified either by name or title.

Giving back.

Culturally and ethically, I know that I must give something back to the communities who agreed to be a part of my research study. This goes beyond individual honoraria and/or gifting. Offering something that is meaningful and lasting to the communities in terms of the topic under study is essential to practicing ethical research in Indigenous communities. When I approached my thesis advisor about this issue, although she was supportive, she informed me that this seemingly self-imposed requirement was over and above what was expected by my department for the thesis portion of my Master's degree. Therefore, we had to come to an agreement of what I could do that would meet my cultural need to contribute back to community, while recognizing that this was beyond the scope of the requirements of my degree.

Although a thesis document will be produced for the university and stored for public access in the university library, I wanted to produce something more valuable and accessible to the communities. Ball (in press) also expresses that findings from studies with Indigenous communities should be presented back in a format that is readily understandable and accessible. Therefore, a commitment was made to produce a small plain-language leaflet or booklet highlighting contributors to successes in the two communities and, as identified in a literature review, what it takes to launch and run an immersion preschool in one's community. The informational product would also provide practical information debunking popular myths for parents and community members about the benefits of immersion approaches to language revitalization.

My hope is that the communities involved in the study will be proud of what they have accomplished and recognize that they are role models for other communities wishing to do language nests and other language revitalization activities. For other communities with whom the data might be shared, my hope is that they will be inspired and recognize the strengths that already exist in their community to start these initiatives. Lastly, my desire is that more Indigenous communities will take small steps towards their dreams, goals, and visions regarding language revitalization.

CHAPTER 4 – RESULTS

The key findings in this chapter are listed here for ease of reference and indication

of major versus minor and sub categories.

Major Components to Starting and Maintaining Language Nest Programs
Leadership
    External inspiration
    Optimism and determination
    Recognition of value
    Autonomy
Elders
    Working across generations
    Accommodating Elders' needs
    Positive effects on Elders
Parents
    Parental motivation
    Parent's fears
    Parental involvement
Teachers
    Hiring and preparing teachers
    ECE licensing dilemmas
    Positive effects on teachers
    Challenges for teachers
Practical aspects
    Keeping the approach simple
    Capital resources and funding issues

Challenges to Doing Language Nest Programs
Resistance
Waitlists and subscription rates
English dominance

Successes and Outcomes
Language nest as catalyst
    K-12 immersion schools
    Changing attitudes
Effects on children
    Self-esteem/Positive cultural identity formation
    One step closer to fluency
    Children as teachers: preparation for leadership
Sharing resources/networking
Healing component to language learning
Language evolution
Cultural continuation through language

Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, two First Nations communities in British Columbia participated in this study, and four key community members associated with the language nest program in each community were interviewed. In one community, a language nest program was started 16 years ago and ran for a few years until the founders' children became school-aged and their attention turned to elementary-level immersion and beyond. The community has, however, re-established the language nest program in recent years; it is running at full capacity once again with eleven children currently enrolled in the program. The other community started their inaugural language nest program two years ago with a unique approach. They had a one-time fixed intake of 15 children, which reduced to a cohort of nine after the first year. These children are now moving through a four-year program that grows by one grade each year. This community's approach to language nest began with 3 to 6 year-olds, and this group now spans 5-8 years of age.

It is important to note that although the research study focused on the language nest in each community as much as possible, discussions of elementary-aged immersion schooling (i.e., discussions of "teaching subjects") were unavoidable for the participants due to the span of immersion activities they were involved with in their communities.

Due to the structure of the study as reported in the previous chapter, some results were important even if only two people expressed similar views, as it might be the case that the two respondents were both parents or that they were from two different communities. Although the information shared by participants in both communities is equally represented in the findings, woven throughout each section, the direct quotations

used were largely those of the administrator and teacher in one community. This is partly due to the fact that this community has been working at language immersion initiatives for nearly twenty years and therefore was able to be more conclusive in their words. It could be cultural differences in communication styles from one community to the next and it is also possible that the researcher's style did not engage the participants in the other community in quite the same way as did the first community studied. However, both communities had valuable knowledge to share and the researcher attended to ensuring the findings were balanced even when the quotes could not be. The following results are summarizations and categorizations of the knowledge shared through the conversational interviews.

Major Components of Starting and Maintaining Language Nest Programs

The following section summarizes the major findings from the part of the study that explored what it takes to start and maintain a language nest program. Also included are some of the challenges of starting and sustaining a program and the effects on the key groups of people involved in the language nest initiatives.

Leadership.

Participants in both communities emphasized in different ways that it takes strong leadership to get language nest programs started in First Nations communities. In one community, initiation of the program was basically the will of one woman; in the other community, a strong group of determined parents founded the program. Several key aspects of the leadership needed were reported in each community.

<u>External inspiration</u>

Participants in both communities described how meeting members of other communities who were doing language nests and working towards language revitalization had inspired and motivated them to learn more and to get started. In one community, the founder's vision and enthusiasm came from an interaction with some Aotearoa Maoris at a conference in Vancouver. After meeting and interacting with the Maori people who planted the seed of the language nest idea, she was so inspired that she immediately relocated to her home community and started a language nest with virtually no funding or extra supports of any kind. She explained that she did not even know what she was doing at first and did not speak the language, but she felt that she had no choice but to follow through on this vision that had come to her.

> *And I didn't even really know what I was doing but I told my partner, I said, 'I'm moving to Chase and I'm going to start a language nest.' And he said, 'You are absolutely crazy.' And I said, 'I know I am. I'm crazy. But I can't sleep at night. This is all I'm thinking about. I just have to do it.' So that's what I did. . . . And nobody had heard of a language nest and I only kind of heard about it. I just knew this is what I was going to do. So I started going door-to-door to houses on the reserve, and I talked to them about what I wanted to do. And I think just through the nature of people being very polite they sat through it and they listened to what I'd say, but they probably didn't have a clue any more than I did what a language nest was.*
>
> (Community Administrator, Secwepemc Nation).

Later, participants from this same community also visited the language nest and immersion programs in Hawaii. Although the second community also studied the language nest work of the Maoris and Hawaiians, they named the first community in this study as the main inspiration and mentors for their language nest endeavour.

Optimism and determination

Optimism is key, and not giving up. (Administrator, Secwepemc Nation)

Four of the eight participants mentioned desire, will, and commitment as key to starting and maintaining language nest programs. Program founders in both communities reiterated that when it comes to starting a language nest program, the most important thing was to "just do it." They stressed that if this is what one wants for their community, they must get something going and not allow anything to stand in the way. These program founders would not take "no" for an answer and they were never dismayed by systemic setbacks or internal politics. They did not ask for permission from outside authorities; they established programs first and informed later.

Participants also expressed that it was important not to dwell for too long on any obstacles or negatives, but to celebrate the little successes as they come along. Parents, teachers, and administrators expressed in various ways that optimism was the key to success. These participants believe in the value of the language and believe in the language nest approach. Their attitudes in the interviews were plainly enthusiastic and optimistic. This courageous and optimistic attitude seemed to be one of the essential components to getting language nest programs started in each of these communities.

Recognition of value

The founding members of the language nest programs in each community described how they seemed to see the value in the language more than did other community members. They did not believe that their language was outdated or useless. Rather, they believed the language to be a gift to the children and a means to maintain their community's culture.

I think our children need the opportunity to hear our languages so that they can go to sleep with our language, they could hear their grandfather speaking the language, they could hear their grandmother speaking the language, they could hear and dream in the language. And I think, too, I have a belief that when we are in our sweats, if we're going to meet our ancestors. Wouldn't it be beautiful to be conversing in the language as the Creator has gifted us? . . . Our children will be going to those levels, too, because they'll be going and meeting our ancestors and be able to understand and make sure our messages and our teachings are not lost.
(Teacher, Secwepemc Nation)

When asked why they take their children to language nest, parents in both communities reported that they saw value in the language nest approach. One parent was not in need of childcare but took her child there anyway for the exposure to the language.

I think that everyone is starting to wake up and say, 'Why don't I know my language? Why isn't there opportunity for my children?'
(Parent, Secwepemc Nation)

Echoed in both communities was the belief that "the younger the better" for creating opportunities towards gaining fluency, as children learn languages more easily than teenagers or adults. The parents described how difficult it was to learn a second language as adults and said they wanted their children to begin as early as possible. This belief helped parents to hold greater value in the language nest idea.

[Early childhood] is the prime time to teach language. The younger we can teach language, the more it acts like it's a first language.
(Administrator, Secwepemc Nation)

Autonomy

In both communities, administrators reported a degree of autonomy as they said they were able to simply take action and set up the language nest. It seemed that these community organizers preferred less bureaucracy and were able to set programs up without the same level of formal structure that other childcare or educational institutions may demand.

We have been raising our children for thousands of years, we don't need anyone to tell us how to do it.
                                                          (Administrator, Secwepemc Nation)

Neither community has chosen to sustain the route of adhering to Early Childhood Education (ECE) licensing but rather to run their program independently. When asked how they get around licensing, the Secwepemc Nation community administrator responded, "We don't ask. This is not something that can be *given*. It is our right, our birthright, to have our language, to teach it to our children; we must do it for ourselves, our own people." This strong statement summarizes the autonomous approach taken by these communities.

Elders.

Having healthy traditional speakers in the community who are willing to play a part in the language nest was fundamental to starting and maintaining a program. These two communities were able to meet these criteria; however, it was not always easy to find Elders who were willing to be a part of the program.

I think in our community not a lot of our Elders will freely speak the language.
                                                          (Teacher, Secwepemc Nation)

Working across generations

Call it a marriage, a marriage between the teachers and the Elders. You have to establish boundaries, you have to establish communication, trust with each other. All of those things have to be ironed out.
                                                          (Teacher, Secwepemc Nation)

In both communities, teachers described experiences of having to find ways to work across the generations when inviting Elders into the classroom. Some described it as "duking it out"; others found ways to compromise and realized that they also needed to change some of their own ways. Both teachers interviewed came from mainstream

educational backgrounds and had to learn to adapt to a totally new teaching environment.

