

**Exploring the use of traditional Secwepemc stories
to teach language**

by

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Abstract

This study investigates the potential of using Secwepemc traditional stories to develop Secwepemc language teaching and learning skills while incorporating the teaching of Secwepemc history and values with immersion students. Traditional Secwepemc stories and relevant literature were analyzed, explored, and reviewed to support the development of second language storytelling pedagogy for the immersion classroom. Archibald's book, *Storywork*, and Chief Atahm School's Secwepemc principles grounded this research in Indigenous methods that both respected and reflected the theme of storytelling. In this analysis, Secwepemc stories are shown to provide an excellent foundation from which language curricula can be developed. The study's findings highlight the essential elements of Secwepemc storytelling as well as strategies for connecting students to stories, in the hopes of strengthening Secwepemc language curricula.

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Dedication

I dedicate my work to all the Elders who have committed their time, energy, and love to keeping *stsptekwle* alive. To the ones who have shared stories with me: the late Bill Arnouse and his wife, Mary; my late father, Joe Michel; to my Uncle Lawrence Michel (the gifted storyteller); to my mother Anne Michel; and, to my Aunt Ethel Billy. I hope this work honours all of the teachings and the knowledge that you have shared throughout the years. To all that are committed to carrying on the tradition of *stsptekwle*, may we continue to learn with our minds and hearts in order to keep the spirit of story alive for future generations. Also, I dedicate this work to all Indigenous scholars who have graciously shared their work on storytelling. I thank my sister, Dr. Kathryn Michel for her insight, her dedication, and her guidance. To my family, my husband, Ken and to our niece, Amelia - I am grateful for your support and understanding throughout this process.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This research presents a practitioner's approach to developing Secwepemc language immersion resources based on the traditional storytelling genre called *stspetekwle*. This project can be viewed as a discovery of ways to improve my practice as a primary immersion teacher at Chief Atahm School, a Secwepemc immersion school that operates one of the few Indigenous immersion programs in Western Canada. At Chief Atahm School we are faced with the challenge of finding ways to maintain the Secwepemc oral tradition of *stspetekwle*. *Stspetekwle* is the Secwepemc term for a genre of legends featuring a magical cast of animals that incorporate the teaching of history, geography, values, and culture. Unfortunately, many of our school's fluent Elders who are trained in the art of storytelling are over 70 years old. Soon there may be no one left to tell our stories to the students.

At Chief Atahm School the challenge is two-fold. Firstly, we will need to be fluent enough in the language to tell the stories in Secwepemctsin, and secondly, we will need to be trained in the art of storytelling. Therefore, it is important for me as an immersion teacher to find an effective way to use *stspetekwle* as a way to teach language and culture in the immersion classroom.

This research articulates a respectful approach for the development of language curriculum using stories. This project shares the processes I took to familiarize myself with the storytelling tradition. Although I have heard many stories, I have never listened to them with the intent that I may someday have to take on the role of storyteller in the classroom. My starting point for this research

was identifying the main elements of *stsptekwle* in order to ensure that any adaptations that would have to be made in order to teach *stsptekwle* in a second language setting would maintain these core features. This research culminates in outlining a curriculum approach for the development and design of a second language storytelling model.

I started my journey in language revitalization 20 years ago when I began working as a classroom teacher at Chief Atahm School, a parent-operated language immersion school located on the Adams Lake Indian Reserve in Chase, B.C. I would not have predicted that my life's journey would lead me to learn and teach in our language, Secwepemctsin. I grew up in the nearby city of Kamloops with parents who were fluent speakers of the language, who chose to raise their children using only English. Needless to say, my first year at Chief Atahm School was an eye-opening experience for me, since I knew less than five words in our language at that time. Now, I have had many years of experience as both a teacher and a student of the language. In this research project I utilize my experiences in exploring traditional stories as a language-teaching tool. This research explored a process for using Secwepemc traditional stories to teach language and culture in a language immersion educational environment.

Background

One of the challenges of operating an Indigenous language immersion school in Western Canada is the lack of curriculum resources available for teachers and the lack of support and networking opportunities. There have been a select few

opportunities to network with other Indigenous language teachers through attending language conferences and meeting participants at Chief Atahm School's TPR (Total Physical Response) summer institute. Although these have been great opportunities to learn from others and to share our successes, most of the language teachers at these gatherings are teaching at a beginner level of language learning, with few teaching in immersion programs. So far I have not met anyone who is using Indigenous stories in second language classrooms. Through my experiences with *stsptekwle* and the TPR-Storytelling model, I am constantly searching for ways that these two models can be integrated to increase cultural teaching in our school.

At the present time, the school offers the following programs: an early childhood language nest program (for children under 4), full-day immersion classrooms from preschool (K-4) to grade three, language classes from grade 4 to grade 9, and adult classes offered periodically to the community. Throughout the years, Chief Atahm School has designed and developed its own curriculum for language teaching. As part of the Chief Atahm School curriculum team, I have developed classroom resources based on Total Physical Response (TPR) methodology and TPR-Storytelling in the lower grades.

Throughout the years of teaching in Secwepemc immersion, many methods, resources, and techniques have been used to assist students in developing their speaking skills. From my experience, I have found that the Total Physical Response Storytelling methodology, or TPR-S, as I will refer to it hereafter, has been particularly effective in developing speaking skills in second language learners. Ray and Seely's TPR-S (1997) builds on Krashen and Terrell's (1983) concept of

comprehensible input and Asher's (1993) Total Physical Response methodology. TPR-S teaches language through using storytelling as a tool to increase comprehension and speaking skills. The TPR-S methodology begins by first establishing the meaning of each word or concept in the target language, using a variety of tools, such as classic TPR, wherein vocabulary is taught through having students physically manipulate and/or respond to commands, or through employing games, pictures, and body gestures. The storytelling process follows the initial comprehension, or understanding phase. During storytelling, a simple story is told that is comprised of the vocabulary previously introduced. Questions are asked about the story in the target language using a technique called "circling." "Circling is a scaffolding technique that involves asking systematic questions that progress from low level to higher level questions" (Gaab, 2015). During the final stage, students orally present their versions of the original story, utilizing the learned vocabulary as much as possible. Ray and Seely (1997) say that students learn to speak by getting enough exposure to the language "through the stories and through TPR that they are able to remember the words" (p. 163). In my experience using these methods I have found them highly successful in moving students from understanding the language to confidently retelling stories in Secwepemctsin.

While my teaching experience using the TPR-S method has been highly successful for teaching language skills, it lacks a cultural component. To date, we have mainly used pre-packaged curriculum for storytelling requiring that we translate the stories into our language. We have been using adaptations of existing TPR-S stories to teach all levels of language programming at Chief Atahm School.

However, I have always believed that we should be teaching our own stories rather than borrowing from another culture. As a practicing Secwepemc language immersion teacher I have made conscious attempts to bring as many cultural components into my teaching as possible. Over time, I began to see how learning and teaching the Secwepemc language was not my end goal, but rather, a vehicle for transmitting Secwepemc culture and teachings to younger generations.

Although I have found success in teaching language using the TPR and TPR-S methodologies, I continue to be challenged to find effective ways to teach language using culturally relevant and meaningful content. I agree with a TPR-S Spanish teacher, Sarah M. Anderson (2004) who found that the connection between language learning and culture was missing from her teaching while using the TPR-Storytelling method. She felt dissatisfied with “the lack of cultural substance in the stories”(p. 11). Furthermore, she goes on to explain that she felt her role as a second language teacher goes beyond merely teaching language. She states:

I want to show them that language goes beyond the dictionary and is rooted in culture (Agar 1994), and that understanding and respecting this connection is the only way to truly know another language. (p. 11)

Her findings parallel my own experiences using TPR-S. Therefore, in this study, I sought to focus on our own oral storytelling tradition, called *stspetekwle*, in order to articulate the key components of our stories from which we could begin developing our own storytelling teaching model. From my perspective as a Secwepemc

immersion teacher I have highlighted the features of Secwepemc storytelling that I found most relevant to my own teaching situation.

Research Rationale

Although this research focuses on the use of Secwepemc traditional stories to teach language in an immersion setting, this exploration holds greater relevance to the wider field of Indigenous language revitalization, and, to Indigenous education as a whole. I have found that many Indigenous groups use stories written in English and translate them to their own languages for use as educational resources. For example, the TPR-Storytelling program at Chief Atahm School is primarily using material that has been adapted into our language from Blaine Ray's, *Look I can talk!* (1990). Although we have experienced some success with adapting Ray's stories, I have found that most of the subject matter does not pertain to teaching students at the Grade 2/3 level. Ray's "Look I can talk" series are geared for high school students learning Spanish and present themes meant for teens living in an urban context. Since most of the TPR-S programs focus on themes unrelated to our Secwepemc context there is a need to explore how traditional stories, in their original form, can be used to teach language.

