Goyatıì K’aàt’ıì Ats’edee, K’aàt’ıì Adets’edee: Ho!
Healing Our Languages, Healing Ourselves: Now is the time

by

Margaret Therese Erasmus
B.A. (Hons.), University of Saskatchewan, 1987
B.Ed., University of Saskatchewan, 1999

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Departments of Linguistics and Indigenous Education

Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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This study investigates key components for effective Indigenous adult language learning and resulting health and wellness benefits following a Dene research paradigm with Grounded Theory applications. Eight colleagues in the Master's of Indigenous Language Revitalization (MILR) program at the University of Victoria participated in open ended discussions on their experiences in learning their Indigenous languages as adults.

These Indigenous adults reclaiming their ancestral languages report experiencing benefits related to health and overall well-being. Physical fitness and healthy weight loss, emotional healing and a greater sense of identity all surfaced for my colleagues while working towards or achieving fluency in their languages. The main methods of successful language learning used were the Master-Apprentice Program, Total Physical Response and Accelerated Second Language Acquisition. Tips for learning the languages are included.

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to all our ancestors who kept our languages and traditions alive despite it all, and especially to my parents, the late Fred and Florence Erasmus. Mahsi cho Mom and Dad for giving up so much to keep us out of residential school and for raising us in our traditional Dene ways and for teaching us what is most important in life.

I also dedicate this work to my children, Laurie-Ann Lines, Lila Lines, Wesley Lines and William Lines, my grandson Rain Tekakwitha Lines, and as-yet unborn generations.

Chapter One: Introduction

Età, weza tsı

Età, weza tsı, yedàıyeh nezıı tsı,

wızì t'à hotıè kǫǫt'e nıdè.

Gotà yak'e wheneda

Ekòt'a nızì degaı ts'edı nıdè,

nızǫ k'àıwo anet'e ne.

Yak'e nets'eèhkw'ǫ,

eyı k'ęę dıı nèk'e tsı nets'eèhkw'ǫ nıdè.

Wet'à dzę taàt'e ts'eedaa gha

dııdzęę k'e goghànıdı.

T'a gok'èch'a nàhoehdèe sìı gıghǫ nahoıle.

Eyı k'ęę nek'èch'a nàhots'eehdè nıdè goghǫ nahonele.

Hoełıı ts'ııwǫ ch'à goxoneehdı.

Weełıı gots'ǫǫ̀ nıwà anele.

Dıì gots'ǫ ıdaà welǫ whìle ts'ǫ̀

nızǫ k'àıwo, nızǫ nànetso,

nızǫ neghǫ sìghà ats'edı ha ne.

Hotıè kǫǫt'e nıdè.

Neda nıèhwho, Marì

Neda nıèhwho, Marì

Hotıè Nǫ̀htsıı neghǫnıètǫ.

Nedzeè yìı whe?ǫ.

Hazǫǫ̀ ts’èko daats’ǫ̀ anet’e ne.

Dıı Jesus nechǫ yìı dıı̨wo, ededı̨ eyı làą̀t’e.

Degaı Marì, yedàıyeh mǫ nelı̨.

Naxıjıı kò gogha yanehtı,

dıì gots’ǫ, ełaàts’ıde gots’ǫ̀.

Hotıè kǫǫ̨t’e nı̨dè.

Qnats’edı nı̨dè

Qnats’edı nı̨dè, età, weza tsı̨,

yedàıyeh nezıı̨ tsı̨.

T’aakwe dàgǫ̀ht’e nǫǫ, dıì,

ı̨daà welǫ whìle ts’ǫ̀ hagǫ̀ht’e ha.

Hotıè kǫǫ̨t’e nı̨dè.

Goyatıì nàtso gha masì, senǫhtsı̨.

Età, weza tsı̨

Età, weza tsı̨, yedàıyeh nezıı̨ tsı̨,

wı̨zì t’à hotıè kǫǫ̨t’e nı̨dè.

Organizational Structure

Following is a brief introduction of material presented in this thesis, written for Indigenous adult language learners and instructors with the hope of providing useful information towards Indigenous language revitalization. It is also intended for those working to heal our communities of the legacy of residential schools and other trauma experienced through colonization and erosion of our languages and cultures.

Chapter one: introduction. Throughout this first chapter, I situate myself for the reader with a traditional Dene introduction to my parents, grandparents and great grandparents including our way of life. This is followed by an outline of the purpose of this research and literature relevant to the research in particular how Indigenous language relates to identity, culture, self-esteem, spirituality, worldview and well being; and best practices in learning Indigenous languages.

Chapter two: methodology and methods. Chapter two describes the methodology and methods used in the study. As a Dene woman, raised by two traditional Dene parents, I have tried to remain true to my teachings, bringing a Dene worldview and Dene ways of conducting research. I have always said that my parents, my Dad especially, were true Dene scientists. They taught us how to think critically, thoroughly assessing a situation before making a decision, thinking about long-term results while keeping in mind benefits to the family as a whole, and to the community as a whole. Ways of assessing become very polished as traditional Dene people age because this training starts at a very young age. Dene Elders are regarded for discerning a person's characteristics by taking a quick glance at them. That is often one reason why they will not spend time with some people.

Although Dene research protocols and methodologies are known to the Dene, there is not much documentation in this area to date. Therefore, most of my citations are in the general realm of Indigenous methodologies with a relation back to the Dene worldview. I also explain the process used to capture information for this thesis.

Eight of my colleagues in the Master's of Indigenous Language Revitalization (MILR) program at the University of Victoria were interviewed on their experiences in learning their Indigenous languages as adults. The interviews were open-ended and conversational, leaving room for additional information that my colleagues saw fit to include. The discussions were documented and sorted and re-sorted into categories as outlined in chapter three.

Chapter three: findings. Chapter three provides a summary of the findings of the research. Since there are two components to the research, language learning and effects on well-being, the results are reported in two sections.

Physical health improvements, strengthening of identity and improved well-being connected to language learning were reported. Colleagues found success using adaptations of Hinton's Master-Apprentice Program (MAP), Total Physical Response (TPR) and Total Physical Response-Storytelling (TPR-S) and Accelerated Second Language Acquisition (ASLA).

Chapter four: conclusions and recommendations. Chapter four discusses the effects of adult language learning on personal health and well-being and includes language learning tips from my colleagues. Indigenous adults becoming fluent in their traditional languages have experienced improved health and well-being including strengthened identity. It is suggested that governments provide greater funding for Indigenous language revitalization, particularly for adult learning. The language programs should be of a long duration to ensure success at

achieving fluency, and health and wellness outcomes should be assessed along with language milestones.

Introduction of Self and Family

In keeping with my Dene traditions of research, I begin with an introduction of my ancestral background and family history, which I have learnt from my own family. I briefly describe my family life growing up in Yellowknife and my own language learning. I use a storytelling style of writing, following a common way of introducing oneself in Dene culture in the north.

Parents and family life. My parents are the late Fred and Florence Erasmus who were born and raised in Behchokǫ̀, Denendeh, speaking Tłı̨chǫ and living the Tłı̨chǫ Dene way of life. My Dad's dad was Cree, and passed down similar teachings to the Dene in ways of living. Dene traditions were paramount in our family upbringing, with a strong focus on the values of honesty, kindness, working hard, spirituality, connection to the land, working together in a cooperative spirit and looking out for the good of the group over one's immediate personal needs. They taught us from a very early age to share, think critically and problem-solve in Dene ways, very much following the Dene traditions regarding child rearing. My mother had never attended residential school or any type of formal schooling; however, she taught herself to read and write. Fortunately for us and our future generations, she was raised in the love of the community as our Dene people had practiced for millenia, and raised her children with a love that had no end. As one of our spiritual advisors stated about my mother, she would 'do anything for her children'. She was one of the kindest people you will ever meet and was loved by so many of the Elders of her community, probably not only because of her nature but because she was one of few children

left in the community while the others were at residential school. She later taught kindergarten because she was recognized as a natural teacher in the Dene traditional pedagogy.

