

---

Faculty of Education

NETOLNEW 'one mind, one people': Indigenous Language  
Research Network

---

Indigenous adults revive languages in British Columbia through Mentor-Apprentice  
style learning: Phase 2 executive summary

S. Gessner, H. Green, & N. Multani

2021

This report was originally published at:

[www.netolnew.ca/resources](http://www.netolnew.ca/resources)

---

Citation for this paper:

Gessner, S., Green, H., & Multani, N. (2021). *Indigenous adults revive languages in British Columbia through Mentor-Apprentice style learning: Phase 2 Executive Summary*. Victoria, BC: University of Victoria. Retrieved from [www.netolnew.ca/resources](http://www.netolnew.ca/resources)



ONE MIND • ONE PEOPLE

# NETOLNEW

*Indigenous adults revive languages in British Columbia through  
Mentor-Apprentice style learning*

PHASE 2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## A community-university research partnership

The NETOLNEW project studies  
adult Indigenous language learning.

NETOLNEW means “one mind, one people” or “doing things as one” in the SENĆOŦEN language spoken on southern Vancouver Island. It is also the name for a research partnership between [WSÁNEĆ School Board / Saanich Adult Education Centre](#), [First Peoples' Cultural Council](#) and the [University of Victoria](#).

In 2017, the partnership expanded to include nine Indigenous partners from across Canada. Increasingly, adult language learners are identified as the “missing generation” who hold great potential to contribute to the revival of Indigenous languages and connect Elders, children, and youth in their communities.

### About the study

Research led by First Peoples' Cultural Council (FPCC) focuses on the Mentor-Apprentice Program (MAP). With the MAP approach, adult language learners (*apprentices*) and proficient speakers (*mentors*) carry out daily activities and cultural practices together speaking only the language.



In FPCC's program, apprentices spend 10–15 hours per week in one-on-one language immersion for up to three years.

Phase 1 of the project documented the successes and challenges of MAP in the BC context through interviews with over 60 participants, including apprentices, mentors, and administrators in partner organizations. The results indicate that MAP has had tremendous positive impacts for mentors, apprentices, and communities across BC. Reports about Phase 1 are available at [www.netolnew.ca/map-report-2018](http://www.netolnew.ca/map-report-2018).

In Phase 2, we focused on three questions to better support apprentice success:

- 1 How can we better support apprentices to succeed in their learning?
- 2 How can we support advanced apprentices in their continued work?
- 3 How can we assess the effectiveness of their learning?



# Research findings

## How can we better support apprentices to succeed in their learning?

TWENTY-ONE APPRENTICES *who did not complete* all program hours participated in individual phone interviews regarding their experiences in the program.

### Challenges

Interviews explored challenges faced by apprentices and also identified possible solutions.

Paid employment is the main reason apprentices do not complete their hours, experienced by 81% of apprentices. Other main challenges include difficulty staying in immersion or planning for sessions, home or family responsibilities and illness.

As for solutions, several apprentices noted the flexibility of the method and the ability to use land-based learning and language outside of a classroom setting. Many observed that a strong interpersonal bond and good communication with their mentor contributed to success. Effective learning strategies include using pictures, recording sessions, having fun and doing practical activities. Every apprentice felt that they were supported by their mentor, and many mentioned support from their families, communities and FPCC. At the same time, 76% of apprentices experienced feelings of isolation; connection to other mentors and apprentices was identified as something that could help.

“

*The mentor-apprentice program is one of the best programs out there to increase your proficiency.*

### Post-Program and future learning

Even though this group of apprentices did not complete all of their hours, 95% of them have continued learning their language in other ways. All previous apprentices stated that they would be interested in reapplying for the MAP program. These 21 apprentices shared a variety of positive outcomes resulting from their participation in the program, as shown below.