This research seeks to add to the field of language revitalization through offering an insider's perspective on using *stsptekwle* to enhance Indigenous second language learning. Jo-ann Archibald's *Storywork* (2008), and Kathryn Michel's "*Restorying Coyote theoretical approach*" (2012) that outlines the six Secwepemc

principles that support the overarching principle of *etsxe [or vision quest]*, have guided this exploration of traditional storytelling as promising language pedagogy.

Research Questions

This project explores teaching language through traditional stories using the following guiding questions:

1. What are the benefits and the challenges to teaching *stspetekwle* in a Secwepemc primary immersion classroom?
2. What are the key features of *stspetekwle*?
3. How can *stspetekwle* be adapted for use for language teaching environments?

Research Context

My experience as a Secwepemc immersion classroom teacher provides a practitioner's perspective on how storytelling can enhance language teaching in an immersion program. I have used the TPR-S language teaching methodology for over 10 years in a variety of classroom situations and have been impressed by how it has helped to develop students' language learning, both receptive and expressive. In grades two and three, a pilot program using TPR-Storytelling was introduced to help increase speaking, reading, and writing proficiency. Stories that were used were adapted for the Grade 2/3 classroom using relevant themes. In addition, I have had the opportunity to learn a few *stspetekwle*, Secwepemc stories, that were taught to me through the TPR-Storytelling approach. I bring my experiences as a Secwepemc

teacher and a language learner into this research project to help strengthen the understanding of using traditional stories in language teaching environments.

Summary

This project examined the use of Secwepemc storytelling as language teaching pedagogy from my perspective as an Indigenous researcher working within community. Subsequent findings formed the basis for a teacher's guide that includes criteria for adapting and selecting stories for a Secwepemc immersion educational setting, as well as suggestions on how to prepare a classroom for storytelling. In the next chapter, I explore relevant literature in the area of Salishan storytelling and, of storytelling as language teaching pedagogy. In Chapter Three, I present the research process, and, in Chapter Four, I discuss the findings. Chapter Five will summarize the project and discuss how it connects to the Secwepemc immersion classroom.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Storytelling as Pedagogy

Storytelling has been an effective teaching tool in many different cultures for thousands of years. Its relevance to education has been widely documented and explored by McKeough, Bird, et al., (2008), Nazir, (2012), and Rowan (2011). Storytelling is an effective instructional method that enhances a student's language proficiency and that contributes to a student's overall language development. Storytelling helps aid in enhancing language skills of students in second language classrooms. Safdarian and Ghyasi (2013) states "from affective view point, including fun themes and making students interested in learning, stories can lower students' affective filter and provide a learning environment that is free of stress and anxiety" (p. 78). Using storytelling as a way of teaching is appealing to both students and teacher. What a great concept to have students learning and having fun! Furthermore, Safdarian and Ghyasi (2013) also state that storytelling is a good strategy for developing and acquiring speaking and listening skills. Through the patterns of communication and repetition of grammatical structures in stories students can experience a wide variety of language forms. Therefore, using storytelling in an immersion classroom situation can be an effective way to help students engage with stories in an imaginative way while increasing their language skills.

Salishan Storytelling

The Secwepemc tradition of *stsptekwle* is part of a larger genre of stories featuring the trickster character, Coyote. Coyote stories can be found in Salishan cultures and throughout the Interior Plateau, an area encompassing the high plateau between the British Columbia coastal mountains and the Rocky Mountains (<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/aboriginal-people-plateau>). Linguistically the Salishan language group comprises of 23 languages that encompasses coastal British Columbia, the interior of British Columbia, and northwestern United States. Through the engaging adventures of Coyote, Elders had a vehicle to teach younger generations in a lighthearted way. Archibald (2008), Cohen (2010), and Michel (2012) share how storytelling invites the listener to become active participants of the story. They also share that the language, stories, and our connections to the land are vital to our existence and our way of being. It is in the knowing of who we are and where we come from that guides us through life's journey. Secwepemc educator, Janice D. Billy (2009) states that, "The old stories explain our philosophy and beliefs and set out how we must live" (p. 25). Michel (2012) shares that, "all of the elements that make a good story are combined to create an ideal communication system for transferring the traditional values, spiritual beliefs, societal expectations, and history of the Secwepemc people" (p.8).

Secwepemc have a long tradition of storytelling. Traditional stories, or *stsptekwle*, include the history, landforms, and cultural practices and beliefs of the Secwepemc and share valuable teachings with younger generations. Ron Ignace's

(2008) dissertation describes *stsptekwle* as “mystical story” or “legend”(pg. 36). In Ignace’s also shares the significance of storytelling to the Secwepemc people:

The stories of my people are inextricably linked to our land,
Secwépemcúlecw, and to the ways in which successive
generations marked the land with their deeds, named the land,
showed us how to look after it, and thus deeded the land to us: we
belong to it, and it belongs to us. Furthermore, I see the history of
our connection to our homeland as inextricably linked to our
language; thus, this thesis also deals with the way in which our
people talked about our history that connected us to our land as a
people in our language, Secwepemctsin. (p.4)

In the past, Elders were the primary transmitters of language and culture using storytelling as a means of communicating these teachings. Within the last 50 years there has been a drastic shift from the Secwepemc oral tradition of storytelling, with *stsptekwle* as being an essential pedagogical tool in raising children, to most children rarely hearing an Elder tell a story. Many of the Indigenous language programs today teach language and culture in classroom settings to children who are otherwise surrounded by English (Kirkness, 1998, Hinton & Hale, 2001; Ignace, 2005).

In order to share about the tradition of *stsptekwle* it is important to start at the beginning with our creation story. As explained by three Secwepemc women in their graduate work, the creation story places us in the world and gives much significance to the beginning of our *stsptekwle* (Michel, 2012; Sandy, 1987; Billy, 2009). Nancy

Sandy explains how "the Secwepemc believe that when the world was just beginning it was not a very good place for people to live, there were floods, fires, and great winds; therefore the Old One (Tqelt Kukwpi7) sent Coyote, (Sek'lep) to come to earth and help to set things right" (1987, p.31). Hanna and Henry (1996) shared creation stories from the Nlha7kapmx sptakwelh period, when "the world was inhabited by animals vaguely human form" (p. 21). It is important to understand that these stories of transformation represent Secwepemc ontology and help teach us how we must live upon the earth.

Coyote stories are significant in that they represent a continuation of culture: connecting our beginnings to today. We must remember that stories only gain their power when they are shared with younger generations. Stories need both a storyteller and a listener. As language educators, we have a role to play to facilitate this transfer of knowledge from one generation to the next. For, as my father, the late Joe Michel, used to say, it is time to start "putting on your Secwepemc binoculars" in order to see Coyote's universe. I can only imagine how powerful it will be to put on our Secwepemc binoculars and start listening to our stories in our own languages again.

Language teaching methodologies using storytelling

Students enjoy learning through storytelling and are willing to communicate in the language (Gordon, 2009 and Hinton, 2003). According to M. Dujmovic, (n.d.) storytelling is an effective pedagogical tool:

[B]ecause language is an interactive process, children learning a language need ample opportunity to interact in a meaningful interesting context and play with the language while developing vocabulary and structures. (p. 75)

There are many advantages to teaching through storytelling in second language classrooms. Fitzgibbon and Wilhem (1988) states that there are many benefits for learning a second language using storytelling:

[S]torytelling interests students, lowers affective filters, and allows learning to take place more readily and more naturally within a meaningful, interactive communication context. (p. 24)

In Hinton and Hale's (2001) *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice*, several authors discussed that successful language programs in school settings need not only maintain instruction in the target language, but should also make sure the learners understand what is being said. This concept of "comprehensible input" was also emphasized by Krashen and Terrell in *The Natural Approach* (1983) which focuses on listening for understanding, or, comprehensible input, before speaking, reading, and writing. Speaking is not forced, it happens naturally and follows natural language acquisition phases. They also highlight the need for students to be engaged in real communication with repetitive concepts that involve students actively engaging in the lessons to make learning interesting (pp. 183–184). The Natural Approach emphasizes that teaching a second language is complex, and therefore many factors have to be taken into consideration, such as:

- The learner's self-concept;

- Lowering level of the learner's anxiety;
- Readiness to learn; and
- Motivation (Krashen & Terrell, 1983)

The Natural Approach focus is on beginner communication skills rather than form, and is grounded on the belief that early speech goes through natural phases, beginning with comprehension.

Building on Krashen and Terrell's research, psychologist James Asher introduced Total Physical Response, a language teaching approach based on his research in first language acquisition (Brune, 2004). The Total Physical Response language teaching methodology, or TPR for short, focuses on students being able to physically respond to various commands in the target language in order that, "through practice and repetition, the students learn to respond to the teacher's commands" (Roof & Kreutter, 2010). By examining different second language teaching tools like TPR and the Natural Approach, one can discover beneficial tools to assist in the development of a successful language program.