My mother loved to sew and was so proficient at her craft that she could look at a person and almost immediately assess the size of clothing they would require from moccasin to parka size. Sometimes, we would go to bed in the evening and mom would be busy at her sewing machine as usual. When we would wake up in the morning there would be two or three beautiful parkas hanging by the door ready to be picked up by the people who requested them the day before. People would be amazed at how well anything Mom sewed fit them, as well as by her handiwork. She would never be satisfied unless her sewing demonstrated her true abilities. Although her handiwork was in great demand, one of Mom's greatest pleasures was sewing for her children. She made countless traditional gloves, mitts, moccasins, mukluks, parkas, vests, and jackets for us. She even designed and sewed modern clothing for us, ensuring we had the latest styles at school dances and other events. Sewing for the family always came first.

Mom believed in and practised the Dene way of raising children, with love and patience, guiding the child to be the person they were meant to be and achieving their full potential. I don't remember her ever raising her voice at us while we were young, never mind spanking us or anything of that nature. On one occasion, which the family regularly teased Mom about - because she usually went along with what our teachers had to say, the school called her because one of my younger brothers was getting into mischief at school and they wanted her permission to give him the strap. She gave them an earful saying that she never hit her own children, so what made them think she would give them permission to hit her children. She couldn't believe their philosophy and asked incredulously, "You **hit** children, and you call yourself Catholic?"

Both Mom and Dad trained us from birth to recognize our passions and aptitudes and provided us with ample opportunities to grow in those areas. They taught us to make decisions using logical analysis and deduction. Common sense and integrity went hand in hand and were customary in our home.

Although our family moved out of Ndilo and to the other side of the island in order to access the school bus when my older siblings were starting school, my parents made sure to establish our home right on the water front. This enabled our family to continue practising our traditional ways even though we lived at the edge of Yellowknife.

It was routine for our family to hop in the boat and go up the river to the rapids. We would enjoy our time together, setting a net, making dryfish and hunting for ducks or moose. We also had a fish net in the water almost all year round. In the winter, Dad would set his net under the ice; my amazement never ceasing at the sight of the net as he and my brothers would pull it up after its mysterious trek under the ice and snow. Dad and the other Elders would be sure to move their nets from place to place to ensure that the fish population thrived.

I remember getting up early on summer mornings just to enjoy the serenity of paddling the boat by myself on the clear still lake, or going with Dad, sitting in my favourite spot at the front high up on the bow to weigh it down, while my younger brothers and sisters would sit carefully protected in the inner gulleys of the boat. Or being out at Prelude, another family favourite area, and Dad setting food aside for the bears, explaining Dene ways of getting along with bears; and hearing his stories of experiences he had with bears and how respect and communication are key to cooperative living. And telling us to never worry about animals like bears hurting us, because if we treat them right, they would not bother us, unless there was something wrong, like they were sick or wounded.

Throughout the year, we had a steady diet of traditional Dene foods; our main staple was caribou meat as Dad was a proficient hunter and always provided well for his family as well as contributing to the community freezer for others in the community. Fish, ducks, moose meat, and rabbits were also regular menu items in our house. Dad would not allow us to have food like wieners or baloney; he would say it's full of garbage and no good for you. There was always a pot of stew or something else on the stove, so we never went hungry and could eat whenever we felt hungry. Dad was an amazing cook and helped mom out quite a bit, especially when she was busy with her sewing.

Mom seemed to make dryfish all summer long, and drymeat usually in the fall and spring. We loved going out to pick berries and were lucky that our grandparents moved from Behchokǫ̀ to Yellowknife with our parents. We spent time with our grandparents pretty much every day.

Family language learning. As for language, Mom loved her Tłı̨chǫ language. She was very particular and spoke clearly and concisely. She was an interpreter in high demand because she usually understood the topic at hand and would go to great lengths to make sure she interpreted correctly, clarifying with the speaker in English or Tłı̨chǫ to make sure she understood and therefore translated correctly. She was an advocate of keeping the language as close to what she was originally taught as possible, and disliked hearing people using phrases like 'wets'ǫ wife' for 'his wife' instead of wets'èke. She would say that pretty soon they will forget how to say it properly. Mom was also very concerned that the language was not being carried forward. In an interview in 1998 documenting Elders' views on why we should have our own school in our community, Mom stated that, 'Now is the time' to start using and teaching our languages at home and in the schools.

It's very unfortunate that the school systems of the day carried on the myth that learning an Indigenous language would adversely affect one's knowledge of English. Mom and Dad wanted us to succeed in this world while maintaining our Cree/Dene identity, and so passed on everything they knew to us including the language. That is, until my oldest brother got sent home from school for a year to learn English before coming back. It was at that point that my mother decided to learn English too, and my parents decided to mainly speak English to the family. We were fortunate, though, that they continued to speak the language to us, although to a lesser degree, and to all our relatives and community members. There were certain elements of the language they made sure we knew; however, our understanding was greater than our speaking.

Spirituality and traditions. Our parents wanted us to be immersed in and learn as much as we could about our Dene and Cree spirituality and did things like bring us to the Morley reserve in Alberta every summer during the 1970s to attend the annual Indian Ecumenical Conference (IEC). Morley was a place where spiritual leaders and Elders from across Turtle Island gathered to pass the teachings down to the younger generations, and people of all ages from Ndilo, Dettah, Yellowknife and Behchokǫ̀ would travel there together by chartered bus each summer.

My late Dad and late Uncle, Jim Erasmus, had been part of a steering committee that established the annual IEC gatherings at Morley. They, along with Elders from across the continent, had attended a meeting in the USA, where discussions were held about passing on spiritual teachings to future generations. Both my late father and my late Uncle grew up in the traditional way of life, and were strong in their beliefs that the Dene way of life should continue.

Treat (2003) captured this to some degree in his book on the annual spiritual gatherings at Morley.

> Jimmy and Fred Erasmus, Dogrib leaders from Yellowknife, collaborated on a resolution "opposing all interference in the natural and sacred relation between the Indian people and the animals and birds which the Creator placed on this island for our physical and spiritual sustenance." They were particularly aggrieved by "such things as requiring Indians to have a permit to hunt eagles … the encouragement of commercial hunting of caribou in the Northwest Territories, the promotion of sportsman hunting to the detriment of hunting for food by Indians, etc." Painfully aware of the connection between environmental stewardship and the political economy, the Erasmus brothers suggested that "Canada and the United States cannot address the problem of pollution and ecological balance by ignoring traditional Indian religious practices. Conservation offices should consult Indian religious leaders about conservation practices." (Treat, 2003, pp. 141-142).

Right up until the year of his passing, my father was a strong advocate for caribou conservation and proper management of the herd, as had been taught and practised by our people down through the centuries. In his life time, he saw warning signs of decline, and spoke about it long before any conservation group or government became concerned. His biggest concern was big game hunters shooting to kill just to carry home a large set of antlers. He often spoke about the leaders in the caribou herd, and would say the rest of the caribou would get lost; they don't know where to go if their leaders get killed, just like people. At many, many meetings, and individually to Chiefs and other leaders, Dad would repeatedly speak up to encourage stopping big game sporting hunting of caribou. Recent reports record the Bathurst caribou herd at

approximately 8200; a dramatic decrease from the robust population of 450,000 in the mid 1980's (GNWT, 2018).