The Elders' methods were at times much different than what these teachers were used to

in relation to managing their own classrooms. One teacher described this experience:

> *But there was still the situation, too, with my uncle, who's this gifted. . . . and I would keep on to him, 'I don't know how to work with Uncle. . . . he's just being silly.' But my sister would say to me, 'Yes, but you don't see his gifts.' And it took me a while to see his gifts. And so that was one of my teachings that when I look at [the] children, when I try to get them to... do it my way, then I remember my uncle and say 'No!' . . . 'OK, there's a teaching in here for me.' There's always another way to learn or another way to show that you are understanding something or another way to, so instead of sitting and teaching two plus two is four, three plus three is six, let's get up guys and let's do it! You hold your three, you hold up your three and . . . so let's play, let's move, let's move, and I think that's what he's talking [about]. Get up, move the kids around, sing a song, take a break, be silly.*

<div align="right">(Teacher, Secwepemc Nation)</div>

Accommodating Elders' needs

There was consensus that many Elders did not find their involvement in the

language nest program easy. While many Elders reportedly thrived and truly enjoyed the

work, they also felt the effects of working outside the home at an elderly age and the

energy it takes to care for young children full-time. It was suggested that perhaps

shortened hours or more condensed visits, such as two to three days on one particular

theme or unit and then some days off, might work better for some Elders.

Positive effects on Elders

It was reported by teachers that Elders who participated in the language nest

seemed to improve their own well-being by being involved. Their lives seemed to have a

new sense of purpose and they felt more connected and alive. One teacher who has been

to Aotearoa many times to learn from the Maori and observe their language nest

programs shared a story of one of the leaders of the movement who gave a "harsh talk" to

the Elders who know the language but are not sharing it. The story is of an Elder who

was prompted to get involved and the effect it had on him.

> *So she had her talk with them, and . . . the next day, she said, oh no, the next day
> this old, old grandfather comes with his cane, barely walking, and she said, 'I
> don't know how ancient he was.' She said, 'Coming to the Kohango Reo, are
> you?' Volunteering his time. 'Oh, my God, I didn't mean you!' [she thought to
> herself] But he came into the Kohango Reo and she said, 'Oh, I felt so bad, I gave
> too harsh of a talk. Oh, no!' she said, 'You know what happened? They invited me
> back for a celebration a couple of months later and remember that old
> gentleman? Here he comes, he was walking better, he was healthier. He was
> dying, he was on his deathbed when I saw him and he's alive now. He comes
> every day and the children love him. He loves coming and he's alive, he's got
> something to live for now.*

(Teacher, Secwepemc Nation)

One Elder shared her experience and explained how being involved in the

language nest has reintroduced the value and purpose of the language in her life. She

learned the language at home from her mother and stepfather. She was ridiculed and

teased by her peers for speaking the language and then married someone who did not

know it, so it became harder for her to maintain. However, she stood up to the

discouragement and continued to speak the language to those who understood it and to

her children as much as she felt she could while having a spouse who was not a

traditional speaker. She reported that she had lost some of her fluency from years of low

usage but was still able to contribute in the language nest and continues to gain it back

quickly. The following quote shows how some of the Elders felt more respected due to

the effects of the language nest. A community administrator explained:

> *Grandparents are not frustrated anymore because if they do say something in the
> language there's at least a flicker of response or there's some 'Oh, OK, this child
> actually has an idea of what I'm saying.' They're encouraged to use it more.
> Where before, if you were talking to your grandchildren and they don't
> understand a thing and they turn away from you when you're speaking, then
> that's like a slap in the face. What I've got to give you, you don't really want.*

(Administrator, Secwepemc Nation)

One teacher described the profound process that some Elders have had to go through to leave English behind and revive the traditional language which has been dormant inside them for many years. This example shows how language revitalization initiatives such as the language nest have had a healing effect for some Elders:

It's been a process, too, to make sure that circle stays strong, because sometimes our Elders, they've gone over some process too, to get through their pain and . . . their history with language. And so, I'm sure they've shed their tears, they've got mad at us, too, as teachers – 'You expect us to do this, when you know this has happened to us?' and yes, I do. 'Do not speak English. Speak the language.' 'Do you realize how long it took me to learn this English language and now you. . . ?' 'Yes, we do.' So it's been a process, but they've been going through their healing.
                                                        (Teacher, Secwepemc Nation)

In one of the communities a teacher reported the experience of having a circle formed in the language nest between the Elder who was in the role of grandmother, the teacher who played the role of parent, and the child. This quote encapsulates the potential of language nests to create an atmosphere supportive of intergenerational connectedness.

And I thought it was such a beautiful experience to have a grandmother . . . me maybe as a parent age and then these grandchildren. So right there in the classroom, the circle was formed. And so it's been a process, too, to make sure that circle stays strong.
                                                        (Teacher, Secwepemc Nation)

Parents.

Parental motivation

We rely on fluent speakers [to run the program] but [the] motivating force that sustains the movement are those who have lost the language.
                                                        (Administrator, Secwepemc Nation)

Parents self-reported as the driving force in both communities in getting language nests programs started. This was confirmed by teachers and administrators. In both communities, parents and teachers (who are often parents as well) discussed the fact that

they were denied the privilege of learning their language as children and now have a strong desire to acquire it as adults. Most parents of the children in the language nests had at least one parent who was a traditional speaker but for various reasons did not pass the language on.

This personal history of denied access to their language and a sense of "missing identity" was what seemed to drive parents.

> *I had very low self-esteem about being Native when I was younger. All through my life I was very ashamed of how I was, and I know that has a lot to do with what I do right now. I do not want my children to grow up in shame or naivety or ignorance about who they are. If we're going to be called down, at least know that is based on ignorance of somebody who's saying that. . . . For me growing up in a vacuum of not knowing my culture and not being told about who I am, I internalized everything that was said about me or Native people. I said, 'Well, that's got to be the truth because that's the only information that I have.'*
> (Administrator, Secwepemc Nation)

In addition to being the driving force, parents who believe strongly in the value and necessity of passing on the language are crucial to maintaining sustainable numbers of children in the language nest programs. The parents who were willing to "take the risk" of putting their children in the immersion program were an essential component to starting and maintaining a language nest program.

<u>Parents' fears</u>

Widespread subscription to language nest and immersion programs was curtailed in both First Nations communities by the fears of many parents. The main fear reported for parents in both communities was that children would not learn to read, write, and speak English properly and therefore would not succeed in the world.

> *Like some people worry about their English but they're going to get English, they are going to get English. Let me just guarantee you that. Every one of our children born in Canada are going to be English speakers. There's an ironclad guarantee about that. So don't worry about that. Yet, it definitely is a fear. That's*

why we only have 10 percent of our population in the surrounding area attending our school. Because people do not believe their children are going to succeed in the outside world by learning language, by learning their culture and by being involved in an immersion setting. They truly do not believe that.

(Teacher, Secwepemc Nation)

In one of the communities, some parents pulled their children out of the program because they wanted to see more tangible evidence of the traditional language acquired as well as other kinds of learning since it was elementary school level. Due to the sharp learning curve for traditional language, it may have seemed to some parents that their children were delayed in other areas such as math and reading.

One way parents seemed to alleviate their fears and justified their decision to go with the immersion route was working with their children on evenings and weekends to continue to build their English skills.

I do know most of them work with the children at home [on English]. With the other stuff, the reading and writing. . . . In some ways that's how they handle the fear.

(Administrator, Lil'wat Nation)

One parent reported that there was a common misperception of sub-standard care in the language nest compared to the regular daycare. It was a reality that the language nest program does not have all the same brightly coloured toys and poster-plastered walls, and the program operates out of a house rather than a "centre." Most parents did not understand that the home-based setting was intentional as a means of creating a simple environment free of distractions in order to focus on the language.

Teachers, administrators and parents reported that other parents expressed their resistance to the language nest and immersion schooling approaches by asking why they would want to participate and expose their child to a movement that they see as backward (with English schooling seen as progress). They also reported that, due to interracial or

intertribal marriage, some parents felt they could not raise their child in the language.

Others gave no reason for not subscribing to the programs.

> *Interviewer: I'm curious about what some of the reasons you think parents chose different avenues for childcare, or why the ones that don't bring their children to the language nest.*
> *Participant: It's just going to confuse them if they learn the language, or, All I want them to do is have an appreciation for language. I'm totally happy with them just knowing how to count, say colours and a few words, that's fine. I see no economic reason or I see no reason for them to have language, to be fulfilled as a person. So those are some of the main things that I hear about. . . . 'Oh that would be nice, but my child is special needs.' Or, 'That would be nice, but my husband is not Secwepemctsín. So they're not pure blood.' You hear every family has a reason for not choosing this program. Some of it is based on wrong information, some of it is based on fear, some of it just because.*
> (Community Administrator, Secwepemc Nation)

Parental involvement

Both communities initially had mandatory parent involvement policies that

included attending adult language classes and some forms of volunteerism. In one

community the volunteerism took the form of fundraising initiatives. In the other

community, parents were required to volunteer time in the classroom as helpers. Both

communities' program administrators eventually abandoned the parent involvement

policies, as they grew tired of being the "language and volunteer police" and did not want

to play this role any longer. While some parents are still involved in the language

revitalization movement, neither community had much direct parental involvement in the

language nest once that involvement was no longer monitored and organized by the

teachers and administrators.

In both communities the language classes for parents became too difficult to

enforce. In the community with volunteer classroom helpers, there were difficulties

reported because the parents did not speak the language. Children also reportedly would not listen as well to the teacher because their parent was present.