One of the more widely known methodologies that use storytelling as a vehicle to teach languages is TPR Storytelling. TPR-Storytelling emerged in the 1990's by Blaine Ray as a further development of TPR. In order for students to develop fluency in a target language there must be comprehensible input. TPR-S presents comprehensible input through the power of the storyform as a tool to assist students' learning and recall of a story. Blaine Ray (1997) states:

TPR-Storytelling can accomplish very important things that perhaps nothing else can. It is a systematic, entertaining, low-

stress way of internalizing pieces of a “cognitive map” of grammatical structures, or of internalizing a “holistic” pattern of how the language works. (Ray & Seely, 1997, p. 165)

TPR-S is a language teaching methodology that seeks to harness the power of storytelling as an effective mechanism to teach a second language. Ray & Seely claim that TPR-S develops language fluency in a way that is fun and interesting. The rate at which students learn to understand, speak, read and write in the target language increases in a TPR-S class.

Although recently there have been materials published on teaching Indigenous languages such as by Hinton and Hale (2001), Hinton (2002), and Reyhner (1997), there is still a lack of research specific to Indigenous language education. Although these resources help place this study within the general context of Indigenous language revitalization, they do not specifically address the challenges of teaching children in an immersion setting. It is important to add to the existing literature on language teaching methods that meets the needs of an Indigenous immersion program.

Reconnecting to culture and language using storytelling

To help the younger generations reconnect to stories, we must be conscious of the dual challenge of language teaching and cultural reconnection. There are many scholars and educators who have documented their pathways to learning their languages. Michele Johnson's (2012) documentation of her journey learning the Okanagan language expressed that "we need to use all the second-language learning

tools” (p.84). There is a need to acquire language quickly and effectively for Indigenous people, as communities are rapidly losing fluent speakers (Billy, 2009; Johnson, 2012). Billy (2003) found that some Indigenous language programs were finding success with a “combination of the Communicative and Natural Approach to language acquisition since they are the most compatible with how Secwepemc people acquired their language naturally” (pp. 10-11).

Although some communities are finding ways to move forward, McIvor (2012) sums up some of the challenges/barriers faced in Indigenous community language revitalization:

[S]carcity of available fluent speakers, a lack of speakers in the community to engage and practice in the language, and because most Indigenous communities are nearly exclusively English speaking . . . there seems to be an attitude of lack of urgency to learn the language. (pp. 56- 57)

In order to successfully implement language revitalization, these challenges must be addressed.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This research explores the validity of teaching Secwepemctsin through storytelling from my perspective as a teacher in a Secwepemc classroom, and, as a student of the language. The primary focus was the exploration of the tradition of Secwepemc storytelling and the identification of common storytelling features that could be utilized within a language teaching context. The research process resulted in a list of criteria and strategies for the development of Secwepemc language storytelling curriculum.

A qualitative research approach was used for this study, using the perspective of practitioner research and guided by Archibald's (2008) *Storywork* and the six Secwepemc principles as outlined in Kathryn Michel's dissertation (2012). The data collected in this qualitative study includes personal reflections, from my perspective as a Secwepemc teacher working in a Secwepemc community, and, as a learner of the language. Using an autoethnographic process I critically reflect on my use of story throughout the past 10 years in an immersion classroom, and, on my personal experience with *stsptekwle*.

Theoretical Framework

In order to keep connected and grounded to the greater vision of Chief Atahm School of "a Secwepemc speaking community living in balance with nature," I conducted the research from within community. This required that I respect the values and ethics already established. I drew upon the path laid out by the Elders at Chief Atahm School, as articulated in Kathryn Michel's dissertation (2012). Michel

outlines the six Secwepemc principles “that support the overarching principle of *etsxe* or prepare yourself for life, that form the foundation of Chief Atahm School” as being:

- *Kweseltknews* – we are related;
- *Knucwestsut.s* – take care of yourself; hone individual strength;
- *Slexlex* – develop wisdom; “to think right about something; knowledge”;
- *Mellelc* – take time to relax; regenerate and enjoy; and
- *Qweqwetsin* – humble yourself to all creation; give thanks/gratitude for life. (p. 82)

These principles helped me stay connected to self, family and community and also helped in identifying the values and teachings within the stories examined.

As a classroom teacher, I am always looking for ways to improve upon my own teaching. It is upon reflection of my own teaching in a Secwepemc immersion setting that I am compelled to further language learning and to connect language learners with the Secwepemc culture. To assist in understanding *stsptekwle* as it can be applied for teaching language, I explored Archibald’s *Indigenous Storywork* (2008). Archibald lists some common approaches to using storytelling in education, including, “telling stories with no explanation, using talking circle for discussion, role-playing and having fun with the stories, and story repetition” (p. 115). She also identifies (p. 125) seven key elements of storytelling as containing the cultural principles of:

Respect;

Responsibility;
Reciprocity;
Reverence;
Holism;
Interrelatedness; and
Synergy (p.125).

Archibald's *Storywork* principles of reciprocity, interrelatedness and synergy helped frame my research within Indigenous community and reminded me that my research was part of a greater process of reconnecting younger generations to their ancestry, land, language and teachings. It was important to enter into the research process with respect and reverence and I felt the responsibility of studying such an important subject as our traditional stories.

Educational practitioner research also helped empower me to communicate using my perspective as teacher. It guided me in drawing new understandings from the findings that will help improve my practice of teaching. Marion Dadds (2000) shared that the choice of practitioner research helped empower her by offering "a mode of enquiry that was built on what I already knew and could do as a practising teacher" (p.3). In teacher research, the research should build on teachers' prior experiences in that teachers already have within their stored memory of experience much of what they need to carry out research (Berthoff, 1987; Fishman & McCarthy, 2000). According to Cochrane-Smith and Lytle (2007), there are shared features of practitioner research. The practitioner takes on the role of researcher, "the knowledge needed to improve practice is influenced by the contexts and relations of

power that structure the daily work of teaching and learning” (p. 26), and “the questions emerge from the day-to-day experiences of practice and, often from discrepancies between what is intended and what occurs” (p. 27).

Data Collection and Analysis

This research has expanded my knowledge of Salishan storytelling by pushing me to question, to plan, to reflect on my practice in order to improve upon my teaching practices. As a practitioner there is a continuous need to seek more knowledge. Within this project I was able to explore not only the theoretical underpinnings of Secwepemc stories, but also the strategies that could develop them into language pedagogy. Salishan researchers helped to put my study into the context of Interior Salishan storytelling. Archibald’s Storywork approach reminded me that my cultural understanding of *stsptekwle* and my prior experience with story would lend a fuller picture of how story could work within a classroom context. Also, her discussion on synergy as an important aspect of Salishan storytelling, correlated with my understanding of story as a sharing of a community’s history and teachings in a personal way.

In Sto:lo and Coast Salish cultures the power of storyworks to make meaning derives from a synergy between the story, the context in which the story is used, the way the story is told, and how one listens to the story. (Archibald, 2008)

The flexible nature of Salishan storytelling allows for stories to be adapted by the storyteller in order to best connect with their audience. In a sense, this encouraged

me to take ownership of my own understanding of story and to articulate my understanding of story and how it relates to language teaching.

In addition, I used a technique teaching practitioners often use, called, curriculum mapping (Weinstein, 1986) to help explore the world of Salishan storytelling and its potential as language pedagogy. Curriculum mapping helps identify patterns and concepts in teaching resources. The process of curriculum mapping, along with 'brainstorming', was used to highlight recurring themes and patterns and to elicit a variety of ideas and solutions to the research problem. The goal of brainstorming is to suspend your logical brain by allowing your thoughts to freely flow without worrying about whether they make sense or how they fit together. This process assisted me in discovering new areas of focus that provided added insight to my research problem.

Comparative analysis of works by Salishan scholars provided me with a systematic approach to delve into my research questions as it "is concerned with inquiring into the deep meaning and structure of a message or communication" (McKernan 1996, p. 145). My search for the themes, concepts, and patterns helped in highlighting the potential of our stories as vehicles for language teaching. To create the link between storytelling and language teaching, I analyzed and critically reflected on three stories adapted from lengthier versions of traditional stories. The following table summarizes the content of these stories.