Grandparents and great grandparents. My great-grandfather, the late Peter Erasmus, was a Cree interpreter for Chief Atahkakoop and Chief Mistawasis at the signing of Treaty 6 at Fort Carleton in 1876. He was chosen by the Cree Chiefs over the government designated interpreters because he was known for his honesty, integrity and strong command of many of the Plains dialects. The Chiefs had sent spokesmen a long distance to Whitefish Lake (in present day Alberta) where Erasmus was residing, to request his services and said they would pay him directly because they wanted to ensure accurate interpretations. When the government treaty party did not want to accept the Chiefs' choice of interpreter, the Chiefs told the government representatives that if that was the case, there would be no treaty discussions. Only upon seeing the Chiefs stand up and prepare to leave did the government treaty negotiators relent and agree to allow the Cree to have their own designated interpreter (Christensen, 2000; Erasmus, 1976). Peter Erasmus was also well known as the last surviving member of the Palliser Expedition, being a guide and an interpreter for the party. He also taught school for a short time, and during that time translated a portion of the bible into Cree syllabics.

My grandfather, Robert Erasmus, was Cree and although he spoke both Cree and English, he didn't have much opportunity to use his Cree language in the land of the Dene, as there were only a few Cree men in the area at the time. They would however, get together from time to time to speak the language. He met and married my grandmother, Marie Lafferty, a Dene woman and they travelled up the Mackenzie River for a few years eventually settling in Behchokǫ̀. My grandfather was known as a traditional healer and for employment he would deliver mail by

dogteam to Edmonton. There was a news article about him stating that it took him about one week; not much different than today's mail delivery timing.

My Chipewyan grandfather, the late Pascal Smith, was a Tłı̨chǫ translator. He passed his knowledge and love of the language on to my mother. My parents ensured that we know who we are and where we come from, and taught us to be proud of our ancestry.

My great-great grandmother, Catherine Beaulieu, was a strong Dene woman who was known to travel great distances by dogteam to deliver frozen milk to her grandchildren (one of whom was my grandmother, Celine Lafferty). Catherine Beaulieu was the daughter of Francois Beaulieu and her Dene name was Etsu Naatsi (Grandmother of the Winds).

My own language learning. My knowledge of the Cree language was mostly learned as an adult. I took Cree second language classes at the University of Saskatchewan, an immersion Cree class at the University of Alberta's Canadian Indigenous Languages and Literacy Development Institute (CILLDI), and was privileged to learn Cree following our traditional teaching and learning styles from the late Cree Elder, Nimosom Samson Beaver. Learning Tłı̨chǫ, however, has been continuous from birth: as a child at home, with friends and relatives, and through classes that my mother taught. As an adult, I continued to practice the language with my mother in both informal and formal settings. The most notable times were during sewing, caring for my children and cooking as well as working with her as a kindergarten teacher. Later, I participated in the 'Dogrib Drama' pilot project and took Tłı̨chǫ second language and literacy classes. I continue to use available resources such as the "Tłı̨chǫ Intro" media application (GNWT, 2012) and to practice with friends, relatives and colleagues.

I, myself, continue to strive to learn and speak Tłı̨chǫ K'èè because it is part of my identity. I feel that it connects me to those who have gone before me, to my family, to my

community and to the land. When I have an opportunity, I try to learn words more common to Wıılıìdeh and Chipewyan and continue to increase my knowledge of Cree. I have found that as my language learning increases, my identity and the identities of people close to me is strengthened, followed by a greater sense of self-esteem and well-being through a strong sense of connectedness to our roots and Dene community. As such, my personal experience has led me to the purpose of my research.

Research Purpose

Improved outcomes in Indigenous health and wellness attributable to learning one's Indigenous language are rapidly gaining traction. The purpose of this study is to determine what effects learning one's Indigenous language has upon identity, self-esteem, health and personal well-being; and further, to understand what methods are key to the personal language learning of Indigenous adult learners. My thesis work has these two strands for the following reasons. Firstly, I begin with the concept that knowing and speaking one's Indigenous language has a positive effect on identity, self-esteem and well-being (Canadian Heritage, Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures, 2005; van Beek, 2016). Secondly, the alarming rate of Indigenous language loss dictates a need for immediate action in all aspects of language revitalization from research to instruction and assessment. The present context for language learning is such that the possibility of learning the language is decreasing dramatically as each day passes with losses of our most proficient speakers - our Elders. The 2016 Canadian census reports that the most likely age group to speak an Aboriginal language is 65 and over (Statistics Canada, 2017).

Furthermore, Dene research methodology is an action-oriented approach. Consequently, one is expected to apply new knowledge to help remediate a situation. Therefore, this work will tie together these two somewhat different research components into actionable

recommendations. In my Dene worldview, this thesis would be considered unfinished if there were not some practical methods provided to learning the language efficiently. "Don't waste your breath." "Don't just talk about it, do something!" "Just try; it's worth trying." and "You can do it." were Dene adages with which my siblings and I grew up. The intent of this aspect of the research is to assist adult learners and curriculum planners in adult language acquisition and program delivery.

All Indigenous languages in Canada are endangered (Canadian Heritage, Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures, 2005). In Canada, Indigenous language loss is most prominent in First Nation communities with over 60 distinct language groups considered endangered, (FPCC, 2016) and only 14 per cent of Indigenous people learning their language at home (Statistics Canada, 2011). In the face of rapid language loss, with insufficient quality language learning opportunities available to people (FPCC, 2016), any insights into improved language learning methods are welcomed. Although First Nations are fully aware of the sanctity of our languages and the wealth embodied within, such as ways of knowing, culture, history, place names and sense of identity and well-being, there is a lack of documented research to support these views. This study investigates resulting health and wellness benefits of language learning.

Literature Review

Language, identity and self-esteem. Interconnectedness of language with identity is recognized in the literature (Norris, 1998; Pitawanikwat, 2009; Rosborough, 2013; Warner, 1999; Young, 2003). "Language and culture are key to the collective sense of identity and nationhood of the First Nation, Inuit and Metis peoples" (Canadian Heritage, Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures, 2005, p. ii). While using one's Indigenous language has

been identified as strengthening identity and therefore, a shield against suicide (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998), losing one's Indigenous language has been equated to losing a crucial element of one's Indigenous identity (King, Smith & Gracey, 2009). In fact, supporting Aboriginal languages and cultures in education systems has helped provide youth with identity formations necessary to succeed in life (Senate of Canada, 2010). A Hawaiian immersion language school demonstrates this success with a 100% graduation rate over 14 years and 80% college attendance (Wilson, 2012).

Learning Indigenous languages improves outcomes related to sense of identity, self-esteem, and education as my colleagues detail in their interviews with me. This research therefore gives support to the immense value in Indigenous language revitalization. Fontaine (2017) explains, "…teaching Indigenous languages is more important than any other factor in the educational success of Indigenous students because it promotes self-esteem, confidence and cultural identities" (p. 199). Similarly, Wright & Taylor (1995) found that students' self-esteem increased after being taught in their Indigenous languages. Government of Canada Senator and Former Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), Murray Sinclair stressed the links of language and culture with identity, self-worth, and spiritual and mental wellness:

> Language and culture are keys to personal identity. Personal identity is key to a sense of self-worth, and spiritual and mental wellness hinge on one's sense of self-worth. Everyone wants to feel worthy and to belong to something valid… Identity also gives one a sense of being valued and worthy if one's language and culture are considered valuable and worthy. If the language you speak and the culture you follow are denigrated or otherwise portrayed as unworthy of respect from your neighbours, disrespect is reciprocated and tension between you is inevitable (Senate of Canada, 2016).

Languages are a stronghold of Indigenous cultures and many Aboriginal people believe that culture is dependent on the language to survive (McIvor, Napoleon & Dickie, 2009, Warner, 1999) as language transmits cultural knowledge (Droogendyk & Wright, 2017). Napoleon (2014) discusses the link between language and culture as intertwined:

> The term nîhiyawîwin can also mean nîhiyaw culture or 'nîhiyaw-ness' for lack of a better term. This stems from a nîhiyaw paradigm where the interconnection between language and culture is prevalent and immediate. In our nîhiyaw way of thinking there is no separation between language and culture (p. 19).