The teacher in one community reported that parents were overly involved at first in driving the direction and agenda, which also determined the curriculum. Although volunteerism was often helpful, the teacher in this community reported feeling "watched" by parents who feared that their children might be missing out on what is offered in a more mainstream classroom. This was not the case in the other community, where the program was more teacher-driven and guided by the involved Elders. This difference might have been due to the fact that in the first community, the language nest program was more structured and operated like an elementary school. Therefore, parents were more actively concerned about what their children were learning. This report of heavy parent involvement in classroom management and curriculum issues contrasted with the observation of the community administrator that parents were not involved enough because they needed to focus more on learning the language themselves. This administrator reported that it was not enough for parents to simply bring their children in, hand them over, and say, "Here, teach them."

Teachers.

Hiring and preparing teachers

In both communities, the first teachers who started out in the language nest were not fluent speakers but had some background in education. They were matched with Elders who were traditional speakers and concentrated their energies on saying very little while in the immersion classroom. In that way, the need for the skills and abilities of trained childcare and education providers combined with fluent speakers was handled.

I didn't speak the language at the time, right. I came in just keeping my mouth shut, running around after kids and doing different things. The Elder we hired really didn't have any idea what to do, so we just said, 'Let's just play with them, let's just do whatever you do with kids but just all speak the language.' Gradually I picked up more language and the Elder got a little more confident, and that's how it started. Not a lot of planning when it started, more like a divine inspiration more than anything else!

(Administrator, Secwepemc Nation)

Members of both communities expressed a need for more traditional speakers who were "qualified" to work with children. They were not speaking about Elders but rather ECE or teaching professionals who either spoke the language or were willing to run the program without speaking.

We need another fluent speaker or person that's able to teach. We have many fluent speakers but they don't have the ability to teach. . . . They were talking about starting another class [new language nest intake] at the beginning of this year, but the issue came up of who's going to teach it. There's no teacher. They need to have a teaching certificate. You can't just pick up a fluent speaker and say that this is a teacher.

(Parent, Lil'wat Nation)

Participants in both communities reported that finding a fluent speaker with a teaching or ECE certificate who wanted to teach in the language was one of the main challenges in finding teachers for the language nest. There were some fluent community members with the relevant credentials (i.e. ECE certificate or B.Ed.) that participants reported did not want to teach at the immersion school or language nest and instead chose to teach in mainstream programs; however, most of the community members with these credentials were not traditional language speakers. One community administrator reports that the community members described were not well prepared for either team teaching, or setting up and directing a program without using their voice (since they had to be silent in order not to contaminate the language nest environment with English). Teachers and

administrators reported that these practitioners also needed to have a genuine desire and commitment to learning the language themselves.

<u>ECE licensing dilemmas</u>

Participants in both communities reported avoiding formal ECE licensing for the language nest program approach. One of the communities avoided ECE licensing by setting up their program more like a primary elementary school. The other community gained formal ECE licensing approval many years ago when they first attempted a language nest program but is now running it on their own authority. They found in their first attempt (which involved formal licensing) that they had to hire from outside the community in order to meet the ECE credentialing requirement and ended up with caregivers who did not speak the language or have a desire to learn it. That first attempt at the language nest eventually folded, partly due to the fact that ECE licensing regulations did not work for the staffing needs of the program. Therefore in this community's resurrection of the language nest program they strategically avoided the ECE licensing option due to the difficulties it created when trying to staff their language nest program. This independent operation was made possible through self-sufficient funding and operating under their own authority.

> *The licensing bit definitely gets in the way of trying to reach your goals because there are so many hoops that you got to jump through and it takes time. It takes you away from what you want to do and everything takes time. Life goes on and I wasn't ready to go for two years of schooling to do this because I also wanted to get going on an immersion school, which was a whole other venture in itself. The answer is yes, it gets in the way.*
>
> (Administrator, Secwepemc Nation)

Since reviving the language nest in their community in the last few years, the administrators of this community have discussed putting the teachers through ECE

training. However, the teachers already have Bachelor's degrees in education and one

was currently working on a Master's in education; therefore, going back to college to

attain a one- or two-year entry-level certificate did not make sense for these advanced

educators. The only other alternative, mentioned sardonically, was to send the traditional

speakers (Elders) to get ECE training, but this was seen as an even more ridiculous

notion. One community administrator conveyed that it was insulting to suggest that

Elders would need training from Euro-western oriented training programs in order to play

with the children of their community.

> *We need to trust that our Elders know how to play with children and if something*
> *is not going well, we'll talk about it later when the children are not around.*
> (Community Administrator, Secwepemc Nation)

The only clear advantage to ECE licensing route reported was the funding and

subsidy options for parents it provides. However, both communities avoided the formal

ECE licensing route because of the difficulties it created for staffing the program due to

the credentialing requirement that did not accommodate for traditional speakers or a "no

English" environment.

Community administrators for the language nests did not report being entirely

resistant to the ECE licensing model. They agreed with standards if they were reasonable

and certainly wanted to attend to the holistic development needs of their community's

children. They reported being open to having outside visitors come in for such purposes

as providing health information sessions, but would require that the presentations and

interactions be provided in the traditional language.

Positive effects on teachers

The teachers in both communities reported that working in the language nest provided an avenue for gaining, practicing, and continuing to use the language daily. Both teachers reported that they learned (or relearned) the language alongside the children in the language nest. One teacher humbly identified herself as one of the "babies" in the language.

One teacher commented that throughout the years, with the same Elders participating and sharing traditional stories and activities, her understanding has grown immensely and the experience has brought her great joy and satisfaction. In her words, she is no longer a "baby" in the language but more like a "toddler" now. The other teacher reported having been a fluent speaker as a child, so her experience was of "relearning" alongside the children rather than of being a "baby" in the language. She described her experience more as remembering the language and of gaining confidence in speaking it again.

The teachers not only spoke of an opportunity to learn or renew their knowledge of the language, but also reported how they have had the opportunity to learn cultural ways of being in the world. This was largely due to their exposure to and relationship with the Elders who came in to teach.

> *My uncle [is] teaching me to be more flexible, the way I teach children, the way I handle people, the way I see the world, the way I treat the world.*
> (Teacher, Secwepemc Nation)

Challenges for teachers

Teachers in both communities expressed a frustration that the children readily learned the language faster than they could. At the same time, the children often looked

to the teachers for guidance or translation if they did not understand the Elders. The

children assumed that the teachers knew the language and could bridge the language gap

for them with the Elders.

Another challenge reported for teachers in both communities, who had worked in

mainstream ECE or the regular school system before switching to heritage language

immersion, was not only leaving English behind but also leaving behind mainstream

Canadian culture curriculum.

> *I think the most difficult part for [the teacher] is that she's a teacher and she's been a regular classic teacher for years and then you put her into this kind of program. It's very hard for her to take away what she knows. Like the parents, they don't want Valentines and they don't want Halloween and all those kinds of stuff, those are all English things. It's very hard for her to break away from that because all teachers depend on these, they use them as their learning tools. So you take all those away and what else does she know? That's hard.*
> (Administrator, Lil'wat Nation)

Practical aspects.

Keeping the approach simple

> *There is no magic to [the language nest], you don't need to teach the language, just speak it. It is so simple and natural it scares people.*
> (Administrator, Secwepemc Nation)

The leaders of these projects alluded to "keeping it simple" in many ways.

Participants in both communities conveyed the importance of not making programs more

complicated than they needed to be. They encouraged communities to explore and

acknowledge the resources that already exist in their communities and to start from there.

They discussed the importance of not allowing toys or flashy things to drown out the

Elders and the language. They were aware that over-stimulation takes the focus away

from the primary aim of traditional language transfer.

One of the two communities was operating more like a primary or ECE classroom. The other community, whose language nest children are younger, have set up a program that was intended to recreate the feel of "Grandma's house" – very simple without much clutter or distraction.

> *People can walk in and say 'Wow, this is easy, we can find any junky old house and do this out of it.' Exactly! This is what we need to remove the mystery behind creating a language nest because all we're doing is inviting children over to grandma's house and speaking the language all day and playing with them. There's no mystery to that. . . . We go down to the lake and we play logs and we put rocks on logs and we make those into canoes, we go out into the fields and we play with the flowers and we make flower wreaths and stuff . . . we don't need to overcomplicate it. I think that's what people tend to do. They overcomplicate the whole thing. We forget that children need love and nurturing, they need positive reinforcement, they need acceptance, they need to be safe, they need healthy food, there's real basics that we need to do, we don't need to worry about too many other things. In a nutshell, that's what I think a language nest is.*
>
> (Administrator, Secwepemc Nation)

Capital resources and funding issues

Surprisingly, neither community reported a lack of funding or resources as a major obstacle. However, it was reported that there must be some kind of funding source, however minimal it may be. Even if the space was donated and many people volunteered their time, there were some real costs to start-up and operations that were unavoidable. There was a clear recognition that eventually people (especially Elders) would need to get paid.

One community administrator described the process of getting started:

> *[A community member suggested] 'there's an empty building that's not being used, maybe you could write a letter or talk to chief and council about using the building.' I just basically was naïve and had lots of energy and had this dream and went around organizing, getting the building, saying that we'll fundraise, we'll figure out a way to hire the Elders to do this, and I made some posters up, some brochures, and we got a couple of people interested and that's how it started. I fundraised enough throughout the summer to hire one Elder in the fall and then I volunteered to be the caregiver for the kids. On our first day of opening*

we had this big empty building with maybe a couple of things in it, not much, with one Elder hired and myself and we had my child, [another teacher's] two-year-old and another lady on the reserve's child who was the same age. So we had about three two-year-olds and that went on for about three weeks, then a couple of others trickled in. By the end of the year I think we had seven or eight children.
(Administrator, Secwepemc Nation)

Participants in both communities reported the few main capital resources required were a dedicated space (i.e., a building), sleeping cots (depending on the ages of children), child-sized table(s) and chairs, a few toys, some containers for the toys, and at least enough funding to pay an Elder.