Table 1: Three Secwepemc stories for language immersion

Title	Description
<p>R Xgwelecw Met'e Sek'lep</p>	<p>Coyote is walking along and sees his brother Fox. Coyote admires his long beautiful tail. The tail makes a swishing sound, “pow, pow, pow.” Coyote says to Fox, “maybe we could trade tails.” Fox says, “sure why not, but before we trade there is one thing you must</p> <p>Coyote is walking along and sees his brother Fox. Coyote admires his long beautiful tail. The tail makes a swishing sound, “pow, pow, pow.” Coyote says to Fox, “maybe we could trade tails.” Fox tells Coyote, “You must never look at your tail.” Coyote agrees and they switch tails. Coyote leaves and he walks along swishing his tail – pow-pow-pow. He really likes his new tail. Coyote starts to wonder why Fox told him not to look at his tail. His curiosity was too much for him and he eventually looked at his tail. At that very moment the tail breaks off and all his guts come oozing out. Coyote dies. Along comes his brother Fox and sees Coyote dead on the road. He pushes Coyote’s guts back into his stomach and switches back the tails. Fox jumps over Coyote 3 times. He wakes up and says, “Oh, I must have been sleeping.”</p>
<p>R Supe7s R Skwleqs</p>	<p>Coyote is sitting by the frozen lake at Adams Lake eating fish and he sees Bear coming along with his long tail. Coyote starts to scheme and think of a way of tricking bear. Bear is hungry and asks Coyote where he got the fish. Coyote decides to play a trick on Bear and says that he stuck his tail in the frozen water and the fish clung to his tail and that’s how he got the fish. Coyote encourages Bear to do the same if he wants fish. Bear sticks his tail in the frozen water and sits and waits for the fish to cling to his tail. He sits and sits and sits. Finally, his tail is getting heavy and he is imaging lots of fish on his tail. He pulls out his tail and lo and behold his frozen tail breaks off and his is left with his short stubby tail. Coyote is in the bushes having a good laugh.</p>
<p>Sek'lep Met'e Spipyu7e</p>	<p>Coyote is walking along and sees grouses’ children playing outside. Their parents are nowhere in sight, so Coyote decides to play a trick on the children. He tells them to go and get some pitch. The</p>

children go and get the pitch. Coyote sticks the pitch on their eyes and they start stumbling around. He leaves laughing at the children stumbling around and bumping into things. The parents return and see their children. They ask who has done this to them and they all reply Coyote. The parents are mad, so they fly to and find Coyote climbing a tall mountain. The parents swoop down over and over again. Finally knocking Coyote off the edge of a cliff and down towards the bottom. Coyote dies. His brother fox finds him and jumps over him 3 times to bring him back to life. He wakes up and says, "oh, I must have been sleeping".

Although my initial intent of this project was to take these three *stspetekwle* and to create TPR-Storytelling units from them, I quickly diverted from that goal. I realize now that the teacher in me wanted to skip right to the end result and produce this fabulous product ready for classroom use. However, my first attempts at adapting these stories into the TPR-Storytelling format, made me increasingly aware that I was forcing them to fit into a mold that did not honour the intent of stories, nor their complexity.

Needless to say, as I journeyed away from this original plan I began to see that I would need to approach the study of using our stories as language teaching from a Secwepemc perspective. Grounding myself in the ways of *stspetekwle* was where I needed to take this journey, so I drew upon my experience of using these stories in an immersion setting to analyze the common features of *stspetekwle*. Along with my own knowledge of *stspetekwle*, I also utilized scholarly research on Salishan storytelling to gain a fuller picture of this oral tradition.

This research, therefore, can be seen as documenting the approach I took to delving deeper into Secwepemc traditional stories with a focus on the potential of using stories in a language immersion educational environment. In general, I sought to articulate the common themes, plots, imagery and characters within Salishan storytelling that could provide me with a starting point from which a more detailed model for using storytelling in language teaching could emerge. These stories generally involve fantastical elements with animal characters that behave as humans at times, and, at times, are endowed with magical powers. Through a practitioner's lens, I analyzed and described what will make our traditional Secwepemc stories effective in an immersion setting and how these elements can best be used to enhance language teaching.

The process of compiling the research on Salishan storytelling left me with quite a bit of information that I needed to sort out. I initially categorized the statements of the key features of stsptekwle under the following headings:

- Identity;
- cultural teachings;
- interconnectedness;
- transformation and;
- imagination or creativity.

Upon reflection, I felt that some of the information gathered presented themes and subject matter that was either hard for students to relate to, or that were too complex for Grade 2 and 3 immersion students to learn in one year. I then narrowed down the elements of a story as follows:

- exposure to gifted storytellers;
- forming a relationship with animal characters;
- making connections to the land;
- the role of repetition in storytelling and;
- the role of transformation.

I found that Secwepemc *stspetekwle* represents a complex tradition, it was challenging to identify the features that I felt most relevant to a Grade 2/3 level immersion classroom. Although Indigenous scholars have identified many of the features of Salishan storytelling, I was selective in categorizing them based on my experience as a practicing teacher. Some of the criteria I used to select the relevant themes were:

- What subject matter would be appropriate to the age level of my students;
- Level of language needed to be at the right level for the learner;
- Potential for language learning;
- Inclusion of Secwepemc values, teachings;
- Length of the story; and
- Enjoyment for the learner.

In the next chapter I will discuss how this analysis led me to formulating a process for selecting and adapting *stspetekwle* for the purpose of teaching in an immersion classroom.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

Overview

The purpose of this research project is to explore how Salishan storytelling can enhance language learning while maintaining the integrity of the storytelling tradition. Through exploring the effectiveness of stories to teach Secwepemctsin in an immersion classroom I have developed both personally and professionally. I view this research as a way to extend my experiences as a learner and teacher of Secwepemctsin at Chief Atahm School. Storytelling can be a way of connecting ourselves to a shared culture and identity and through our own stories, or *stsptekwle*, that our children will be able to understand how they are connected to each other, and to the land. Within this research I have discovered ways in which stories can be adapted for use in language teaching, while still maintaining the core elements of the traditional form. These discoveries form the basis of an Indigenous language storytelling curriculum approach that will help open pathways for others on their journey to "be" Indigenous. Other than the existing curriculum at Chief Atahm School, I have not found any other written materials that focus on the use of storytelling in a Secwepemc language immersion setting. Therefore, I have drawn on the teachings from the Elders at Chief Atahm School, the works of Salishan scholars, and my own experiences to create a Secwepemc storytelling model. In this discovery I have focused on three Secwepemc stories that have been adapted for use in an immersion setting:

1. *R Xgwelecw Met'e Sek'lep* (The Fox and Coyote)
2. *R Supe7s r Skwleqs* (The Bear's Tail)
3. *Sek'lep Met'e Spipyu7e* (Coyote and the Grouse Children)

Through closely examining these three stories presently used at Chief Atahm School, as well as Salishan scholarship on storytelling, I was able to articulate what the key elements of *stspstekwle* are that can provide the foundation from which we can develop storytelling pedagogy for immersion classrooms. By building on my experiences as a language teacher I add a practitioner perspective to the existing body of knowledge in Indigenous immersion education. In the following section, I share the rationale of using stories to teach language and follow up with a discussion of how these key features of Salishan storytelling can be utilized within language classrooms.

I have divided my findings into three parts. In Part One, I explain how *stspstekwle* in Secwepemc immersion classrooms can be used as a way to connect the Secwepemc people to their history, cultural teachings, and beliefs. In Part Two, I identify the important themes needed to retain the essence of traditional stories. In Part Three, I present a guide for teachers to use for developing and using *stspstekwle* in an immersion setting.

Part One: Rationale for using stories in the language classroom

It is crucial that students understand the importance of *stspstekwle* and how it links Secwepemc people to their language, history and culture. As a teacher in a Secwepemc immersion school, I believe it is my responsibility to provide my

students with opportunities to start building their own relationships with story. Additionally, I feel that I am partly entrusted to develop the resources needed and to help prepare the learning environment for storytelling. Archibald (1997) emphasizes the lessons and teachings to be learned through stories. She states, “I believe that Indigenous stories are at the core of our cultures. They have the power to make us think, feel, and be good human beings. They have the power to bring storied life back to us” (p. 139). I have witnessed this sharing of the spirit of story through Elders sharing with the children. One big question is whether that same spirit can be translated or transplanted into the classroom environment. Presently, we are fortunate to have Elders at Chief Atahm School who are willing to share the stories. However, when these Elders are no longer available it will be the responsibility of the teacher to ensure that the story spirit be passed on to the listener. It is important that *stsptekwle* be treated as more than a mere story being told to the children, but rather, as a vehicle for our collective wisdom to live on from one generation to the next.

Storytelling as history

One of the features highlighted within Salishan scholarship is the use of story to share historical events and cultural teachings. Ignace (2008) presents evidence of the interconnection between Secwepemc storytelling and history. He shares a Secwepemc creation story that was originally documented by ethnographer James Teit (1909):

At the beginning, the earth was very small, but it gradually became larger, emerging more and more from the waters... The people who inhabited the earth during this period partook of the characteristics of both men and animals. They were called *stspetekwll*. Some were cannibals. At that period many kinds of animals, birds and fishes did not exist, nor many kinds of trees, plants, and berries. The earth was much troubled with great winds, fires and floods. In those days the Old-One ...send Coyote to travel the world and put it to rights. He was gifted with magical power beyond that of all the other mythological beings, and had great knowledge and cunning; yet often he proved himself to be selfish, lazy and vain, doing many foolish and bad tricks. pp. 595-596

Michel (2012) encapsulates the role of storytelling in traditional society as being:

[A] way to guide children into their roles in the community since ancient times. These stories share the dynamic adventures of the Trickster, *Sek'lep* (Coyote), and other magical Transformers. In *stspetekwle*, all the elements that make a good story are combined to create an ideal communication system for transferring the traditional values, spiritual beliefs, societal expectations, and history of the Secwepemc people. (p.8)

Storytelling has served as a way to document a people's history as well as link younger generations to their ancestors. Through teaching *stsptekwle* in language immersion classrooms, students can experience a deeper connection to their roots.