He goes further to say that "from a nîhiyaw perspective, getting to know nîhiyawîwin will help one to understand nîhiyaw tâpisinowin" (Napoleon, 2014, p. 52). Greymorning (personal communication, 2005) asserts that although many people put primacy on teaching culture, such as in school programs, the focus should be on language instruction because if students learn the language, they will know the culture.

Language has been accepted as an instrument for determining one's place in the world through identity and relationships with family and community (Rosborough, 2012). Referring to her study on Kwak'wala revitalization, Rosborough (2012) boldly states that her research need not be defended any further beyond the statement that "our language is who we are" (2012, p. 10). Another First Nations scholar, Baker-Williams (2006) explains how, "The teachings of the ancestors are wrapped in the S<u>k</u>w<u>x</u>wu7mesh language, S<u>k</u>w<u>x</u>wu7mesh snichim. Na mi k'anatsut ta snichim-chet" (p. 113). The link between identity and language was clarified for Baker-Williams (2006) by S<u>k</u>w<u>x</u>wu7mesh Elder, Kwitelut: "…that's all about the *xwnixw'* – the upbringing, how you must live, what you must do…" (2006, p. 79).

Baker-Williams (2006) interprets the Sḵwx̱wu7mesh term, Wanaxws, as "to show respect through action" (p. 82). She determines the teachings of Wanaxws are in the language: For example, elements of respect are encoded in the language, and fluent speakers understand the meanings portrayed. For those outside the language, the translation does not carry across the full meaning. Sḵwx̱wu7mesh values such as exertion and diligence, identity, pride and being worthy of one's language, ways of knowing, teaching methodologies, learning by doing, using stories to teach, humor and kindness are all inextricably linked to the Sḵwx̱wu7mesh language (Baker-Williams, 2006). Many Indigenous scholars agree that language affects and is focal to identity (Baker-Williams, 2006, Rosborough, 2012). Thus, the loss of an Indigenous language is a loss of a "sense of identity, collective and personal" (Michel, 2005, p. 37). Because Indigenous languages have no other homeland or locale where the language is spoken, as other languages do, extinction here significantly increases challenges to collective identity (Droogendyk & Wright, 2017).

The late Cree Elder and Statesman, Ernest Tootoosis spoke in 1981 about the importance of speaking our languages and the spirituality of the languages:

> We have forgotten how important it is to speak a language. That's a holy, spiritual language, these native languages. The reason why I say that is, when we use our native languages we cannot even swear to our Creator, because the Creator did not want us to disobey him, to disrespect him. That's why he gave us a language that is so spiritual. It's a prayer language. Our language is a prayer language. Mild, soft languages. And that's the wish of our elders, that we relearn that; that we use that language; and at the same time we master the white man's language (Tootoosis, 1981).

Outside the Indigenous experience, we can also look at Alberta's Francophone community's protocols for student learning with regards to cultural identity. Alberta's Francophone educational framework (Alberta Learning, 2000) stresses the important role of language in meeting the basic needs identified by Maslow's hierarchy - physical, social, affective, intellectual and spiritual needs (Maslow, 1954). The framework goes further and emphasizes that Francophone students develop self-esteem and self-actualization through their cultural identity (Alberta Learning, 2000).

Towards a new beginning: A foundation report for a strategy to revitalize First Nation, Inuit and Metis languages and cultures urges the Federal Government to take action to make Canada "whole by recognizing and acknowledging our First Nation, Inuit and Metis Languages as the original languages of Canada" (Canadian Heritage, Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures, 2005, p. 3). Indeed, the wholeness of Canada and the wholeness of Canada's Indigenous Peoples rests on the survival of our languages. Margaret Noori describes her language revitalization efforts as working "to save a people, an identity" (Noori, 2013, p.128).

Worldviews and language. An important component of culture is worldview. Worldviews of Indigenous Peoples are different from Eurocentric worldviews and are embedded in our languages (Battiste and Henderson, 2000; Fontaine, 2017; Little Bear, 2000; Mead, 1996 ; Michel, 2005; Napoleon, 2014). Language is "what makes us human…" Bickerton (2009, p. 3). The language that we identify with is part of that humanity. Languages contain our philosophies and worldviews and speaking intrinsically demonstrates our cultural values, norms and way of living (Droogendyk & Wright, 2017; Napoleon, 2014; Simpson, 2011).

An example of worldview visible in our Tłı̨chǫ language is with kinship terms for family members. Unlike English and other languages, there are different words for siblings depending

on your placement in the family. For example, there are different words for ‘my older brother’, ‘my younger brother’, ‘my older sister’ and ‘my younger sister’, as well as ‘my youngest sister’ and ‘my youngest brother’. For grandchildren, the word for ‘my grandchild’ differs depending on whether the grandparent is the grandmother or grandfather. Relationships, roles and responsibilities differ according to familial positioning and other characteristics and this is reflected in the language.

Extended family relationships are vivid in the language and some terms are used to respectively signify a deeper relationship that occurs in Dene communities. For example, the word for ‘my older brother’, sı̨nde, is the same as the word for my older cousin. Many older cousins take the role of an older brother such as being protective and offering advice. Similarly, the word for ‘my grandfather’ or ‘my grandmother’ is often used for elderly people in the community as a sign of respect, even though there may be no blood relation. We treat the Elders like our own grandparents, and in turn they treat us like their own grandchildren. Additionally, we do not have a word for family members that stands alone; there is always a reference to a relationship to the person; my, our, his or her, or their as part of the word describing the person. As Wilson (2008) stresses - we are our relationships.

In his memoir, Albert Canadien discusses the Dene oral culture and describes how Dene languages carry “detailed traditional knowledge of the land, environment, plants, fish and animals. This knowledge includes beliefs, customs, values, history, and the achievements of the Dene people” (2010, p. VIII). Napoleon (2014) reiterates the function of language, “one cannot gain deep insight into the nîhiyaw belief and value system without having some basic knowledge and understanding of the language… one who … understands the nîhiyaw ways can see how these teachings are strongly linked to the language” (p. 23).

Language and health. In the health field, definitions of health are moving away from the biomedical model and instead include social determinants such as income, shelter, education, food, social justice and equity (Greenwood & deLeeuw, 2012). Additionally, Indigenous health has been recognized to have unique social determinants including "loss of language and connection to the land, and spiritual, emotional and mental disconnectedness" (King et al., 2009, p. 77). One way to address health inequities facing Indigenous Peoples is by approaching issues from a social determinant perspective (Greenwood & deLeeuw, 2012). Self-determination has been credited as addressing a major determinant of health - colonialism. One approach for applying self-determination is through improving traditional culture and language in communities (Graham & Stamler, 2010).

Although there are some references to positive effects on identity corresponding with language learning, there is a research gap on connections between language learning, self-esteem and overall health and well-being. The relevance of Indigenous language and culture to health has been determined; however, most findings relate to culture (Ball & Moselle, 2013; McIvor et al., 2009) rather than specific connections between language learning and health. For example, a noted study in the literature is that regular engagement with culture and language has been linked to lower rates of diabetes amongst Alberta First Nations (Oster, Grier, Lightning, Mayan & Toth, 2014).

Within the literature on language learning and revitalization, there has been evidence of increased recovery from addictions (Jenni, Anisman, McIvor & Jacobs, 2017) and suicide prevention for youth (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Hallet, Chandler & Lalonde, 2007): however, further research is required on general language related health benefits (Jenni et al., 2017). Language revitalization has been suggested as a health promotion strategy as it is commonly

accepted that isolation from one's cultural identity is correlated with adverse effects on Indigenous health (King et al., 2009). Czaykowska-Higgins (2014) states that "language and its renewal play a vital role in the healing of communities and individuals" (p. A13).