Neither community had a fee system in place for the language nest programs at the time of the study (however, one community implemented a policy of $60/month or the equivalent in volunteer hours a few months later). One community administrator explained, "It should be given for free. For years we never charged for language and we just raised children in the language." Both communities have found unique ways around funding challenges by either reallocating education dollars or extensive and ongoing fundraising efforts. One community did fundraising initially through activities such as bingos and bake sales but more recently have innovatively used their expertise to run language training programs for heritage language teachers from across the province. The revenues generated from these language training endeavours are reinvested into language programs such as the language nest. The other community found room in their tribal school budget to get the program started but continued regularly fundraising efforts as well through activities such as bingos.

While funding has not yet inhibited these particular communities from reaching their goals of starting a language nest, it was reported that specific funding for the operation of language nests would be a great relief.

Because with [funding] comes support, comes networking, and we don't need to say we're something that we're not. We're not a daycare; I don't want to say we're a daycare. We're not a Head Start; I don't want to have to say we're a Head Start. If there was funding for language nests, for exactly what we're doing, having babies from birth to five years old raised in the language, I'm all for that. How much easier it would be.

(Administrator, Secwepemc Nation)

Challenges to Starting and Maintaining Language Nest Programs

Resistance.

Participants in both communities reported facing various forms of resistance and ridicule towards the language nest and immersion programs. Although some of the negative encounters described were from outside the community, the main resistance participants reported came from within the communities themselves. All but one participant mentioned the negative residential school experience of many First Nations communities as the primary reason community members shied away from language use and regeneration.

The other thing is we are also dealing with the residual effects of residential school, you're talking about a lot of damaged people. Even if the will is there, they already name to every positive thing they can match it to a hundred negatives. It's already overwhelming and they've been told all their lives that you're a dumb and stupid Indian and this and that, you know, and you're language isn't worth anything, you're not worth anything. So they believe it. They've internalized it to the point where even though deep down they really want it, all those negative messages come back to haunt them. And then they're sunk. I was fortunate that I was educated, I had parents that loved me, that didn't raise us in a too dysfunctional environment, so the only thing I felt I really lacked was a sense of identity, of my language and culture and our heritage. And because I'm a problem solver I said, 'I can solve that one! I can do that!'

(Community Administrator, Secwepemc Nation)

One of the Elders shared her experience of residential school where the children themselves hushed each other when they spoke their language. She reported that it was possible that residential school authorities conducted themselves unethically when it

came to discipline around traditional language use but she did not experience this herself.

She felt more that the behaviour of hushing each other when the language was spoken

was passed down from one year of schoolchildren to the next. She believed that it is our

own people who have now created barriers to learning and passing down the language,

that residential schools are no longer needed to silence the language. She explained her

belief that each individual is responsible for healing from the past.

> *I think that people have to, when they have had negative experiences with the language or they associate, I think they have to talk about it. I think they have to get it centred in themselves because it's not the language that's the offender, it's other outside things and you've got to get it centred in yourself.*
> (Elder, Secwepemc Nation)

Community parents have been described as fearful of the traditional language.

This has manifested in parents avoiding, stalling, and refusing to participate in the

immersion language programs. One parent illustrated this by recounting an example of

another parent's refusal to send their child to the immersion program.

> *You know, like we had one person put the [language immersion] school down. Saying, 'I want my kid to go be a doctor, and I'm not sending him up there. . . .' I asked them, 'Are you scared of the language?' That's what they're scared of. They took it away, now you're scared to take it back.*
> (Parent, Secwepemc Nation)

One community administrator reported that it was partly their own fear that held

them back for close to 10 years from implementing an immersion program. Community

administrators feared that the programs would not be a success or that they would let the

parents down with their attempts.

> *The greatest barrier is our own thinking that there are too many barriers.*
> (Administrator, Secwepemc Nation)

Two participants talked about keeping ourselves "down" and "stuck" by focusing

too much on the negatives and on what was lacking, which only causes people to lose

sight of the real work of getting children on the path to learning the language. These participants encouraged people not to waste time focusing on obstacles or avoiding personal responsibility.

Another form of resistance reportedly faced was overt verbal attacks from within and outside the community. One of the parents described being confronted by a teacher from the local public school who surmised that the immersion school children were not as smart as other children. Another such experience of being challenged was described by one of the teachers:

> *We have an Elder on the reserve where he tests, in the beginning, he would test us, 'Oh, you guys want to teach language to the kids?' So he would come at me with full, full language. In the beginning I maybe caught a word, if that. I didn't even know what he was talking about. I stood there dumbfounded. Then he walked away.*
>
> (Teacher, Secwepemc Nation)

Participants in one community also described the gossip and hearsay that surrounds the language immersion programs. Whether it was accusations of nepotism or rumours founded on misinformation, the program organizers reported keeping their focus on the language preservation activities and showed professionalism in not responding to such criticisms. A parent from this community expressed her strong belief in the program and her wish to have her choice to participate in the language nest respected.

> *It really doesn't matter to me what your choice as a parent is going to be, what your choice as a human being is, as long as you understand where I'm coming from and you do not judge me for what I'm doing. I certainly know, people say they're not going to send their children to immersion because they're not going to be able to graduate from high school or go to university. . . . I truly believe my children are going to go to university and they're going to succeed in any role they choose to.*
>
> (Administrator, Secwepemc Nation)

Another form of resistance experienced by community participants was more subtle. Indirect resistance manifested itself through silence and lack of communication and cooperation by community members and leaders. Those involved in language nest and immersion programming felt their efforts were at times undermined in a number of ways. In one such instance, resistance was shown by some traditional speakers who would not contribute to the language nest. Even more discouraging to all participants was that some of these same Elders also refused to speak the traditional language to the language nest children when they encountered them in the community.

An administrator in one community shared another example of the subtle resistance shown by members of the community when another childcare program received funding in their community and was located right next to the language nest. This was done without any consultation or consideration for funding of the language nest program by chief and council and other community members who spearheaded the new initiative.

Waitlists and subscription rates.

Participants in both communities reported having waitlists for the language nest programs but for different reasons. In one community, the waitlist was due to a four-year pilot program approach which has a one-time intake at the start. In that case, any new children whom parents have wanted to enroll after the program started were put on a waitlist. In the other community, the waitlist was caused by a lack of space and extra staff that inhibited further intake. At present, eleven children are enrolled, which is full capacity in terms of space and the number of qualified helpers available.

Despite the fact that waitlists exist for the programs in both communities, the subscription level for the language nest and immersion schools is relatively low. One community reported that approximately 10% of the children in the appropriate age category currently choose the immersion program. In the other community, approximately 30% of children at the K-7 level and 8% of preschool aged children are enrolled in immersion programming. In addition, this community also has a full-time daycare as well as an Aboriginal Head Start program. The low subscription rate in these language immersion programs limits the funding and community support available to the programs for expansion

English dominance.

Participants in both communities reported in different ways that the dominance of English in society, in the community, in themselves, and in others they worked with (including the children) was still a major challenge. When asked how many days a week the children attend language nest, one community administrator answered, "Only three days a week, and I say 'only' because we are still not overpowering English [in the children's lives]." One parent reported that her child does not speak the language at home because neither she nor her husband speaks it. It was also reported in both communities that in most peer and family situations, the language nest children reverted to English, including in the language nest itself.

In both communities the teachers and administrators were the strictest about language use. At times they had to remind the Elders not to use English, which was a risky venture as it could result in offending or irritating the Elders. Teachers also reported difficulties in avoiding English in the classroom. They said that it was easy at first to get

frustrated, and that those were the times they would most often revert to English. They used reminder systems, such as flashing red cards at each other or drowning each other out in the language if they heard someone speaking English. If a verbal reminder was used that this was not a time for English, it was, of course, done in the traditional language.

> *I spend a lot of time at the very beginning reminding, 'Don't speak English.' I use my language and I say that, 'no speaking English, remember what we're here for' and you know I get dirty looks from the Elders sometimes or I get frustration, but I'm strong enough to handle that.*
>
> (Administrator, Secwepemc Nation)

Successes and Outcomes

Language nest as catalyst.

K-12 immersion schools

In one community, once the children of the founding parents became school-aged, parents were faced with the decision of what to do to continue their child's language learning. In response to this dilemma they launched an immersion school, starting with kindergarten. Each year they expanded the school by one year, reaching high school levels in the past few years.

The other community started their language nest program a few years ago as a preschool, but the program design grew by one grade each year to accommodate the children who were moving through. It is now more like a K-2 primary school. This was a four-year trial program, and the community hopes to keep the program moving forward to higher grades of immersion to accommodate the children who began two years ago.

<u>Changing attitudes</u>

Two of the interviewees reported that they were extremely skeptical when first

introduced to the idea of language nests and "reintroducing" the language to young

children in the community. Their reactions ranged from strong resistance to a spouse's

desire to send the couple's children to the language nest to an Elder who was convinced

that the idea would not work.

> *She had come to me and asked 'Mom, we want to start this nest and we want it all in the language. And it would be for babies and maybe up to four years old or five. And call it like a daycare or something but it would be the nest, language nest is what it would be called. Could you teach, could you join us and speak Secwepemctsín to the children?' And I thought, 'It won't work. It won't work.' I didn't say that to her. I said 'Yeah, sure.' 'Cause I was thinking I'd done a lot of dumb things in my life, why not? Just like I was humoring her or something. 'Sure,' I said, 'I will.'*
>
> (Elder, Secwepemc Nation)

Several participants reported that some of the other parents in the community who

were originally skeptical or opposed to the language nest and immersion approaches

began to change their minds. They watched their young nieces or nephews go through the

program and they witnessed them making the transition to public school with ease (which

was defined as a definite marker of success). They would see the children perform

somewhere in the language and remark how beautiful it was and how happy the Elders

were. These non-subscriptive parents also saw the children in the language nest being

spoken to in the language by their teachers or others in the community and observed that

the children could understand. These types of outcomes from the language nest softened

some parents' resistant attitudes towards the immersion programs.

Effects on children.