Sharing beliefs and teachings

As well as connecting younger generations to their history, *stsptekwle* can be seen as a powerful vehicle to transmit Secwepemc values and beliefs. Shirley Sterling (1997) stresses the importance of storytelling as a way to transfer Indigenous knowledges in that they "teach and guide, they transmit the philosophies and beliefs and cultural knowledge essential for survival" (p. 51). Archibald (2003), Cohen (2011), Ignace (2008), Michel (2012), and Sandy (1987) all emphasize the holistic nature of stories and its importance in educating the younger generations. Archibald (2008) describes the concept of holism as "the interrelatedness between the intellectual, spiritual (metaphysical values and beliefs and the Creator), emotional, and physical (body and behavior/action) realms to form a whole healthy person" (p. 11). She (2008) states,

Each Indigenous group has developed its own cultural content for the holistic circle symbol; however, a common goal has been to attain a mutual balance and harmony among animals, people, elements of nature, and the Spirit World. To attain this goal, ways of acquiring knowledge and codes of behavior are essential and are embedded in cultural practices; one practice that plays a key role in the oral tradition is storytelling (p. 11).

Archibald emphasizes that there is a responsibility of community members who are knowledgeable in storytelling to pass this knowledge on the next generation and for generations to come. Cohen (2010) shares how, "It is our responsibility as Sqilxw to know the Captikwl, the accumulated wisdom that the natural communities have shared with us so we would survive" (p. 105). Storytelling plays an important role in connecting students to a larger community, helping to create this sense of holism. Stspstekwle embodies the culture, history, and values of the Secwepemc and therefore is a perfect vehicle for teaching children in a holistic way.

Storytelling as developing self

Another key role of storytelling is to help guide the development of individual responsibility and sense of community. Michel talks about how "the trickster character, presents an exaggerated version of humanity that offers the audience a window through which to see themselves" (p.9). Stories have powerful messages that teach about how to conduct oneself, and how to avoid inappropriate behaviour through exaggerating the traits of the Trickster Coyote, such as, greediness, self-centredness, laziness, conceit, selfishness, revenge, teasing, and other human faults. Overcoming selfishness is a major theme of Secwepemc stories.

The Core Principles of Chief Atahm School and Storytelling

Stories reinforce Secwepemc values. I see stspstekwle as a way to reinforce the five core principles of Chief Atahm School (as outlined in in Michel's thesis, 2012). Below, I discuss my findings of how the five core principles of Chief Atahm School are integrated into stspstekwle.

1. *K'welseltknews* (All beings are related)

This guiding principle establishes the importance of the Secwepemc belief that all things are related, all things are equal, and that we all have a responsibility to each other and the earth. The value of *k'welseltknews* is based on interconnectedness and respect for all beings and life forms. Within the storylines of *stspstekwle* these are reoccurring themes in many of the stories. Through stories students can develop knowledge of the important of each being. For example, in *R Xgwelecw Met'e Sek'lep*, the characters Fox and Coyote are introduced as brothers. When Coyote asks to trade tails with Fox, he does not hesitate to accommodate his brother Coyote. In the end, Fox helps his brother Coyote by bringing him back to life. Another theme is that Coyote wanted to go around the world looking like something else, his brother Fox, by wearing his tail. However, ultimately, it can be said that each of us has our own way of looking and that we don't need to look like each other. An important teaching is given: that we all have our own unique roles to play on this earth. Other evidence of the value of *k'welseltknews* can be found in *R Sek'lep Met'e Spippyu7e*. In this *stspstekwle*, Coyote breaks the rule of showing respect to others, by manipulating the baby grouse and putting pitch onto their eyes to blind them. In the end, the parents show that Coyote cannot get away with such an offence and sends him tumbling off a rock cliff killing him. The value of respecting each and everyone and everything, is a universal value that the students will be able to identify with.

2. *Knucwetsut.s* (take care of yourself; hone individual strength)

The value of *knucwetsut.s* shows students to take care of oneself physically, emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually in order to strengthen the *k'welsetknews*, or family. In *stspstekwle*, many of the plot lines promote hard work and perseverance. In *R Supe7s R Skwleqs*, Bear must take care of himself to find enough food to survive. He believes Coyote's story of how he got the fish and he sticks his tail in the frozen ice hoping to catch a lot of fish on his tail. He does not catch any fish right away and perseveres for a long time before pulling his tail out of the ice. Bear must find an answer to his problem and he seeks to find ways to catch fish to eat. These stories can illustrate to students the importance of taking care of oneself, including the need to develop skills for problem solving. It is sometimes best to learn by doing, as was the case with Bear. Unfortunately, he learned that sticking your tail in the ice was not a good way to catch fish.

3. *Mellelc* (take time to relax; regenerate and enjoy)

Another important principle is *mellelc*, the principle of relaxation. This value stresses the need for balance in life by taking time to celebrate life, and engage in self-expression through the arts, such as singing, dancing, and storytelling.

Humour also is an integral part of this value. I remember once when my Uncle was finishing telling us a *stspstekwle*, he shared with us a teaching: that all beings have a story, and, all beings have a song. It is important to take the time to hear stories and to listen to song. With most of the *stspstekwle* there is an element of humour. Most times this humour not only comes through in the story line, but in

the way the storyteller tells the story. When my Uncle Lawrence Michel tells stories he makes us laugh because of the sound effects he uses to emphasize certain actions. For example, in the story of *R Xgwelecw Met'e Sek'lep*, he makes the sounds of Coyote's guts coming out of him, or in *R Supe7s r Skwlaqs*, he makes the sound effects for when the Bear pulls his tail out of the ice.

Throughout the years the students have had opportunity to act out some of the stories. I can recall a time watching the students in Janice Dick Billy's class acting out the story, *R Sek'lep Met'e Spipyu7e*. My nephew, Seth, made a convincing *Sek'lep* as he put pitch on each of the baby grouse's eyes. The children pretended to be blind, walking around bumping into chairs and tables. *Stsptekwle* is a good way for the children to use their imaginations and to express themselves in story form by acting out the story and by retelling the story.

4. *Slexlexs* (develop wisdom)

The value of *slexlexs* stresses the importance of providing an environment for all children to learn. The goal is have the children become more knowledgeable in the language, in history, in our beliefs, traditions, customs, be knowledgeable about the land. Through stories, our *stsptekwle*, our children develop their understanding and knowledge in each of these areas. The teachings are in the stories.

5. *Qweqwetsin* (humble yourself to all creation; give thanks and gratitude for life)

The value of *qweqwetsin* highlights the spiritual connection between all things. This value encompasses the aspect of giving thanks, prayer, and power. Within storytelling this spiritual connection can be found in the concept of

transformation. In each of the 3 books examined, something is being transformed. In *R Supe7s r Skwleqs*, it is through the antics of Sek'lep that Bear's tail is changed from once being a long tail to becoming a short one. Also, in *Sek'lep Met'e Spipyu7e*, at the end of the story Sek'lep is knocked off the cliff. Today the cliff still shows the markings that is said to be Coyote's blood. One of the most profound examples of transformation in story is the ability to bring creatures back to life. This is exemplified in *Re Xgwélecw mét'e Sek'lep*, when Fox jumps over Coyotes three times. Perhaps it is within the transformational aspect of stories that children are brought into a magical realm that reinforces that humans are but a small part of a greater universe.

Summary of Part One

Stories are very important, but they must be seen, heard, and witnessed by the younger generations so that they will not fade away. Cohen (2010) shares the importance of Sqilxw (Okanagan traditional stories) stories,

The Captikwl story system is very much the spirits of the land and our ancestors talking to us. It is our responsibility as Sqilxw are to know the Captikwl, the accumulated wisdom that the natural communities have shared with us so we would survive. (p.105)

In Secwepemc society, it is of great importance for children learn to be good family members. In order to best contribute to the family, children must be hard-working, honest, resourceful, and treat others well. The stories teach that, although the animal characters may have faults, by changing their ways they can overcome their

challenges. Storytelling provides the vehicle in which this knowledge can be naturally shared with children. In order for these teachings and values to be reinforced, teachers, community leaders, and Elders must find ways for the children to gain competency in the storytelling format. While being entertained by stories, children can be simultaneously learning about Secwepemc ways, and their place within the universe.

Part Two: The elements of a good story

Through this research I have identified five significant themes from Secwepemc *stsptekwle* that can form the basis of a storytelling model for immersion classrooms. These five elements are discussed below.