Historical trauma. Historical trauma is a contributing factor to negative health outcomes (Duran et al., 1998; Sotero, 2006) and continues to affect Indigenous Peoples and communities (Jenni et al., 2017). Traumatic memories are passed on to successive generations culturally, socially and psychologically and this type of trauma transmission is more prevalent among Indigenous Peoples (Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004). Because Indigenous people rarely have time to recover between losses and ongoing hardships such as racism, forced assimilation, poverty and marginalization, it is as though the traumatic experience never stopped. (Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004).

A significant trauma suffered collectively amongst Indigenous Peoples was severe punishment for speaking Indigenous languages in residential schools (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Pain destroys language; when speakers are punished for language, it makes it very difficult to speak later on (Scarry, 1987). The effect begins during the immediate experience of enduring severe pain; it is almost impossible to speak and most people succumb to pre-language sounds of moaning (Scarry, 1987). Numerous sources including medical case histories, courtroom documentation of trials on personal injury and information retrieved from Amnesty International on practices of torture were accessed by Scarry (1987) to reveal these findings.

There is no overnight method of healing historical wounds especially since the group identity has been so severely damaged. A first step, however, is learning about the history, to understand and clear up misconceptions about Indigenous Peoples (Wesley-Esquimaux &

Smolewski, 2004). The work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has helped in this process through holding public hearings on residential schools across Canada and reporting widely on their findings. Whenever language is destroyed by oppressive means, the language must be reinvigorated in order to achieve the lost life balance (Phelps, 2004). For example, torture victims lose their life stories through disconnection from families and communities, and they must re-invent their stories to effect healing (Phelps, 2004).

Within an Indigenous holistic framework, health and well-being comprise more than physical, emotional and mental health domains, as in western medicine; also included is the spiritual life (King et al., 2009). Balance across all domains is key to overall well-being (King et al., 2009; Moss, 2015). Language is a vital aspect of that balance as Indigenous Peoples relied on their languages for everyday communications, and as a system for guiding cultural norms and traditional ways of living (Dion-Stout, 2015). Revitalization of Indigenous languages has shown to contribute to improved physical health outcomes (Jenni et al., 2017; Whalen, Moss & Baldwin, 2016). The interruption of intergenerational transmission of language since the residential school era in Canada has escalated to a crisis situation, resulting in deficits in health (Gracey & King, 2009; Hallett et al., 2007; King et al., 2009).

Historical information on Indigenous languages. It is well documented that a purpose of the Indian Residential Schools (IRS) in Canada was to transform Indian children into brown-skinned white people, and that Indigenous languages were barred from the premises (Chrisjohn & Young, 1997; McKenzie & Morrissette, 2003; Miller, 1996; Toulouse, 2006). Beyond banning their first language, children as young as 4 and 5 years old were punished for speaking their mother tongue (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, Truth and Reconciliation

Commission, 2015). As the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Duncan Campbell Scott, stated in 1920:

> I want to get rid of the Indian problem. Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian Question and no Indian Department (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2002, p. 3).

The TRC referred to this process as cultural genocide because the Government of Canada engaged in defining activities including: banning the language, restricting movement, seizing land, forbidding spiritual practices and disrupting families so that cultural values and identities could not be passed down to the next generation (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples affirms the rights of Indigenous people the world over to their languages in all forms (United Nations, 2008).

Learning a language. Learning a language requires full blown commitment and sacrifice. Most adults learning their own language have to set aside a good portion of their waking hours and dedicate that time to learning the language, resulting in less time for English television or other social activities (Hinton, Vera & Steele, 2002; Sampson, 2014; Underwood, 2017).

An important question then becomes why should adults learn the language? Wouldn't it be easier if English were the primary source of communication? That may have been the thinking of generations past, who tried their best to provide a solid base for their children in the English language so that the young would be successful in the modern world (Michel, 2012). What about the nagging voice that says something's missing? How do we fill the void of loss of mother tongue? Alcohol? Drugs? Other addictions? The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) refers to the prevalence of social ailments among Canada's

Indigenous population (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996). In more recent years, however, many Indigenous Peoples in response to these social ailments are turning to the languages; there is a general resurgence of people and communities reviving our languages (First Peoples Cultural Council, 2018; Hinton, 2013). A major language revitalization focus is developing and using methods that allow for fluency with the least amount of time and resources (Pitawanakwat, 2009).

Language learning techniques. To this end, in this section, I examine the literature on language learning methodologies: in particular, the Master-Apprentice Program (MAP), Total Physical Response (TPR), Total Physical Response-Storytelling (TPR-S), Accelerated Second Language Approach (ASLA) and Mohawk adult immersion. Importantly, these models have proven to be very successful for adult learners of Indigenous languages.

Master apprentice program (MAP). The Master-Apprentice Program (MAP) was developed by Leanne Hinton and Karuk speakers including Nancy Richardson and Mary Bates Abbott in California, based on a suggestion by Karuk speaker Julian Lang (Hinton & Hale, 2001). It has been adapted and used successfully across the world, in places such as Australia, (Olawsky, 2013) and British Columbia (Virtue, Gessner & Daniels, 2012). MAP involves pairing up a fluent speaker, usually an Elder, with a non-speaker who commit to working together for a minimum of 10 – 20 hours per week on the language.

While MAP is unique in that it takes place outside of a classroom setting, it makes use of ideas from other language acquisition methods, including Total Physical Response (TPR), conversational competence models, Steven Krasher's input hypothesis, linguistic elicitation and immersion techniques (Hinton et al., 2002). The program is oral-based with content chosen by the master and apprentice. Vocabulary is taught and used in whole sentences and is applied to as

many different situations as possible, following the 20 x 20 rule – hear and use the vocabulary 20 different times in each of 20 different situations (Hinton & Hale, 2001).

Real life situations such as doing laundry or dishes, eating meals, playing games and attending traditional ceremonies are used to practise the language. Teams are also encouraged to take the language out on traditional activities such as hunting, fishing and berry picking.
It is hoped that after three years the apprentice will be proficient enough to teach others the language. Masters are taught the stages that a learner will go through when acquiring a language: particularly that comprehension is followed by production, so as not to hold high expectations of language production before the apprentice begins to understand what is being said (Hinton & Hale, 2001). Asking questions such as, "Say it again," and "What is this?" in the language is taught early on to enable the pair to maintain the immersion setting. Actions, pictures, gestures and facial expressions are all used to assist in communication (Hinton & Hale, 2001, p. 220).

Apprentices should be deeply committed (Jenni et al., 2017) and willing to make mistakes, taking risks with the language. British Columbia's apprentices who become the most fluent are the ones who maintain a strict schedule of 10 - 15 hours per week (Virtue, Gessner & Daniels, 2012).

A strength of MAP is that the setting is usually authentic and thus language learned is everyday, usable language chosen by the learners themselves. Since the instructors are usually Elders, protocols of the culture regarding language usage are easily maintained. As well, the Elders often demonstrate a gentleness, and patience required by the learners.

Nimosom Samson Beaver taught me Cree using a natural Cree style of teaching which holds similarities to the Master-Apprentice model. As described in my notes of reflection:

> His way of teaching was fun, safe and interesting. He used a lot of scaffolding; I felt safe enough to use a lot of private speech. No matter what came out of my mouth, he was good with it. He would nod and smile or take it one step further. He was very patient; much like a parent with a baby or toddler trying to speak. Really what he gave me was the freedom to babble (Erasmus, 2012).

Total physical response (TPR) and total physical response-storytelling. Developed by James Asher (1969), Total Physical Response (TPR) mainly focuses on pairing actions with words spoken aloud. Asher (1969) describes how educators were aware that information learned using the aid of bodily movements was retained longer by students. He theorized that children learn languages faster than adults because they are always moving while talking and some of his experiments in the 1960's validated this claim.