<u>Self-esteem/positive cultural identity formation</u>

All eight participants commented on some aspect of the children's increased self-esteem, pride or positive cultural identity formation as a result of the language nest program.

> *Yesterday we had to drive and he said 'You know what? I learned this word today. It's tsqúqum (Secwepemctsín word for mountain). Do you know what tsqúqum is, Auntie?', 'Oh, let me see, let me think.' [She'd say.] He says, 'Oh, it's mountain! Ha! You didn't know that, Auntie?!' I did but I didn't tell him. 'Oh, no, I didn't know that. Did you learn other words you can teach me?' 'Yeah, I learned another word,' he said. So he was teaching me and I thought, 'This is cool.' 'Oh,' I said, "xexe7" [which means, 'you're getting so smart!'] and he's sitting there . . . I can just see how over the years as we're learning the language our kids are getting more confident and stronger.*
>
> (Teacher, Secwepemc Nation)

Other respondents reported that the children had a "bigger worldview," were more in touch with the Earth, and were more respectful. They developed calmer demeanors, better appreciated their history, identity, and traditions, and had hope that all was not lost in their community. Participants in both communities additionally commented that they believed the children were also developing a cultural belief system by way of the Elders' influence in the classroom and the stories they told.

<u>One step closer to fluency</u>

Although language nest programs alone may not be able to produce fluent speakers due to the age of the children and the length of time in the program, both communities reported that the language nest children were one step closer to fluency. One community has continued from the language nest into K-7 immersion school and has successfully graduated several fluent speakers. In this community, the main role of

language nest was to better prepare the children to enter the language immersion program. The teachers, parents and administrators in that community reported that those children are ahead of other children who entered "cold" and predicted they would be much "purer" speakers in the end. The other community, which was in the second year of the language nest, reported that they can see that children are beginning to understand the language more and more as time goes on.

> *They really are beginning to know all the things you show them. What to do when you tell them to go wash their hands, when you tell them to sit down, they sit down. Get their lunch . . . when they don't want to listen they pretend they don't know what you're talking about [laughs].*
>
> (Elder, Lil'wat Nation)

Children as teachers: preparation for leadership

Parents and teachers gave many examples of the ways in which the children are leaders in the language. Both parents interviewed reported that they were learning the language partly from their children at home. Both reported that they would ask their children how to say something they were not sure of and that their children spontaneously corrected their pronunciation or word usage if they made a mistake.

One parent reported reading her children stories in the language and said that they helped her fill in the blanks when she could not figure out a word or a concept. They also taught her the songs they sang at the language nest; when she substituted as a teacher in the mainstream daycare, she shared the songs there, which was another way that the language nest had positive reverberations throughout the community.

One of the parents reported that when she spoke to her five-year-old son in English when he came home from the language nest, he said to her in their language, "Don't speak English." She said that it really made her think and pushed her to speak in

their language. Parents in both communities reported that trying to keep up with their children was a great motivator to continuing with their own language learning.

The parents also reported that when they volunteered in the language nest, the children helped them out if they struggled with the language. One parent expressed her frustration because she felt she should have been teaching them, but she accepted the role reversal in that particular situation.

In one community, the first children who went through the language nest and then K-7 immersion have now graduated and work at the school as curriculum developers. One of the teachers reported that she has conferred with these past graduates (who are now young adults) on certain words or concepts that she does not know. She respectfully referred to them as her "little Elders."

> *When I'm stuck, guess what? I'm going to my 'little Elders,' and I'm asking them to help me and sure enough, they sit back and they'll base their answer on a story they've heard from their grandfather and [an] answer will come out of that for me.*
> (Teacher, Secwepemc Nation)

One of these same immersion school graduates gave his valedictorian speech in his language at the local public school, where he attended his few last years of high school and sent the message that it was "our responsibility to continue our language." This was another way that these children prepare and motivate others to be the leaders of the future.

Sharing resources/networking.

The community that has been conducting immersion initiatives for a longer period of time now offers language teachers' training workshops in the summer. They have researched new methods for language teaching and have passed them on through these

workshops. Workshops participants created new resources such as songs and "big books" that can be translated into any language and therefore shared with other communities that want to adapt them for their programs. The workshop participants have started to create a small, informal network of people who share ideas about planning and conducting immersion programs in First Nations communities. However, it was also expressed in both communities that better support systems are needed for those communities specifically attempting language nest programs.

The healing potential of language learning.

An administrator described how the traditional language can be a healer for the community. She described the language as a gift that was available to help all Aboriginal people feel whole again. She expressed that not allowing the language in (to oneself) was a manifestation of "generational shame" passed down. She hoped that all community members would have the opportunity to feel the joy of speaking the language of their ancestors.

Most of the teachers, parents and administrators reported that they had not experienced being spoken to in their language at home as children. One teacher shared her experience of having her mother (a traditional speaker) come into the classroom and share the language with the children. This teacher had the opportunity to experience "re-mothering" in the language and found it to have a profound personal impact on her.

> *So those were my beginning classes. I would sit down with these little children and we were learning together and it was really a beautiful experience too because it was almost like having my mother over again too. But I was an adult being a child. That's what I sort of equate my language to now. I was a baby in the language, a baby with the babies in the language.*
>
> (Teacher, Secwepemc Nation)

Language evolution.

The community that has taught immersion longer and at higher grade levels has had to deal with the creation of new words in the language. Their attitude was as radical as any other they have expressed in not letting anything stand in their way. They reported simply using common sense, consulting with the Elders, and coming up with new words when needed. Once local consensus was reached, the new word was made official by being added to their compilations of words. This was a successful outcome of the language nest and immersion programs as it shows movement and innovation for reinstating Indigenous languages as living languages.

Cultural continuation through language.

Both parents and teachers described how culture is embedded in the language. A teacher described her experience of seeing the language nest children come alive when they hear traditional music.

> *We've gone to a couple of Elders' luncheons. [The children] start to hear the drums and they start dancing, even on the floor, between the tables.*
>
> (Teacher, Lil'wat Nation)

Teachers reported that they do not worry about having to incorporate or take time out for culture the way they did in mainstream classrooms. Culture was naturally included when teaching in the language. Many of the songs, stories, concepts and activities done in the language exemplify the culture of the people.

CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The results of the study showed the key components needed for starting and maintaining language nest programs in B.C.. Barriers and challenges to the language nest preschool immersion approach were highlighted and positive outcomes shared. This chapter discusses the implications of the study, recommendations for other communities interested in starting language nests, and 'ways forward' to revitalizing Indigenous languages in B.C. and beyond.

Implications

Language nest programs can be successfully implemented in B.C.

Language nest programs initiated in other parts of the world have been highly successful (King, 2001; Warner, 2001). The two B.C. First Nations communities involved in the study have shown that the language nest approach is compatible, transferable, and useful for First Nations language revitalization in the B.C. context. Their successes have great potential as models for other First Nations communities in B.C..

Models for overcoming barriers.

The two communities in the study offered many examples of ways that common barriers to implementing language nest programs in B.C. can be overcome. The kinds of issues that these communities faced are similar to what many First Nations would encounter when trying to undertake such initiatives. The approaches taken by both communities to overcome obstacles are a model that other First Nations can use for

inspiration and practical assistance to initiating language nest programs in their own communities.

Language nest as a means to community-level revitalization movement.

Language nests have been an instigator for Indigenous communities in B.C. and abroad to expand language revitalization endeavours beyond this most critical approach of targeting young children. In both communities involved in the study, the language nest programs were catalysts for other language revitalization endeavours such as elementary and secondary school immersion, weekly language classes for adults, annual language retreats for language teachers and week-long immersion 'camps' for community members. Similarly, the Maori of Aotearoa extended their language revitalization efforts from language nest programs to primary and secondary immersion and eventually to Maori-speaking post-secondary education institutions (Smith Tuhiwai, 2004).

Contribution to sovereignty movement.

> *We can't be wiped off the face of the earth because we still have land here. We are of this land... and your language is the only way you can prove who you are.*
> (Elder, Secwepemc Nation)

As mentioned in the literature review, many First Nations people advocate that keeping First Nations languages alive and functioning in communities is a crucial aspect to maintaining a separate identity and avoiding full assimilation into non-Aboriginal Canadian culture. A common point of view of First Nations participants in this study was that language can prove First Nations are separate and distinct and existed with fully functioning societies prior to contact. One teacher in the study shared, "Our language is *us*. It's our being, it's who we are." This point of view is linked to the belief that culture and language are inextricable; without its language, a culture would quickly die.

Language nest programs contribute positively to the First Nations sovereignty movement. The Elder interviewed at the Secwepemc Nation reinforced this view, telling how the language is linked and therefore significant to the concept of traditional territory:

> *I always say, if I walked outside and I rubbed the dirt, my ancestors are in this dirt, from way back. Your language is right here, on the ground, right on the land. Of course you should know this language, you're right of this dirt, this and it's real....*
>
> (Elder, Secwepemc Nation)

Recommendations

Take personal responsibility.

The communities involved in the study modeled the importance of taking personal responsibility for language revitalization in one's own community. It is clear that while many First Nations people talk about wanting to do something about the languages that are dying, too few take a personal stand to initiate a tangible project themselves. Depending on others to solve the problem of rapidly depleting First Nations languages may be the final act to eradicating them. Burnaby (1997) reports that the single most important factor to successful language stabilization activities is the presence of leadership.

> *We are getting less Elders now and not very many people use the language and if we don't start now it's going to be lost.*
>
> (Teacher, Lil'wat Nation)

Recognizing the urgency of the movement towards First Nations language revitalization is critical. The last generation of Indigenous language speakers is elderly. They are passing on at an alarming rate and taking the language with them. The time is now to do whatever one can, no matter how big or small the undertaking may be. Each of the communities in the study started language nest programs with the initiative and drive

of just a few people. The effect of one person cannot be underestimated. Any First Nations person who is serious about language revitalization must take personal responsibility and act immediately.