1. Personification of animal characters

Perhaps one of the more prominent features of *stsptekwle*, and of Salishan oral traditions in general, is the use of animal characters endowed with special powers. Through this exploration, I wanted to learn more about the mythical beings in *stsptekwle*, especially, Coyote. Through my experiences of hearing *stsptekwle*, the central character Coyote, has become one of my greatest teachers. I began to build an understanding of the significance of Coyote and the teachings he provides. I have always viewed Sek'lep, or Coyote, as a fascinating character, one who made me curious to hear more stories. Through the actions of mythical characters, such as Sek'lep, I have gained knowledge about Secwepemc morals and beliefs. Indigenous scholars have shared in their writings their own understanding of these mythical beings. Archibald (2008) describes Coyote as:

Among many First Nations, Coyote and her/his/its many manifestations is considered a Trickster character who has lots to learn and teach while travelling the world. The English word *trickster* is a poor one because it cannot portray the diverse range of ideas the First Nations associate with the Trickster who sometimes is like a magician, an enchanter, an absurd prankster, or a Shaman, who sometimes is a shape-shifter, and who often takes on formations often use humour, satire, self-mocking, and absurdity to carry good lessons. (p. 5)

It is within these lessons embedded in story that much of my learning about *being Secwepemc* has occurred. Many have said that Sek'lep (Coyote) is a character people can identify with because he has many human characteristics. Michel (2012) talks about how Sek'lep's "ability to bounce back after one fatal error after another helps us to see that it's okay to make mistakes" (p.210). These stories appeal to the children because Sek'lep's antics are childlike and the lessons being taught through story are not overtly delivered. In two of the stories I reviewed, *R Supe7s R Skwleqs* and *Sek'lep Met'e Spipyu7e*, Sek'lep plays the prankster and is eager to play tricks on the Bear in one story, and on the grouse children in the other story. His pranks cause the Bear to lose his long tail and the grouse children to walk around blindly bumping into things; all the while Sek'lep laughs at them. Ignace (2008) commented that, "In fact, he [Sek'lep] was fond of amusing himself and playing tricks on other people" (pp. 52-53). There is also a sense of realism in the stories. Michel (2012) states,

The ability of *stspetekwle* to both implicate and exonerate the audience is what gives power to a story. The psychological realism of the story, or its level of believability, is enhanced as we “jump on Coyote’s back” to share in his adventures. (p. 209)

It is this aspect of believability that draws us into a story and makes us feel a part of it. The students and myself, included, always look forward to hearing about the next adventures of Sek’lep and the other animal characters. It often feels like we are not just listening to the story, but in fact, are participating in it too.

2. Connection to the Land

When Elders are sharing *stspetekwle*, it is an important way for sharing knowledge about the land. The stories connect us to the land in many ways. Some stories explain how land forms came to be, some stories emphasize that the land is important to the interrelationship between the plant and animal world (Michel, 2012, p. 8), while other stories share lessons about how to live on the land and to sustain it. Archibald (1997), Ignace (2008), Michel (2012) all support in different ways Cohen’s declaration that “our stories, language and connections to our territory are vital to our existence and ongoing survival” (Cohen, 2010, p.103). Billy (2009) shares how “Coyote taught many lessons on how to behave properly using himself as an example. In fact, today you can see the markers left by Coyote that remind us of proper behavior” (p. 23). This is to remind us not to make fun of others, especially those that are young and defenseless.

Stspetekwle also connect us to our land through knowing our place names. Each story is set in a familiar location, such as Copper Island, or in Adams Lake (*Cstelen*) as in the story *R Supe7s R Skwleqs*. An important feature of *stspetekwle* is that many of the stories could be adapted to feature place names of the local community. Along with featuring place names, Ignace (2008) and Cohen (2010) both help us learn more about the land. Ignace (2008) states, “like the sparse language of *stspetekwll* that are aimed at an audience that knows the land” (p. 163). Ignace (2008) also goes on to say that what saves Coyote “is his knowledge of biogeoclimatic zones and indicator tree species, as a forest biologist would say” (p.168). Cohen (2010) states “Captikwl stories are connected to places, resources and practices within Okanagan territory and over thousands of years of knowledge” (p.105). Learning our *stspetekwle* is important to keep us connected to our territory by knowing our place names, the passing on of knowledge of the lands, and the teaching of Sek’lep by seeing land markers left by him to remind us of “proper behavior”.

3. Recurring Themes and Characters

Another feature of *stspetekwle* is the concept of recurring themes and characters. Many themes reoccur in *stspetekwle*, such as, the importance of family, knowing one’s gift, explaining how things came to be (such as the salmon or the short tail of the bear). Also, some main characters reappear in *stspetekwle*, such as the coyote, fox, mole, and bear. After hearing a few stories you begin to see the main

character’s personalities take shape. You see how each have certain characteristics, manners, and that they have formed certain relationships with each other.

As well as repeating themes and characters, many stories also feature a similar ending that has Coyote dying an often violent death but then being revived by his brother, Fox, or his wife, Mole jumping over him. The table below provides an example of recurring themes within three *stsptekwle* currently used at Chief Atahm School.

Table 2: Examples of repetitive themes

Title	R Supe7s R Skwleqs	Sek’lep Met’e Spipyu7e	R Xgwelecw Met’e Sek’lep
Sek’lep’s desire for change	-Sek’lep changes things (i.e. Bear used to have a long tail, now he has a short one)	-Sek’lep always changes things (i.e. at the end of the story he is knocked off the cliff and today the cliff is marked with his blood)	-Sek’lep changes things (i.e. he wanted to change his tail and trade his with Fox)
Sek’lep’s ability to come back to life		Fox, Sek’lep’s brother finds him dead on the road. He jumps over Sek’lep 3 times to bring him back to life	Fox finds his brother Sek’lep at bottom of cliff. He brings him back to life by jumping over him 3 times

Cohen (2010) sees this repeatability of stories as a significant factor in helping keep the story tradition alive. He states:

When the patterns of stories, seasonal cultural-economic practices, repetitive speech patterns and metaphoric and conceptual terms expressed..... "just knowing" becomes an intuitive wisdom, a synthesis over a lifetime of collective Okanagan pedagogy, ontology, and epistemology, collectively nurtured and held values, responsibilities and kinship relationships that sustained the people for millennia. (p. 110)

According to some Elders, it is the similarities within stories that help them to recall them. Archibald (1997) shares, "When Ellen [White] was asked how she learned to tell stories she recalled the use of repetition where she had to repeat the story" (p. 203). It is through the recurring themes and characters that the listener can begin to create their own connections to their land, history, and language.

4. Adaptability of Stories

Within Salishan oral traditions, storytellers have the flexibility of adapting their stories to fit their audience. Oral tradition has always allowed for storytellers to create their own meanings and interpretations of the stories, and to change the characters and settings of the stories. Storytellers often inserted local place names and landmarks in order to help their young listeners form a closer connection to the stories. Michel (2012) discusses how the adaptive nature of stories could be seen as not only a way to instruct the younger generations, but also to help communities make sense of changes and tensions. Although storytellers have a responsibility to personalize story for their listeners, the listener also has a responsibility. Michel

states that, “Within *stsptekwle*, there is a general expectation that the audience actively participates in helping produce story through adding their own details from existing knowledge” (p.10). Therefore, storytelling can be seen as a process wherein both storyteller and the listener co-create story based on their shared experiences and knowledges. Through storytellers adapting stories to help their audiences identify with the stories, ultimately allows for deeper connections to be made.

The flexible nature of story lends itself to be adapted for use in language teaching situations. In most cases, the *stsptekwle* will need to be altered from their original forms to increase their accessibility for language learners. To facilitate student comprehension, many of the stories may need to be shortened in length or the language and grammatical forms be simplified. Also, the plots and locations may need to be altered to be more relevant for children today. These changes will help students connect to the story and invite them into the world of story as active participants. By personalizing stories so that younger generations can better identify with them, we can help them make connections to their role within the Nation.

5. Story as Entertainment

Throughout the years, I have witnessed the enjoyment that children get from hearing an Elder share *stsptekwle*. I attribute their enjoyment to the magic of the story itself and to the gift of the storyteller. Gifted storytellers have the ability to make his/her words come alive through a variety of storytelling devices, such as

humour, word emphasis, body language, dragging out word sounds, or making sound effects. I noticed that whether it was my late father, Joe Michel, or my Uncle Lawrence, or my mother, Anne Michel, telling a story to the children, they all exhibited a passion and a gift for telling a story. Archibald (1997) explored the question, “What makes a good storyteller?” She stated, “I just think when people are gifted with storytelling, the stories become so much a part of their character and that’s what really captures people’s attention” (p. 121).