TPR is considered a fun, non-stressful way of learning. Classes are immersion style with students copying actions and phrases demonstrated by the instructor. Some common commands used at the beginning of the program are 'sit down', 'stand up', 'walk', 'run' and 'dance'. It usually doesn't take too long for students to understand and remember these phrases, so they soon begin learning combined related commands such as, 'walk to the board and write your name'.

Focusing on developing listening skills through TPR for 6 months to a year is recommended because the time available for second language classes is usually very short and listening skills are transferable to speaking, reading and writing skills (Asher, 1969).

One drawback of TPR is that it is usually used in artificial settings. Baker-Williams (2006) warns that the essence of our languages not be lost in certain methodologies such as TPR

that convey only minimal actions. Instead, teaching strategies must maintain the worldview and authentic traditional learning situations.

Total Physical Response-Storytelling (TPR-S) was developed by Blaine Ray and combined the effectiveness of Total Physical Response and storytelling to develop greater fluency. Students learn the language by focusing on the details of a story, not the details of a language. TPR-S makes learning fun and interesting and speeds the rate of learning (Ray & Seely, 1997).

Secwepemc immersion teacher Janice E. Billy (2015) adapted Total Physical Response-Storytelling to teach the stories of her people in a more authentic way. Telling traditional stories authentically is a complex process with many varied interconnected pieces such as cultural protocols and intimate experiential knowledge of the way of life (Billy, 2015). Several integral components of Secwepemc storytelling, however, were gleaned by Billy (2015) to enable a more authentic teaching of storytelling, even though students are beginners in the language and lacking in maturity in Secwepemc ways.

In his university German classes, Davidheiser (2002) ensures he teaches many of the vocabulary words prior to beginning the storytelling phase. He uses a basic storyline that can be easily retold and elaborated by both students and teachers and stresses the importance of repetition. Davidheiser (2002) expands on Ray's TPR-S method by including a written component which he feels helps the students focus on the details of the story and thus remember it better. TPR has been found to be a good method for regular classroom instruction for developing vocabulary quickly with a solid base of understanding in the language (Davidheiser, 2002, Billy, 2015).

Janice E. Billy (personal communication, February 25, 2014) achieved fluency using TPR and TPR-S as the main tools of instruction followed with some total immersion in non-classroom contexts.

> TPR, to me, I feel that it gave us a foundation for language, so an understanding of the language…
>
> TPR Storytelling took that step for me – how to retell a story, retell it in whatever language ability I have, and yet learning all this new vocabulary at the same time. It started to fit language together for me… That really sped up our language ability - when you are put in a situation to use the language and all agree to speak in the language and use the skills you have… But we had sort of a foundation before we entered into that.

Chief Atahm School, where Janice E. Billy is a master teacher, has found great success in producing fluent students using TPR and TPR-S as their main modes of instruction. They offer annual summer institutes on TPR and TPR-S to a wide variety of teachers from across Canada (Chief Atahm School, 2018).

Accelerated second language approach (ASLA). Indigenous language learners, including myself and some of my colleagues have had success using the Accelerated Second Language Approach (ASLA). Greymorning developed ASLA based on how children learn a language and reports (2019) rapid language development by adult students in his Arapaho classes at the University of Montana. For example, after just approximately 120 minutes' instruction time, students could say sentences as complicated as 'a man and a woman are walking holding hands' and articulate over 65 concepts in Arapaho (Greymorning, 2019). Greymorning (2019) attributes this success to the use of visualization attached to sounds rather than memorization. Greymorning's students also acquire grammatical skills of the language

without specifically being taught grammar; and learn to tell stories without ever hearing the story in English (Greymorning, 2019).

My own experience with ASLA is similar to my colleagues, Underwood (2017) and Sampson (2014). I found the method to be an exceptionally fast way of learning language, requiring minimal resources. While coordinating workshops with Indigenous language instructors from across the Northwest Territories, I witnessed people learning basic phrases from other language families very quickly.

Early Mohawk adult immersion. Twelve years after the first Indigenous immersion language program in Canada was started at Kahnawake by the Mohawk people, a trend in reversing language shift was noted in that community. Soon after, a one year Mohawk Language Certificate Program in which students gained language proficiency was developed in conjunction with Brock University. Later, a two year program was developed with Trent University (McCarty, 2013).

As documented in Maracle & Richards (2002), a Mohawk adult immersion program began at Six Nations in 1999. Essential components conducive to language learning included a relaxed setting and sharing of meals, as well as Elders and other speakers being an integral part of the program. Making lunch and eating together provided a safe, enjoyable context in which even the shyest speaker found an opportunity to converse. Another helpful technique was using pictures to generate conversation. Instructors taught a lot of grammar and verb paradigms. Although it seemed to help some of the more academically inclined students, it took away from actual time in the language. The instructors found that students from more academic backgrounds seemed to have learning strategies that made it easier for them to learn the language. Also, students with a better than average English vocabulary did the best in Mohawk.

After the first year, the instructors decided that tense, gender and number should be taught early on in the program to allow for greater fluency sooner. Introducing spelling too soon resulted in student pronunciation being more like English than Mohawk (Maracle & Richards, 2002). Immersion has been cited as the most successful language methodology as long as speakers have a variety of domains in which to speak the language (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006).

Chapter Summary

Ironically, at a time when the numbers of Indigenous language fluent speakers is at a critical threshold for intergenerational transmission in many communities across Canada, evidence that documents positive outcomes for strengthened identity and health and well-being is mounting (Hallett et al., 2007; Jenni et al., 2017; Whalen et al., 2016). Our communities are suffering language loss at a phenomenal rate due to things like the residential school legacy, mass media, and societal influences (Norris, 2006). Revitalization efforts such as language nest programs require both mature and younger adult speakers to pass the language on to the young (Hume, Rutman & Hubberstey, 2006, Jenni et al., 2017). In many communities, the only speakers left are the Elders and older people who do not have the energy required to be amongst children and toddlers on a daily basis. Time is a precious commodity because this language transfer needs to happen while our speakers are still here amongst us. Although this job becomes more difficult with each passing year, reviving Indigenous languages is critical to the health and well-being of Indigenous Peoples. Increasingly, research is demonstrating a close link between Indigenous health and learning one's Indigenous language (Hallett et al., 2007; Jenni et al., 2017; Whalen et al., 2016).

Developing language programs is expensive, time-consuming and difficult to maintain over a long period. The literature suggests escalating difficulty in finding authentic immersion

settings for one to learn Indigenous languages (Hinton, 2013). Our people rarely have this type of an immersion opportunity because few communities retain our languages as the dominant language. Communities may not have the capacity to develop a Master-Apprentice program, Total Physical Response program or immersion program. If key components of some language learning methods could be determined and adapted to particular learning situations, more individuals could design their own language learning pathway and more communities may be able to develop successful language learning programs, in which language could be mastered in a shorter period of time. For these reasons, it is important to determine what is critical to successful language learning and to further investigate the relationship between language learning, identity, and health and well-being.

I Lost My Talk
Rita Joe

I lost my talk

The talk you took away.

When I was a little girl

At Shubenacadie school.

You snatched it away:

I speak like you

I think like you

I create like you

The scrambled ballad, about my word.

Two ways I talk

Both ways I say,

Your way is more powerful.

So gently I offer my hand and ask,

Let me find my talk

So I can teach you about me.

(Estate of Rita Joe, 2007)

Chapter Two: Methodology and Methods

Methodological Paradigm

Indigenous methodologies founded in Dene protocols. This research uses an Indigenous methodology and specifically follows a Dene research paradigm that incorporates Dene protocols and values, as I am a descendant of the Dene and member of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation (YKDFN).