Educate parents of young children.

If the children of a community are not learning the language, the language will die out. If a community is serious about saving their language, they need to focus on the parents of young children in the community. One Elder involved in the study shared her thoughts that parents are not educated about bilingualism but should educate themselves before making decisions about preschool and schooling for their children. Communities should actively promote and educate parents on the benefits of immersion and bilingualism as well as the advantages of exposing children to the language at as young an age as possible. The researcher suggested the creation of a pamphlet or brochure with factual information in accessible language to help alleviate parents' fears of immersion. This idea was well received by both communities; however, as discussed below, other strategies might be more suitable in some communities.

Implement programs that match the community's goals.

Depending on a community's language goals, different approaches are more suitable than others. Those communities who want to keep their language as a living language, where the generations that follow not only understand the language but speak it, need to implement initiatives that create fluency. Language nest programs may create fluency in children if they start young enough and stay in the program full-time until they are school-aged. However, even if children do not gain fluency by the time they leave the language nest, the program provides essential building blocks for deeper and higher

levels of language learning in the future. If fluency is the community's language revitalization goal, it is critical to situate language nests within a larger plan for acquiring and maintaining fluency.

Most community participants expressed a hope and dream for themselves and their community's children to gain fluency. It is important for communities to have realistic expectations for the likely outcomes of the initiatives they undertake. One participant in the study gave an example of this when discussing an adult language-learning initiative launched in her community. She commented that people could not expect to take a six-week course in the language and walk out with fluency. It is important that community members understand what it takes for individuals and communities to acquire and maintain a language.

Drawing on the reports of linguists working in the language revitalization field, the following table has been created matching language revitalization activities with the likely outcomes of levels of language acquisition (Anthony et al., 2003; Fettes, 1992; Fishman, 1991; Hinton & Hale, 2001; Wurm, 1998).

Table 1 Likely outcomes of language revitalization activities.

Language revitalization strategies:	*Levels of language acquisition:*
• Documentation and preservation • Weekly language classes (2-3 hours a week as a 'subject' in K-12 classroom, as a university subject or as an adult evening class), including some cultural event based or land-based learning activities • Immersion programs (preschool, K-12 and adult)	• Archival (record) • Symbolic/Ceremonial – use of common words and phrases (i.e., greetings, short speeches), memorized songs, rehearsed use in prayer, labeling use (i.e., traffic and street signs) • Conversational and fluency

This typology is not meant as a judgment of initiatives that communities are trying but rather to help communities anticipate what the likely outcomes would be to the approaches they may be considering. Doing a realistic assessment of the community language situation and matching goals with methods is an important planning initiative to any community language revitalization effort (Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer, 1998). Considering the information provided in the table may put communities into better positions to make more informed policy decisions and to allocate funds in ways that meet their community's language goals. It is also important to keep in mind that different approaches to implementation and program configuration will work better for different communities. The two communities involved in the current study took very different approaches to language nest programming, but found the best way of doing it to suit their communities' needs and available resources.

Practical strategies and suggestions.

Observations and discussions with participants in the study produced the following list of program development essentials and strategies for communities aspiring to start language nest programs.

Structure

Both communities reported the importance of having both a structure and the basics in terms of early childhood care in place. Both programs started with greeting each other in the language, followed by prayer time, snack time, song time, free play, outside play, and so forth. Although these activities and routines were similar to those in mainstream childcare and elementary school, the key difference is that they were all done in the language and they helped to provide structure. One teacher stressed that without

structure there was chaos and that it was at those times when the use of English happened (i.e., children hitting other children).

Focus on speaking

Although parents in one community pushed for reading and writing, both the teacher in that community and the Elder in the other community were adamant that the program design needed to minimize emphasis on reading and writing and focus on the spoken language. They agreed that if there was too much emphasis on these things the children would forget about the oral language and not learn how to speak.

Strict use of the heritage language

Teachers were adamant that one must also not accept English from the children. One strategy they reported was repeating back to the children in the language what the children had said in English. Teachers also emphasized that it is important to use a lot of positive reinforcement when the children spontaneously use the language.

Participants reported the importance of continuing to use the language when interacting with parents at drop-off and pick-up time. Teachers reported using gestures, props and body language as much as possible to help parents understand and to avoid reverting to English in front of the children. However, teachers also reported that if there was a life-threatening situation and caregivers had to communicate with the parents about an incident, they would step outside away from the children and only then would they use English.

Teachers reported that it was important not to translate to English or the children would not listen to the language. This was something that had to be negotiated with the Elders who came in. Naturally it was frustrating for Elders to talk in a language that no

else understood, and there was an understandable tendency to translate so that there was communication happening. However, teachers found it was important to find other ways to communicate and to keep the language use pure with no leaning on English.

Culture as curriculum

Teachers in both communities reported using a lot of singing in their programs. Children love to sing and they will pick up the "new" language sounds and remember new words more easily. Both programs reported using traditional drumming and dancing as tools for learning the language as well. This helped to incorporate cultural concepts into the singing, as some of the other songs were English translations of children's classic such as "Itsy Bitsy Spider." One teacher was encouraged by the Elders to sing to the children more than talk because as a new speaker her pronunciation still needed much work. A cultural curriculum which included songs was found to be a useful way of learning and integrating sounds and words for both the adults 'learning alongside' as well as the children. Similarly in Maori language nests, great emphasis is placed on songs and acting out words (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

Use full language

One Elder emphasized that teachers should be sure not to leave out words they might think are too difficult for the children. She held the strong belief that children need to be exposed to the full range of the language. Cairns (1986) supports this approach in reporting that children respond best to speech that is just beyond their current level of functioning. This Elder also encouraged teachers of the language always to speak in full sentences or phrases and not to teach one word at a time because this is not how language is spoken.

... like say I have a cup here and I was teaching you the language, it would be me7 ste7 ke r let, I'm going to drink tea. I don't say clluqwme7(word for cup in Secwepemctsin). I'd say it fully, me7 ste7 ke r let. So it's natural and sometimes you can repeat it and you're kind of like playing all the time. Like you're saying it. And that's how we all learn our first language. Mom or Grandma or Dad didn't say 'Cup, cup, cup'(pointing to the cup in her hand). Do you remember anybody telling you that? Whether it was English or whatever language? No. You ask another adult, ketctseme t'ek clluqwme7(asking for a cup in Secwepemctsin) and then you give me a cup and little child will see it, the brain says, 'Oh, she gave her a cup.'

(Elder, Secwepemc Nation)

Be excessively descriptive

Observation of the two immersion programs showed that being overly descriptive with everything one does, saying everything out loud as it is being done, and using repetition were important methods language teachers used for language transfer.

Traditional name-giving

Both communities introduced the practice of using traditional names for the children in the language nest as a way of encouraging language use. It set the tone for heritage language learning and reminded the children that when they walk through the doors into the language nest, it is time to speak the language. In one of the communities, giving names to the children became an unexpected community development exercise when many families had to coordinate and consult their relatives for appropriate names.

Ensure language interaction directly with children

Although in a natural setting children would pick up some language from adult-adult interactions, the true language learning reportedly happens when children are spoken to directly and requested to respond. Language acquisition theory supports that successful approaches to language acquisition must be in the form of interactive, social speech (Cairns, 1986). Participants reported this interplay of language directly with the

children as key to heritage language acquisition. In addition, it was reported by one

teacher that if the children are left to play on their own they easily revert back to

communicating in English.

> *I was raised in a family where my parents spoke the language and they never spoke it to us. So I grew up thinking of it as an adult language or their secret parent language. So that's why I guess I'm a little bit more sensitive than others to say, 'We forgot about the kids here.' Remember we're not letting the kids in. So I always make sure that I do the reminders or that I'm bringing the kids into play so that there's some interplay between all the generations.*
>
> (Administrator, Secwepemc Nation)

Creating curriculum materials

Participants in both communities reported a combined approach of making their

own curriculum materials and translating other more mainstream materials. Some

participants were able to ask Elders to translate or had other support people who would

create the resources needed.

Participants in both communities talked about the creation of "big books," which

are large, illustrated storybooks with the words to the story written in the traditional

language in large print along the bottom of the pages. The books were most often hand-

drawn and manually written, then laminated for durability. Other books were translated

from English as they were being read or had the traditional language words to the story

taped over top. Some mainstream songs were translated and sung to the same tune; in

other cases, entirely new songs were created in the language.

Teachers also reported creating new games or bringing back old games that could

be played outside or in the classroom. One such game was "Find the penny," which was

sung in a circle with a penny passed around and which used the children's traditional

names when they had the penny.

The technologies of CDs, videos and computer games were described as unnecessary for this age group. However, one community discussed the desire to audiotape some of the language for children to listen to at home.

Continually increasing vocabulary

One teacher who had gained proficiency in the language but still came across subjects or areas in which she lacked vocabulary strength shared her strategy for continuing to increase one's knowledge of the language. She made lists of the words or concepts she was missing and then asked an Elder or a mentor to help fill in the blanks. She audiotaped the session with the traditional speaker and studied from the recording on her own time.

Ideal space for a 'nest'

In terms of space, one or two large rooms and a small fenced playground were reported as ideal, with enough room for comfortable play but not so big that the interaction of language could be lost.

Ways Forward

Creating networks.

Although a small informal network has formed of those who regularly attend the Secwepemc Nation language teacher training program, it appears that there is no formal networking system in place for language nest preschools in B.C. or Canada. Each community created and runs its programs independently. The success of the language nests programs in Aotearoa and Hawaii could be attributed, in part, to the high level of collectivity they have gained by being part of one centralized organization. Although the

circumstances in Canada are different, with a greater geographic divide and greater diversity of languages, it would be desirable to create some kind of provincial or national network for language nest programs. Creating a network may be an important organizational step to moving forward on the language nest and Indigenous language revitalization movement in B.C. and Canada (Fleras, 1987).