Gifted storytellers are able to enthrall their listeners. The children’s enjoyment is evidenced by their laughter and their responses to the story. They laugh at the funny parts; they get scared at the scary parts; but they always are listening attentively. Archibald (2008) talks about the presence of humour in storytelling. In her experience with talking with Elders she felt that laughter was present during many of her interviews with Elders, “Humour through teasing, joking, and telling funny stories is a very important cultural interaction” (p. 68). Archibald (1997) talked about Elders Ed Leon and Dolly Felix, and their ability to make people laugh with their stories. As gifted storytellers they, “had a way of bringing out humour in their stories and had “an animated manner”(p. 121). Archibald (2008) also, stated, “I believe that humour has a healing aspect for both the storyteller and the listener” (p. 121).

In my experience, I have witnessed the strong bond between the Elder, the storyteller, and the young students in my immersion classrooms. This relationship continues to build as the students get older and as they keep hearing the same stories overtime. These are beautiful moments for me when I see the Elder and the

young child engaging in such a traditional activity. A language teacher must have excellent rapport and relationship with their learners. Stories are as form of collective knowledge within the community. Archibald (1997) shares how "Wilfred Charlie, who worked as the Elder's Coordinator, reinforces the responsibility of teaching the oral tradition and culture to the young children" (p.123). She discusses the responsibility of that storytellers have to transmit Indigenous knowledge from one generation to the next. There is a relationship that the child learner develops with the storytellers, with the elders, and with traditional knowledge.

Part Three: Connecting Stories Language Curriculum Approach

In this section I gather up all of the pieces that I've learned about *stsptekwle* and connect them to developing language curriculum. As a language teacher I am most concerned with how this research can be practically applied within an immersion classroom. I have drawn from my research findings and from my experiences as language teacher to develop the *Connecting Stories Language Curriculum Approach* to designing and developing language teaching curricula based on Salishan storytelling. The steps in this methodology include a summary of the need for storytelling in the classroom; a list of specific goals for storytelling curricula; and, a guide for the selection and structuring of content.

Methodology is presented as a three-stage process: definition of the problem; conceptual framework, including criteria for selecting stories; and strategies for implementation. Although this process is presented as if it was sequential, in practice, I foresee it as a more organic process that will probably involve more

backwards then forwards movements as I scramble to fill the missing pieces. As with most curriculum development processes, this methodology presents a theoretical model that will probably be edited along the way when applied to real life situations.

Goals of the Connecting Stories Language Curriculum Approach

The general outcomes to be achieved by the *Connecting Stories Language Curriculum Approach* are:

- To promote storytelling as a vehicle for the intergenerational transfer of language, history, and culture;
- To ensure that the cultural values of respect and relationship-building are maintained;
- To promote positive relationship-building between the storyteller, the teacher, and the students;
- To provide strategies for the selection of stories;
- To list the core elements of traditional storytelling to ensure that these elements are maintained within language curricula; and
- To provide strategies for the adaptation of stories to make them more meaningful and comprehensible to language students

The Connecting Stories Language Curriculum Approach

In this section I discuss the implications, strategies, and challenges to implementing storytelling in an immersion classroom utilizing my perspective as an

immersion teacher. The following list can be used to guide teachers in preparing their classrooms for stories.

1) **Research** available resources and connect with storytellers. In this step it will be important to find original resources that can be used in a primary immersion classroom. There are some options to finding stories:

- a) Find recordings of fluent speaking Elders telling a *stsptekwle*
- b) Find written documents of *stsptekwle*

2) **Selecting a story**

- a) Does the story meet the pedagogical goals for teaching history, traditional knowledge, and values?
- b) Does the story have the five core elements of *stsptekwle*?
- c) Is the story entertaining? Will the story be interesting and relevant to the students?

3) **Adapting a story** for language teaching

- a) Shorten the length of the story
- b) Locations changed to familiar settings
- c) Simplified language
- d) Simplified plots and characters
- e) Ways in which students can develop receptive and expressive skills
- f) Ways to reinforce Atahm School guiding principles
- g) Inclusion of the five elements of stories, example shown in table below.

Table 3: Inclusion of the 5 storytelling elements

Story Features	
Personification of animal characters	Identify the characters in the story Describe the characteristics and traits of the characters What role does each character play in the story? How do the characters interact with each other?
Connection to the land	Does the story happen at a specific location Identify place names, names of land marks, or forms Identify the names of plants How is land important to the story?
Repetition	Use strategies like TPR-S to repeat the story many times Are there reoccurring themes in the story Do animals appear in different stories – what is their role?
Adaptability of story	Selection of the story: ensure that the content in story is applicable for the age of the students Adapt details in the story: keep the core element of the story but make some modifications. Possible modifications: change the location of the story, take out a character, or add a character, lessen the story and the details
Story as entertainment	Engage the audience Use props to enhance the story Use of voice and tone to enhance a story Storyteller is familiar with telling the story

4) Preparing the classroom for storytelling.

Establish and maintain a positive and trusting relationship between the storyteller, the teacher, and the students.

- a) Provide an environment so that the relationship between child and storyteller can flourish. Perhaps establishing an area for storytelling where

the storyteller and the listener are both comfortable. (I.e. set up a storytelling corner)

- b) Prepare resources that will be needed for the telling of stories (vocabulary list with graphics, story pictures, props, materials, etc.).
- c) Ensure that the storyteller understands his/her role and responsibilities. The storyteller has a responsibility to teach the Secwepemc oral tradition and culture. The tradition of an Elder telling a stspetekwle to young children in a classroom environment will be somewhat of a challenge, since traditionally these stories were told in people's homes. The storyteller has many responsibilities to fulfill some of these are as follows:
 - i) Selection of story - is the story appropriate for the time and place, for the age of the child, for the appropriateness of the situation.
 - ii) Engaging the audience – by use of sound effects, props, change of voice intonation, etc.
- d) Prepare the students for listening to stories.
 - i) Practice how listeners can demonstrate respect for the storyteller by sitting quietly and comfortably and actively listening to the storyteller.
 - ii) Demonstrate how students can indicate to the storyteller that he/she show his/her appreciation to the storyteller or indicate to the storyteller that he/she is still listening or wanting to hear more of the story or another story by saying, “i7ey”, a Secwepemc word indicating you are listening. This encourages the storyteller to keep going.
 - iii) Discuss ways the students can show appreciation to the storyteller is by offering a gift to the storyteller.

Summary

In this chapter I have articulated a process to help guide teachers in preparing their language classrooms for using traditional stories. In Part One, I discussed the use of traditional stories within Indigenous language education as providing an important link to a child's history and culture, as well as a way to help them come to a better understanding of self. Part Two identified five main elements of *stsptekwle* that need to be present within any adaptation of story for language teaching. Finally, in Part Three, I outline my *Connecting Stories Language Curriculum Approach* to designing and developing language educational curricula based on Salishan storytelling. In the final chapter, I summarize my research project and explore potential developments of this research.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Never before have Secwepemc stories, or *stsptekwle*, been examined for the purpose of language learning in a Secwepemc immersion classroom. This practitioner research project focuses on a curriculum and classroom approach to using traditional stories to teach language, culture, and history. Although this study comes from my perspective as a Secwepemc immersion teacher, I believe that the findings are relevant to Indigenous language education in general. As a learner of Secwepemctsin, and an immersion teacher working hard to reclaim and revive the Secwepemc language, I have been challenged to find either the resources or the methodology to incorporating *stsptekwle* within a second language educational setting. Therefore, this work will fulfill an immediate need – that of bringing the tradition of storytelling into our immersion classrooms. Through engaging in the process of understanding story, and through identifying essential elements of *stsptekwle*, we can ensure that the integrity of our stories remain intact. In a way, this research represents my way of ensuring that we continue the tradition of hearing, understanding, and learning from our *stsptekwle*, in our own language, Secwepemctsin.

In this research project, I explored ways our traditional storytelling form of *stsptekwle* could be used in a language classroom as a vehicle for teaching our history, language, and culture. Although Indigenous language teachers, myself included, have found success using second language methods such as TPR-Storytelling (TPR-S) in their classrooms, I felt that the methodology was lacking a

cultural perspective. To help articulate the genre of traditional stories, called *stsptekwle* in the Secwepemc language, I looked to what Indigenous scholars had to say about Salishan storytelling traditions. I am grateful to the scholars before who have written on the subject. In this research I have relied on the words of Salishan scholars Archibald (1997, 2008), Ignace (2008), Billy (2009), Cohen (2010), and Michel (2012) to help identify key features of *stsptekwle*.

Discussion of Findings

For this research project I sought answers to three main questions. In this section I summarize the findings within the context of answering the research questions.

Question One: What are the benefits and the challenges to teaching *stsptekwle* in a Secwepemc primary immersion classroom?

As Indigenous teachers working hard to revive our traditional languages in classroom environments, we are challenged to find effective ways to teach to teach language. In second language classrooms, storytelling is an effective way to teach language because stories interest students, students engage in learning, students are entertained, and lowers affective filters that allow for learning to occur. Storytelling is also an effective tool to enhance students' language proficiency, both receptive and expressive, and increases language development.