100% Increased your proficiency in your language

100% Been empowered to participate in other programs

100% Developed relationship with mentor/other speakers

95% Experienced cultural and/or spiritual wellbeing

90% Increased your ability to pass on language to others

90% Been empowered to lead/teach in other programs

71% Experienced physical health benefits



## How can we support advanced apprentices in their continued work?

EIGHTEEN APPRENTICES *who did complete* the maximum 900 hours in the program participated in an online survey to elicit ideas to support advanced apprentices in their work. Highlights:

- 100% of apprentices felt they increased their fluency.
- 100% of apprentices felt they increased their ability to pass their language on to others.
- 94% have continued learning their language after participating MAP, mostly through self-study (88%) or by continuing to learn with their mentor in an informal way (71%).
- 94% have been actively passing on their language to others after participating MAP, mostly with other family members (65%).
- 72% have been involved in other language work in their community since participating in MAP.
- All apprentices surveyed felt that further support to continue their learning would be helpful. There was broad support for all of the suggested options (e.g., grants for resources, revitalization training or post-secondary, linguist support, and others) but the one deemed “very useful” by 94% of apprentices was a similar MAP grant to continue learning. Clearly, apprentices found the method to be successful and would like to do more of the same.

## How can we assess the effectiveness of their learning?

THE LANGUAGE LEARNING ASSESSMENT TOOL (LLAT; see [www.netolnew.ca/assessment](http://www.netolnew.ca/assessment)) poses 84 questions covering beginner- and intermediate- level speaking and understanding tasks. If apprentices are learning, one would expect scores to improve each year. Fourteen apprentices submitted complete LLATs in both 2019 and 2020 and 86% demonstrated an improvement in total score between years.

This research question had three particular findings of interest:

- A 86% are improving their language proficiency through the program.
- B The LLAT results are consistent with other methods of assessment used in the program.
- C The results provide quantitative data to complement the qualitative data that demonstrates that MAP is effective at increasing language proficiency for adult language learners of Indigenous languages.

“

*Because I had a toddler at the time, I learned language that you would use at a playground. I would learn language you would use going for a walk ... Anything that was relevant to me was something that interested me and was easy for me to learn and pick up, because I was able to practice it when I was away from the fluent speaker.*

# Recommendations & future directions

THE APPRENTICES INTERVIEWED and surveyed for this study provided rich and detailed feedback on their experiences. There is much we can learn from their observations, including:

- › *Work is the main issue that interferes with completion of MAP hours.* One way that FPCC is trying to address this issue is with the new Youth Empowered Speakers Program which combines MAP learning with a paid internship and an educational scholarship.
- › *Apprentices feel they would benefit from more interaction with other apprentices* and by having more than one apprentice in the same community. The ability to work with more than one mentor also ranked highly.
- › *The Language Learning Assessment Tool is an effective way of assessing apprentice proficiency.* As of 2020, FPCC has an online grant portal which will facilitate collection of data for future apprentices. It will enable us to see whether preliminary observations are confirmed over a larger scale.

“Participating in the MAP program was such an amazing opportunity for me. I was able to begin the lifelong journey of learning my language, and along with language, learning more about my culture.”



#### LEARN MORE & CONTACT US

First Peoples' Cultural Council | [www.fpcc.ca](http://www.fpcc.ca) | [info@fpcc.ca](mailto:info@fpcc.ca)  
NETOLNEW | [www.netolnew.ca](http://www.netolnew.ca) | [netolnew@uvic.ca](mailto:netolnew@uvic.ca)

**THANK YOU** to the following apprentices for their participation in this research: Craig Adams, Marilyn Baptiste, Melanie Chickite, Colette Child, Will Cohen Jr., Jessica Creyke, Amber Eustache, Cynthia Jensen Fisk, Lori George, Alicia Gilbert, Cheyenne Gwa'amuuk, Victoria Jaenig, Rosalie MacDonald, Warren Nelson, Alexandria Peters, Sandra Robinson, Aaron Sumexheltza, Gail Tait, Carla Voyageur, Aaron Williams, Crystal, Krystal, Natasha, Nundi, Zaz and 14 anonymous adult language learners. **HI,SWKE!**

This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.



Social Sciences and Humanities  
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en  
sciences humaines du Canada



The quotes in this report are from MAP apprentices who participated in the study.

The photographs on pages 1, 2 and 3 are copyright © 2021 by FPCC.

#### PLEASE CITE THIS REPORT AS:

Gessner, S., Green, H., & Multani, N. (2021). *Indigenous adults revive languages in British Columbia through Mentor-Apprentice style learning: Phase 2 Executive Summary*. Victoria, BC: University of Victoria. Retrieved from [www.netolnew.ca/resources](http://www.netolnew.ca/resources)