The advantages of this approach are multiple. Communities operating language nest programs could share translatable curriculum resources and ideas, tackle common issues and have informed discussions on ways to improve their programs. In addition, a general sense of cohesion and support might be of great assistance to communities who feel they are working in isolation with their language nest initiatives. Although all those participants who were asked about this issue agreed that a network would be valuable, one community administrator mentioned that it would be important to have a network of those actually engaged in language nest initiatives. Her concern was that it not become a forum for complaints or of listing the reasons why language nests and language revitalization were impossible. In her words, *"We need to work with the believers."*

Creating holistic community approaches.

Although language nest programs are valuable, as stand-alone programs they cannot produce life-long fluent speakers. Children need to continue learning the language beyond age five and have opportunities to practice speaking regularly in order to gain and sustain fluency. For the purposes of creating life-long users of the language, language nests need to be part of a larger, more long-term community-level language revitalization strategy.

Planning processes for communities need to have a multigenerational approach to ensure full community inclusion. As shown in Table 1, other types of initiatives are available to accompany the language nest or serve as alternatives if the community is not ready for a full immersion approach. Creating an immersion or bilingual elementary school for children to continue language learning after 'graduating' from the language nest appears to be a vital next step. Language learning opportunities for adults, especially the parents and caregivers of young children, are also important. In this case, immersion initiatives are preferable if fluency and ability to support children's growing fluency are the hoped-for outcomes. Creating a holistic, community-inclusive plan to language revitalization endeavours is crucial to ensuring life-long learning and is an important step towards the reinstatement of a living language.

Create a living, working language.

> *Obviously we are just in the developmental stages of it, becoming more of a community used language but we've gotten somewhere with it. There's an identity attached to it, there's knowledge that our language and culture exist and used to be very strong and can be very strong again. We've only just begun.*
> (Administrator, Secwepemc Nation)

The ultimate goal for communities pursuing language revitalization is working towards the creation of a community of traditional language speakers. Community members need to recognize that for true language regeneration, the traditional language must be reinstated as a valued language of common use. This is especially crucial in regards to the children in language nest and other immersion programs. The benefit of the language nest is dependent on opportunities to use language skills outside of it, within the context of the community (Fettes, 1992). There is an important relationship between the degree to which a language flourishes and the amount of public use it has in the

community (Assembly of First Nations, 1991; First Nations languages and literacy secretariat, 1992).

A major issue for language sustainability with language nest children is that most parents of the children attending the language nest preschool do not speak the language. Participants in both communities reported that none of the children in either program had parents who spoke the language. Although there are dedicated parents, including the two interviewed, who are actively acquiring the language for themselves, the fact remains that most of the language nest children do not speak the language at home.

Taking the language out of the classroom into everyday use is one of the biggest challenges facing communities. Parents and teachers reported that although the children might be learning the language, they naturally revert to using English with their peers and family. It seems this is so even if their peers or family members know the language. Although the language nest and other immersion programs are important incubators for language learning, a danger exists that children may associate the language only with school. Several participants reported that the children in the language nest program have come to believe that "school" is the only place for the language or that only their teachers speak the language.

> *The parents actually did mention that, when they were out in public and the mom used our language, and her son looked at her and said we're not at school. So she told him this is for everywhere, we don't have to be at school to speak.*
> (Administrator, Lil'wat Nation)

The practice of using children's traditional names from the language nest out in the community seemed to be an important prompt to both the traditional speakers and the children to use the language outside of the language nest program. When traditional language-speaking adults familiar with the nest met the children out in the community

with a traditional greeting and the use of their traditional name, it reportedly prompted the children to respond in the language. This is one way that communities began to reinstate the use of the traditional language in the larger community.

One of the communities has two young people who have now graduated from high school and at times substitute teach in the immersion school. The children are often amazed that these young people speak the language. Undoubtedly these young adults are a positive influence on the children who see them as role models. These new graduates are the first in their generation to develop a command of the language and will undoubtedly contribute to a speaking community now that they are out of school. The children must see the language being used in the community to come to believe, according to one administrator, that is it is a "real working language" which is also seen to have worth.

As a way of creating an environment for year-round language learning for children, one of the communities has considered operating the language program year-round with breaks at traditional fishing, hunting and gathering times. This was the solution they devised for handling the long summer break when children often revert back to English and lose some of the ground they have gained with learning the language.

> *It's going to take time.... This year we had four days a week, now in September we're going five days.... It's what they need, to have the language more. We're quite worried about the summer. It's a long break. So that's one thing that we need to work on is that immersion should not be part of the school that way. They should have a seasonal school like all the year around and have breaks at different times. We're actually thinking, we thought we should run our school that way as well, according to season.*
>
> (Administrator, Lil'wat Nation)

Beyond community-level language revitalization.

Neither community involved in the study reported language differences or dialects as an issue for them, contrary to what was expected. This finding is surprising as diversity of languages and dialect are commonly brought up as one of the reasons why Canada is not able to collaborate and collectively organize on issues of language revitalization (Hinton, 2001c). Although there are national bodies working towards language revitalization strategies, none are specifically focused on strategies such as language nests but rather on administering federal funds for and evaluating language initiatives. Comparatively, Aotearoa and Hawaii each have negotiated the use of one unified Indigenous language to be transmitted to children, which may account for the robust language nest system in these places. In B.C. alone, there are 26 to 34 different languages, and within those language groups there are differing dialects depending on the geographic span of the traditional territory and the distance between tribes.

In the communities that participated in the current research, there was recognition that different dialects of their language exist and even collide in their own community as people inter-marry, creating situations where the Elders in the language nest might be from a neighbouring tribe. As the children gain sophistication in the language, they are able to pick up some of the differences, but the teachers and Elders simply reassure them, saying, "That is how grandma 'X' says it." Both communities seem to accept that there are different accents and ways of saying things. They recognized that they do not have the luxury of being too particular over the issue of dialect difference, and that the community needs to move forward with one dialect for the sake of simplifying the children's learning.

When considering language revitalization efforts in B.C. and Canada as a whole, the possibilities for a collective national movement hold great potential. Organizing around specific language groups or dialects is difficult and not as powerful due to the diversity of languages. However, binding together on common initiatives such as immersion approaches or language nest programming has proven in other places to be a powerful and necessary approach to large-scale, effective and sustainable language revitalization efforts.

Conclusion

The issue of language revitalization is critically linked to the survival of Indigenous people. When our languages are threatened the health and well-being of our peoples, a maintained connection to the land, and an ability to pass on and carry out traditional ways of life and maintain a worldview unlike any other is at stake. Children must learn the language in order for it to survive. The language used to be passed down naturally in homes, on the laps of our grandmothers and on the land, at the foot of the grandfathers on the traplines. Indigenous languages are at such a state of critical endangerment that we must create artificial ways to pass on the language. However, whatever strategies are taken must work towards reinstating Indigenous languages into common, everyday use in order that they are viable. We need to come full circle, back to speaking our languages to the babes in the cradle swings and on the streets of our communities. One community participant agreed and asked me not to write that language nests are the answer. Rather she wanted to emphasize that returning to natural uses of language transmission is the solution.

I was going to say that language immersion is the way to do it, but that's not true. The way to do it is to raise your children in the language, very naturally, from the time they are born you speak the language to them, you speak to them in the language, and let the outside world do the English. That's the truly natural way to do it. I would have done it that way if I'd had enough language to raise my children like that but I had to set it up artificially with hired Elders to come in to do that. Even if it was my own mother cause she wouldn't have done this without a certain title to it, or whatever. Immersion is not the best way to do it, do not write that. The best way to do is to go back to raising our children in the language.

Personal reflections.

As a new researcher, undertaking this study was at times both terrifying and exhilarating. The communities visited were welcoming and gracious; however, the responsibility of researching ethically within Aboriginal communities was significant. Yet, I walked away from both communities feeling inspired and full of hope. The message that stayed with me was that as Indigenous people, revitalization of our language is each individual's own responsibility. I wondered, "What am I doing? What is my place in this movement? What is my life path towards regenerating our languages and culture?" During one of the interviews, a crow flew into the school close to where we were sitting. The community member was attentive to the crow's presence, explaining that crows are "messenger" birds and come carrying a message, maybe good, maybe bad. She shared that perhaps it was my place to be a "messenger" of the movement. She explained that in their community, the "workers" are busy working at saving their own language. They cannot fly all over presenting at conferences and holding endless workshops, sharing what they have done over 20 years of language revitalization efforts. She suggested that perhaps this is part of what I can give back – to share the successes and the lessons learned along the way.

I offer my humble thanks to the crow, one of my spirit guides, for your presence and teachings.

Nanâskamon.

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APPENDIX A: CONVERSATION TOPIC AREAS

General questions asked of community administrator prior to starting:

➢ Is there anyone else you think I should talk to in your community for this study?
➢ Discussed permission to take pictures.

A. Head teacher in immersion program and school administrator

Start up

➢ How did you get started?
➢ Did you study any other programs (in person or on paper) before launching yours? Or along the way?
➢ What did it take to launch your program? (e.g., building, traditional speakers, other resources)
➢ How were you able to finance the start-up and continue to fund the program?
➢ Was funding a major stumbling block for the start-up? What avenues did you try? Have you been able to identity any external funding sources?
➢ What else stopped you?
➢ Did you study other programs before starting?

Basic info about the program

➢ age group
➢ current numbers
➢ How many children can you take? Waitlist? (undersubscribed, oversubscribed, limited by caregivers/space, etc., fluctuating, seasonal)
➢ number of hours per week
➢ structure of program, schedule
➢ Is enrollment restricted to your FN (i.e., Adam's Lake or Lil'wat only)?
➢ Fees?
➢ How do you handle ECE licensing regulations?

Community context

➢ total population
➢ number of traditional speakers
➢ Started with? Current?
➢ total number of children in age range that could attend language nest and/or immersion school
➢ number that attend language nest and/or immersion school

Policy decisions

➢ Are there different languages and/or dialects in your area? If so, how was a decision made for which language to subscribe to in the immersion program?