As a Secwepemc teacher working in an immersion setting, it is important not only to teach language, but also to incorporate culture into the teaching. Since stories have been used by the Secwepemc people throughout history as a way to

“transmit traditional values, spiritual beliefs, societal expectations, and history of the Secwepemc people” (Michel, 2012, p. 10) they are a natural fit within a language-teaching environment. According to Archibald (2008), Cohen (2010), and Michel (2012), we, as listeners, are invited to be participants and engage in the adventures of Coyote. It is in hearing the stories from the master storytellers that we will be able to understand and know our language, our histories and to learn more about who we are and where we come from. There are many benefits to keeping our tradition of storytelling alive.

Although there is a long history of using stories to teach young children, the task of bringing *stsptekwle* into second language classrooms poses a few extra challenges. Through introducing children to *stsptekwle* in immersion classrooms, we are changing the manner in which the stories were traditionally shared. Unfortunately, most homes do not have fluent family members able to tell stories to children; therefore, the classroom may now be the only place our stories are heard. Also, in the past, storytellers were usually close family members who knew how, and when, to personalize the story for each child. However, in the immersion classrooms of today, it is left up to the teacher and the storyteller to select the story that will best meet the students’ language development needs and adapt them so that they become comprehensible to them. Another challenge we face is that the number of master storytellers left who have been trained from a young age in the art of telling stories is dwindling fast, and, because very few are actively training to be storytellers today, there is a need for teachers of the immersion program to begin some form of training. Also, there is an urgent need to share our stories to younger

generations before all our master storytellers are gone. Hearing the story from a living source far outweighs hearing from a secondary source.

Question Two: What are the key features of *stsptekwle*?

I began my research by diligently reviewing what Indigenous scholars had to say about *stsptekwle*. I am grateful to the scholars before who have written on the subject. Although there are many layers to *stsptekwle*, I have identified five themes as significant themes to teach in an immersion classroom as outlined below.

First, students can make connections with characters that appear in *stsptekwle* by identifying with the human-like animal characters that have magical powers. For example, children will be able to identify with the main character of Sek'lep, or Coyote, because of his child-like antics. Second, *stsptekwle* connects the listener to the land. Learning *stsptekwle* is important to keep us connected to our territory by knowing our place names, the passing on of knowledge of the lands, the teaching of Sek'lep by seeing his land markers left by him to remind us of *proper behaviour*. Third, *stsptekwle* presents a recurring characters and themes, such as Coyote coming back to life, that help reinforce Secwepemc values of k'weseltnews (importance of family), knucwestsut.s (knowing one's gift), slexlexs (becoming knowledgeable), mellelc (learn to enjoy life), and qweqwetsin (humble oneself to all creation). Reoccurrence of familiar characters like Coyote, Fox, Bear, and Mole help the listener starts to see how each have certain characteristics, manners, and that they have formed certain relationships with each other. Lessons can be learned through the adventures of these characters and their interactions with each other,

and, the end results of their actions. Fourth, the adaptive nature of *stsptekwle* lends itself to being used in a language-teaching context. It will be the responsibility of storytellers, curriculum developers, and teachers, to help make connections between the listener and the story by adapting the stories to be more comprehensible to students and relevant to the modern context. Stories can be adapted by shortening the story, simplifying the story's language and grammatical forms, altering any plots that are not relevant to a present-day context, and by personalizing the story so that students can identify with the teachings. Finally, *stsptekwle* connects the storyteller and the listener in an enjoyable activity. A good storyteller entertains by making stories come alive by using humour, body language, dragging out important words, or by making sound effects. Overall, these five themes will help students make their own connections to story and to connect to the Secwepemc language, culture, history, and land.

Question Three: How can *stsptekwle* be adapted for use for language teaching environment?

When our Elders are no longer able to come into our classrooms to share their stories with the students, the responsibility of keeping our stories alive will fall on those of us working hard to learn and teach our ancestral languages. Therefore, it is imperative that more people begin to learn the stories. This research helps engage this process of reviving stories through articulating an approach to developing storytelling curriculum that honours the tradition of *stsptekwle*, while being considerate of the language needs of immersion students.

In order to implement successful storytelling language curriculum it will be helpful to ensure the following: research and find resources, follow a process for selecting a story, adapt the story, and prepare the classroom. First, find and research and existing stories and begin recording any Elder that is willing to share stories. Second, the process of selecting a story is key to success. This process involves asking yourself the following questions, “Does the story follow the criteria of meeting pedagogical goals to teach history, traditional knowledge, and values?”; “Does the story have the five core elements of *stsptekwle*?”; and finally, “Is the story interesting and relevant for the students?” Third, preparing the classroom by providing a positive learning environment between storyteller, teacher, and students. Also, it is important to prepare any resources that are needed to enhance the learning of the students. The storyteller has a responsibility of ensuring that the oral tradition of storytelling is honoured by challenging students to learn and by selecting appropriate stories and engaging the audience. The listener also has a responsibility to show respect by listening attentively, show appreciation by encouraging the storyteller to continue by saying “i7ey” and offering a gift of thanks to the storyteller. These are all ways to prepare the learning environment for storytelling.

Limitations of this research

This research is relevant to the improvement of my teaching. In the past, I have been busy working with the Chief Atahm School staff to create, develop, and deliver a Secwepemc immersion program. I have not taken the time, before now, to record

some of my discoveries as a practicing Secwepemc immersion teacher. Through this research I have finally taken the time to research Secwepemc *stsptekwle*. This research has guided me to many discoveries and findings. Throughout this process, my challenge was to quit being so product-oriented and become more process-oriented. As a teacher used to the day-to-day classroom rush, I wanted to jump to the finish line and produce a final unit plan with detailed lessons. It was challenging to keep reminding myself to be mindful of the process I took towards making my discoveries. I realized that I would have to slow down in order to communicate to others how bringing *stsptekwle* into Secwepemc language classrooms needs to be grounded in our values and in the teachings inherent in our stories. This research project can be seen as my joining in with Sek'lep's ongoing adventure, and not, as the end of a story. The stories are never-ending, and so, my journey for learning should be as well.

Through this research journey I developed a greater appreciation of our storytelling tradition, *stsptekwle*. The more I learned, the more I realized how complicated it would be to try to recreate the passing down of the tradition of *stsptekwle* within an immersion school setting. The training of becoming a storyteller is a very complex process that requires someone who is fluent enough to understand and tell the stories in Secwepemctsin: knowledgeable in cultural protocol, history, geography, and cultural teachings; and has developed a life-long relationship of *knowing stsptekwle*. As my Uncle Lawrence says, it is in the knowing of not just one story, but many, that we can begin to relate to our *stsptekwle*.

Therefore, in order for me to move forward in this research, I felt I had to narrow my focus to defining what the essential elements were within *stsptekwle* that would have to be carried forward in any adaptations made for language programs. The resulting five elements should not be looked at as a definitive listing, but rather as a general guide to assist in the development of storytelling curriculum.

Future considerations

In the Secwepemc immersion classroom, the students are learning to be good listeners and speakers of Secwepemctsin. One of the biggest challenges to keeping *stsptekwle* and the story spirit alive is that we are working with students in a second language environment. Because Chief Atahm School is an immersion school, the *stsptekwle* will need to be presented in Secwepemctsin. Fluent-speakers will often tell stories that they remember being told as children and this usually would be the lengthier versions of *stsptekwle*. The challenge is that our students do not always understand the complete story because they do not have some of the language skills needed to fully comprehend a story. With guidance from the Elders, there is work to be done on restorying the *stsptekwle* to help them be more comprehensible for immersion classrooms. However, it is important not to take away too much from the original story. This research does not cover how and when the students would learn the full version of the story. At first the students would hear a simpler versions of each story, however, it is planned that the students will hear the same stories in each subsequent grade, each time with more details and length added to the story. This repetitive cycle for stories would need to be developed further and piloted in

our language classrooms so that we can ensure that we continue to meet the students needs.

Ultimately, this research project represents a pathway to engage in storytelling for teachers to learn from, and, to extend their own teaching. In the past, I have spent the majority of my time, along with other members of the Chief Atahm School staff, creating, developing, and delivering a Secwepemc immersion program. Until now I have not had the opportunity to record my reflections and observations as a practicing Secwepemc immersion teacher. Although this project has offered me the opportunity to research Secwepemc *stsptekwle*, it has led me to many more discoveries and findings about our stories that I doubt I will be able to fully explore in this lifetime. However, I have managed to find tools from which I can carry forth with my life's passion, learning and teaching about *being Secwepemc*

Conclusion

This project is important because it fills an immediate need through providing the framework from which to approach the development of storytelling curriculum for second language learners. In addition, since no one has articulated the key features of *stsptekwle* from the perspective of language teaching before, my experiences as an immersion teacher, and, as a Secwepemc, lends a practical perspective to the use of storytelling in Indigenous language education. This work will add to the work that has already been accomplished at Chief Atahm School. My wish is that this sets a foundation that can lead to the development of *stsptekwle* curriculum in the future.

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