As Cram and colleagues (2013) portray, "The ways of Indigenous research are as old as the hills and the valleys, the mountains and the seas, and the deserts and the lakes that Indigenous people bind themselves to as their places of belonging" (p. 11). It follows that over the millennia, the Dene have formulated their own research methodologies based on the Dene worldview, protocols and values. The Dene are known to be industrious, creative people with methods of determining outcomes related to environmental stewardship, wildlife management, child rearing and education among other areas, adapting to new pressures of outside influences while maintaining Dene values (Fumoleau, 2004). After travelling up and down the Mackenzie Valley in the mid to late 1970's, hearing from Dene, Inuit and Metis peoples their thoughts on the proposed Mackenzie Valley Pipeline, Mr. Justice Thomas Berger (1977) noted in his findings that the Indigenous people of the north maintain their traditions and ways of thinking:

> Yet, since the coming of the white man, the native people of the North have clung to their own beliefs, their own ideas of themselves, of who they are and where they came from, and have revealed a self-consciousness that is much more than retrospective. They have shown a determination to have something to say about their lives and their future. This determination has been repeatedly expressed to the Inquiry. (p. 85)

Relatively recent Indigenous researchers have formalized methodologies that are completely Indigenous and based on their own Indigenous group's values, protocols, languages and oral histories (Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2009; Louis, 2007; Wilson, 2001). A pan-Indigenous approach, however, is not espoused by Indigenous peoples as a singular methodology to follow (Kovach, 2009). Although there are many similarities in identity, values and protocols, there are enough differences that call for respectful delineations (Kovach, 2009). Smith (2012) recognizes that Indigenous self-determination is applied in deliberately naming a methodology to reflect the specific Indigenous worldview. Under a general Indigenous methodology, I have specifically used a Dene methodology in my research that reflects the Dene values, customs, and worldview that I have been taught through all my relations. As with other Indigenous methodologies, I do not believe that there would be one and only one Dene methodology that would be the only way to proceed with research. In the Dene way, although each individual often puts group needs before the needs of the individual, there is also a protocol that individuals are given the freedom to define for themselves their own path.

Berger (1977) in his report to the federal government on his findings regarding the proposed Mackenzie Valley pipeline wrote the following about the Dene regarding respect and freedom:

> Egalitarianism in northern native communities is closely linked with the people's respect for individual autonomy and freedom. Peter Gardiner, an anthropologist who spent a year among the Dene of Fort Liard, spoke to the Inquiry of his experience: Living with the people, you can see that they try to act with respect, even toward people who are young, or people who are confused, or people who are different; they are tolerant beyond anything white Canadians ever experience. When the people here give freedom to one

> another, they give equality. Then, many of us have a lot to learn from the people... These are values that other Canadians can appreciate. They are ancient values though, and we should not see them as a result of our better teachings. (p. 96)

In forming a Dene methodology, I looked towards common standards of Indigenous methodologies and identified specific characteristics that created a Dene methodology reflective of my relations and experiences. Louis (2007) identified four shared principles in Indigenous philosophies: "relational accountability; respectful representation; reciprocal appropriation; and rights and regulation" (p. 133). I tried to ensure that relational accountability, respect, reciprocity and responsibility were strongholds of each aspect of my research. I included in my Dene methodology consideration of ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology. Prior to and while conducting the research, I considered these concepts and explored their relation to a Dene research paradigm. Below, I will relate these four research paradigm elements to the 'four unwavering principles' so succinctly summarized in Louis's (2007) extensive review of numerous Indigenous academics' published findings on Indigenous methodologies.

Relational accountability. Relational accountability refers to the understanding that we are accountable to all our relations (Louis, 2007). A relational Indigenous research paradigm includes harmony, relationship building, love and social justice as critical components (Chilisa, 2012). According to Wilson (2001), the ontology or belief of what is real in the world of an Indigenous paradigm coincides with relationships in reality, and is a process of relationships (Wilson, 2008), as in the Dene worldview: being is based on relationships (GNWT, 1993). Therefore, it is important for those following an Indigenous methodology to bring their relationships into the research and to be themselves (Weber-Pillwax, 2001).

Because of the relationships I had developed with my colleagues prior to the research and because of the respectful way the interview discussions were conducted, I believe that my colleagues felt freer to share with me their beliefs about the reality of their language learning and its effects on their lives, than if the research had been conducted within a totally western paradigm. They knew that I would understand what they meant, and trusted that I would treat the material with due respect. For example, people spoke about very sensitive and personal spiritual experiences. Additionally, they spoke from the heart and shared their experiences freely because they sincerely want our Indigenous languages to be revived and are working collectively in an Indigenous manner for the benefit of the whole.

Epistemology or how people think about that reality is more than a way of knowing in an Indigenous paradigm (Meyer, 2001). Our systems of knowledge are always embedded within relationships, thereby putting more value on the relationships themselves (Wilson, 2008), including relationships with the living, non-living, the land, the spirit world, others and self (Chilisa, 2012). As Dene, we are dependent on all our relations, including others, the animal world, the spiritual world and the land (GNWT, 1993).

True to the Dene culture, nurturing a relationship between the researcher and the researched is an important aspect of the research (Chilisa, 2012; Wilson, 2008). Among the Dene, self-gain is viewed as less important than relationships with others (GNWT, 1993). Canadien (2010) explains that, “The Dene way of life was not based on competition, hoarding and self-interest. The traditional habit of sharing had meaning; people looked after each other and conformed to traditions and customs” (p. IX).

Wilson (2001) suggests a pivotal point of Indigenous research is to ask ourselves if we are fulfilling our roles in our relationships within our research. In determining my specific topic

of research, this question was hovering while I considered possible avenues of research. The end result seemed logical to me and fitting in my relationship with others in my communities: both with my home community of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation and with my community of the 2012 Masters of Indigenous Language Revitalization (MILR) cohort at the University of Victoria. I was an adult language learner myself and, thus, could bring my own perspectives from my experiences to the table. Language learning is a topic of great interest not only to my fellow classmates but also to most of our communities in dire need of strengthening our Indigenous languages.

Following a Dene paradigm, I intersperse my own language learning experiences throughout the material because I have consciously taken formal steps to learn my language since I was twelve years old. I attended Tłı̨chǫ classes taught by my mother and true to Dene teachings felt like I was her assistant rather than a student. Since that time, I have used various methods for my language learning including Stephen Greymorning's Accelerated Second Language Approach (ASLA) method, second language techniques, semi-immersion, immersion and a natural form of the Master-Apprentice approach with my Cree Elder, the late Nimosom Samson Beaver from Wabasca, Alberta.

Both my academic and work backgrounds have prepared me for this research. I have gained experience with western quantitative research methodologies from completing an honour's thesis in psychology and qualitative research working on program evaluations. I have worked extensively in developing language learning and holistic health and educational programs, and worked with Indigenous language instructors and Indigenous resource developers across the NWT. This familiarity, therefore, equips me to understand the needs of the

Indigenous community in the NWT and will be helpful in communicating any new knowledge gained in this research.

Respectful representation. Respectful representation includes incorporating Indigenous values in the research process (Louis, 2007). Indigenous methodologies arise from collective knowledge within a nation or tribe, and are distinct from western paradigms (Kovach, 2009). Indigenous Knowledge contributes to Indigenous research paradigms by: allowing the people to become the source of solutions; allowing research to be ethical and purposeful to the people being researched; and allowing for greater collaboration between the researcher and the researched. Indigenizing research means the methods and measures should reflect the culture of the people being researched, and should meet self-identified needs of the community (Chilisa, 2012).

As a Dene woman, I tried to align the methodologies used in this study with my Dene world view as much as possible. The Dene values of respect, kindness, honesty, integrity, humour, holding confidentiality, being non-judgmental, and taking the time necessary for completion in a good way (GNWT, 1993) were paramount in my work. As Chilisa (2012) points out, the worldview of the researcher affects the research outcomes, therefore it is imperative that postcolonial and Indigenous research paradigms dominate research on Indigenous peoples. I tried my best to follow the Dene Laws that I grew up with: Share what you have; Help each other; Love each other as much as possible; Be respectful of Elders and everything around you; Be polite and don't argue with anyone; Young girls and boys should behave respectfully; Pass on the teachings; Be happy at all times (Blondin, 1997).