Resources

➤ Any other regular guests (besides Elders)?
➤ What other technologies or media do you use to support language immersion beyond speaking? (e.g., books, videos, guests, activities)
➤ Can you tell me about resources? (i.e., could you purchase them or did you have to create them, etc.?)

Staffing

➤ Are all employees fluent speakers?
➤ What are your requirements in terms of credentialing of staff, ratios, etc.?
➤ What are the credentials (if any) of the staff you currently have working in the program?

Elder's involvement in setting up or maintaining

➤ How much are they involved (i.e., hours per week), decision making, etc.?
➤ What exactly is the involvement? What does it look like?

Parental involvement

➤ Describe your levels of parental involvement.
➤ Is parental involvement mandatory/voluntary?
➤ Are most of the parents working or is their children's involvement more of an Indigenous language development choice than a need for care?
➤ Are there other same-age childcare resources in your community?
➤ How would you compare the subscription to both programs?
➤ If so, what do you think are the reasons that parents choose your program? Why do they not choose your program?
➤ What were parents' fears? What stops them from enrolling their children?

Networking

➤ Do you know of any other FN language nests?
➤ Do you network and learn from each other? Get together, meet regularly, etc.?

Continuation

➤ Where do children go from here? Is there hope of maintaining the language beyond ECE (such as immersion K-12, concurrently educating parents so that language will be spoken at home, etc.)?
➤ What about children who move away from the community?
➤ Is there a speaking community?
➤ Is language use modeled in the community? By whom, where, when?
➤ Do children value the language or do they do it in the classroom because it is required of them and they want to please the adults?
➤ What other language initiatives are happening in your community?
➤ What is your dream for the language nest?

General closing and critical look:

> ➤ Besides what you already have, what else is important to have in place?
> ➤ What are the pros and cons of immersion in your view?
> ➤ What do you see as the challenges of this approach?

Vision for the future

> ➤ What are your hopes and dreams for your community around language and the language nest program? (i.e., Where to from here?)

B. "Champion" parent

> ➤ How did you get interested/involved in language nest?
> ➤ What is your level of language knowledge and exposure?
> ➤ If not your first language, what got you interested, when did this change?
> ➤ What is your level of involvement in the program and the process of your child's language learning? Is involvement mandatory or voluntary?
> ➤ How do you manage "fitting in" your involvement?
> ➤ How did you choose this route for your child?
> ➤ Are most of the parents working or is their children's involvement more of an Indigenous language development choice than a need for care?
> ➤ Are there other same age group childcare resources in your community?
> ➤ How would you compare the subscription to both programs?
> ➤ If so, what do you think are the reasons that parents choose your program? Why do they not choose your program?
> ➤ What (if any) were the things that stopped you? What do you think does or may stop other parents?
> ➤ How do you see yourself contributing to the language revitalization movement in your community?
> ➤ What does the language nest experience add to your child's identity development (if anything)?
> ➤ What are your hopes and dreams for your child? For your community?

C. Elder

> ➤ How did you come to be involved in the language nest?
> ➤ What do you think of the language nest? Do you think it's working?
> ➤ What do you hope for the future of your community to do with language?
> ➤ What (if anything) do you think the community should be doing differently?

(All other questions drew on the directions that Elders took the conversations in their storytelling.)

Tanisi (hello), my name is Onowa McIvor. I am an Aboriginal graduate student in the department of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria. I am conducting a study for the thesis component of my degree called **"Revitalization of endangered Canadian Indigenous languages through Early Immersion and Child Care Practice."** It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Jessica Ball.

What I am hoping to explore is what makes Indigenous early immersion programs possible and what barriers exist for launching such programs. As I am sure you are aware, many First Nations languages in Canada are near extinction with many of these languages being in BC. Many communities, such as yours, are working hard to avoid language death. With this study I am hoping to compile as list of promising practices in revitalizing and continuing First Nations languages with a strong focus on immersion programs for young children. Although early childhood immersion approaches are widely known to be very successful in continuing languages it does not seem to be a method readily being taken up in Canada. Due to the ever-present threat of Indigenous language extinction, my hope is that the findings of this study will make a useful contribution to better understanding effective ways of ensuring language survival.

I would like to talk to those in your community who are involved in maintaining and restoring First Nations languages through early childhood immersion. I am writing to gain your permission to visit your community and conduct taped interviews with the staff of the early childhood immersion program should they be interested and willing.

Information sharing protocol: Anyone who is interviewed will have an opportunity to review the information they have shared. Once this information is complied and the study is complete, it is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways; I will produce a small booklet of the findings of the study to share with those who have participated and any others who are interested. My completed thesis will be stored for public access in the University library. I also hope to present my findings at conferences as well as submit articles for publication.

Please let me know if there is anything further that I can provide to assist with this process. I will look forward to your response.

Ekosani (thank-you).

Onowa McIvor
453 Constance Ave.
Victoria, BC   V9A 6N2
E-mail: onowa@telus.net
Telephone: (250) 661-6135

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

You are being invited to participate in a study called *"Continuing and regenerating endangered Canadian Indigenous languages through Early Childhood Immersion Programs"* being conducted by Onowa McIvor. Onowa is an Aboriginal graduate student in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria. You may contact her by telephone at (250) 661-6135 or by email at onowa@telus.net.

As a graduate student, I am required to undertake research as part of the requirements for a degree in Child and Youth Care. My thesis supervisor is Dr. Jessica Ball. You may reach her at 250-472-4128 or by email at jball@uvic.ca.

This research is being partly funded by the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP), a group of researchers supported by the Ministry for Children and Family Development. The main purpose of this research is to look at what makes First Nations early immersion programs possible and what barriers may exist for such programs.

I believe research such as this is important because more than half of the First Nations languages near extinction in Canada are found in BC. Many communities, such as yours, are working hard to avoid language death. This study will develop a list of current practices that many different communities are undertaking to ensure the survival of First Nations languages as well as taking a closer look at immersion programs for young children in just a few communities. Although immersion approaches are widely known to be successful for continuing languages it seems that little is being done in Canada on early childhood First Nations language immersion compared to other Indigenous groups globally. Due to the threat of First Nations language extinction, my hope is that the findings of this study will make a useful contribution to better understanding effective ways of ensuring the survival of Canadian First Nations languages.

You are being asked to participate in this study due to your interest and involvement in maintaining and restoring First Nations languages with a focus on early childhood immersion and/or your involvement in child care. First Nations participants have been selected from two communities due to their involvement in contributing to young children's gaining of the local language. If included in the study, Ministry of Health employees will be selected due their knowledge of First Nations child care practice and regulations that exist for immersion programs within BC.

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, as I am requesting up to two hours of your time. If you agree to volunteer to participate in this study, your commitment would include a 1-2 hour interview with questions focused on traditional language early childhood immersion programs. With your permission, the interview will be audio-taped and I may take notes to make sure that what I hear on the tape is correct by comparing it with my notes. The tape will later be listened to and written out.

There are some potential risks to the First Nations participants in this research. Due to historical experiences between some First Nations communities and university researchers, if you agree to be a part of this research it is possible that you will risk the scorn of your fellow

12/23/2004

community members. To prevent or deal with these risks I am available to talk through with you any incidents that should arise and will make myself available to speak with any community member to explain the research study if this would be helpful.

The potential benefits to you by participating are that, along with those of other participants, the information you share will be compiled and may help you gain new insights into your work of saving your language. You may also be able to better understand and explain what you have contributed to saving your language and what further steps could be taken. The hope of the study is to add to the growing body of knowledge on practices targeted at saving First Nations languages, with a special focus on immersion programs. The further hope of the study is to contribute to greater society's understanding of traditional language recovery efforts as First Nations people continue to heal from past and current injustices and from the damage caused by language decline.

> *As a way to compensate you for any inconvenience related to your participation, you will be offered a honourarium of $50. It is important for you to know that it is unethical to provide payment to participants if this is the only reason that they would agree to be in the study. If you would otherwise choose not to participate if the honourarium was not offered, then you should opt out of the study. If due to your position within the government your participation in this study is covered by work time and you would like to decline the $50 honourarium, please sign here _____ and no payment will be issued.*

> *Your participation in this research must be completely by your own choice. If you must leave the study for any reason the information that you have already shared would be greatly appreciated to contribute to the greater understanding of the study. However, you are free to withdraw what you have shared at any time without consequence and any information you have provided would be destroyed.*

In order for you to remain anonymous in the study, the information you share and your personal information will be available only to the researcher and her supervisory committee. Once the information is added to the greater pool of results, there will be no individual identifiers attached to what you have shared. However, as it can be disrespectful not to identify an Elder or other respected community member when using their comments I would like to provide the option of giving you credit for your comments. If you wish to be identified by name and/or community in connection with any comment that may be used as a direct quote, please check yes ☐ and sign here _____.
If not, please leave blank.

Your personal information and the information you share will be protected by storing notes and audio tapes in a locked cabinet in the researcher's project office and no one other than the researcher will have access to the information. When the study is complete, the information will be kept for 5 years then destroyed. Documents will be shredded and electronic files will be deleted.

Once the study is complete it is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways; I plan to produce a small booklet of the findings of the study to share back with you, your community and other communities as appropriate. My completed

12/23/2004

thesis will be presented to my committee and later stored for public access in the University library. I also hope to present my findings at conferences as well as submit articles to be published. If you wish to review or edit any information you provide that may be used for publication, please inform the researcher at this time.

In addition to being able to contact the researcher and her supervisor at the above phone numbers, you may confirm the approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice-President, Research at the University of Victoria (250-472-4362).

Your signature below will indicate that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the chance to have your questions answered by the researcher.

_____   _____   _____
Please print name   *Signature*   *Date*

A copy of this consent form will be left with you, and a signed copy will be taken by the researcher.

12/23/2004