Respectful representation includes taking into account what material is discussed in the end product, as "not all knowledge shared is meant for a general audience (Louis, 2007, p. 133)."

As a Dene person raised by traditional Dene parents, I grew up understanding that caution is to be exercised when writing down anything about Dene spirituality, for a variety of reasons, including misinterpretation. When a small portion of a belief system is taken out of context, it is easy for it to be misconstrued and to perpetuate false stereotypes. Further, having spent many summers attending the annual Indian Ecumenical Conference at Morley, Alberta, hearing Elders speak year after year about maintaining discretion around what is written down about spirituality, I could not help but follow that advice when writing up my results.

More than one reality is acceptable in research findings and outcomes (Chilisa, 2012). Throughout this research, I strove to elicit meaning from the participants' recounted experience while keeping their words authentic. I tried to keep the original stories given to me by my colleagues intact as much as possible to remain true to my Dene culture: allowing the reader/listener to draw their own conclusions (Government of the Northwest Territories, 1993).

Kovach (2009) describes Indigenous story-telling as a method with an open-structured format that allows for participants to fully provide meaningful input. Throughout this research, I allowed my colleagues to expand as much as they wanted on a topic, or to discuss other related topics that came to mind for them, without limiting the time frame or the content. This was reflected in the variety of overall interview discussion lengths and content of individual responses. Themes emerged often in the form of stories in areas where the guiding questions would not appear to be related. In Dene traditions, stories are told for multiple purposes, and often include morals or teachings that may be determined by the listener only after much reflection, as explained by Rene Lamothe (Berger, 1977):

> As we learn the way of life from the old, as we get older, we understand different things, we hear a legend, we hear it again, we hear it again, we hear it again, and every time at a given age this legend takes on new meaning. (p. 98)

Dene Elders relate to children that they will learn from these stories as they grow up and the stories will help them know how to live and relate to others (Canadien, 2010).

Reciprocal appropriation. Indigenous communities must benefit from the research to meet the obligation of reciprocal appropriation (Louis, 2007). In Indigenous research paradigms, axiology or set of morals is straightforward in that the research must benefit the larger relational community in lasting ways (Weber-Pillwax, 2001). In this way, as in Dene protocols, people (researchers) are accountable to their relations. A main feature of Indigenous methodologies is that the people being researched are respected and helped by the research (Kovach, 2009). Contrary to western paradigms, post-colonial Indigenous paradigms value community over individualism (Chilisa, 2012). Dene Elder Joe Naedzo from Fort Franklin explained to Justice Berger the concept of commitment to the whole community (Berger, 1977):

> We help each other. That is how our life continues. We share all the time.
>
> Our ancestors have taught us a lot of things. They have taught us how to make life continue. They teach you that for your neighbours, when they are in need and when you are in need, the neighbours will feed you. Take care of each other and share with each other. (p. 96)

For far too many years, the Dene and other Indigenous peoples were researched on by others, and the results of the research were rarely relayed back to the Dene, nor was the research necessarily usable by the Dene. Just before the turn of the last century, Smith (1999) caused academia to re-think the traditional western paradigms to consider research from the viewpoint

of Indigenous Peoples. Many researchers took Smith's suggestions to heart, causing research involving Indigenous people to begin moving in a direction that aligned more closely with Indigenous community protocols and ethical considerations (Kovach, 2009).

After much reflection, it was clear to me that focused research is required in this area to assist in future planning of programs aimed at curtailing the downward spiral of health outcomes among Indigenous peoples. The more we determine how knowing and using our Indigenous languages affects our lives, the easier it will be for us to access resources and direct them to language learning initiatives with a focused goal of positive health outcomes. As anyone working in the field of Indigenous Language revitalization will attest, one of the biggest hurdles in language programming of any kind is lack of human and financial resources.

The research is purposeful and is intended to benefit Indigenous language revitalization. I knew that it would be critical to determine why learning language is important, beyond strengthening identity and culture, because Indigenous languages will only survive if there is real purpose and documented value to their usage. I knew from my own experience that learning my languages had a great effect on my personal life and life balance, and suspected that this may be the case with others. Therefore, I posed questions related to language learning and well-being outcomes.

Rights and regulation. Smith (1999) describes rights and regulation to mean that Indigenous protocols form the basis of the methodology, goals are explicit and effects of the research are well thought out. Intellectual property rights of the Indigenous groups participating in the study must be protected. It is necessary for the process to be collaborative and findings must be written in plain language and shared with the Indigenous community (Louis, 2007). Additionally, Louis (2007) asserts that Indigenous methodologies must be grounded in Indigenous epistemologies.

Throughout this research, I relied upon Dene protocols. One of the reasons I chose not to do my research within my home community of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation is that I would not be able to follow Indigenous protocols because of established research protocols within the NWT that are adhered to by the University of Victoria. Any research in the NWT must undergo a process of review for approval by the Aurora Research Institute, which is a non-Dene, non-Indigenous entity. I could not overcome the internal dissonance associated with me being a Dene woman asking a non-Dene entity for permission to do research on anything to do with Dene languages or any other Indigenous languages in my homeland, in Denendeh. It was transparently colonial to me and disrespectful to our Indigenous languages, which I see as a collective intellectual entity. I did follow the academic protocols which required a formal ethics application. I decided that I could do research within my home community at a later date if desired by the community, without going through a non-Dene entity, and face any undesirable repercussions. In this instance, however, I was informed that I could not convocate if I did not follow the established research protocols within the Northwest Territories. This was one of those times when an alternative was in order that would not compromise my personal ethical boundaries.

From the outset, I explained the goals of my research to my colleagues and others in the Indigenous community. Particularly, I reflected on the potential effects of the research, hoping for the best possible outcomes for Indigenous language communities. Knowing that research provides impetus for policy and programming, I hoped that any new knowledge gained would be helpful in this area. Further, in reviewing other Indigenous research on the topic of language learning, I found no evidence of negative effects upon the community; rather the opposite seemed to be true.

Following a Dene paradigm, my research demonstrates values of mutual knowledge seeking. People involved in the study were viewed as colleagues, bringing as much education and knowledge to the research as the researcher (Chilisa, 2012). Each interview discussion held unique aspects depending upon the person involved and the protocols and values they brought to the table.

Although my name is on the research as following protocols of the academy, and in order to complete my Master of Arts degree, I see the information gathered as belonging to the Indigenous community at large, especially as the purpose of the research was to further our cause of keeping our languages alive and thriving.

As a holder of the information collected in this study for the Indigenous community, I perceive my responsibility to ensure that the end product accurately reflects the information generated. Further, it is my responsibility to share the information with the Indigenous community so those interested may benefit from the research. Copies of this research will be sent to all colleagues who participated in the research, as well as distributed amongst the Indigenous community. The thesis will also be available through the University of Victoria digital records.

Methods

Colleagues/participants. In a western paradigm, those participating in this research would be considered participants or another similar term; I have chosen to use the term colleague, as explained in the Methodology section.

Eight colleagues, members of the University of Victoria's Master of Indigenous Language Revitalization (UVMILR) degree program 2012 cohort, took part in this research. The UVMILR program is the first of its kind in North America. As such, it attracted people who

have been working in Indigenous language revitalization for numerous years to its first cohort. Some members of this class learned their languages as adults and present a diversity in age, a range of language proficiency, and a variety of methodologies used to learn their languages. They were willing to share openly their experiences in learning the language and how it affected themselves, their families and their communities. I, myself, am a member of this cohort and have established relationships with my classmates through sharing with one another throughout our first year of class work together our life's work, passions, hopes and fears around our languages and our people.

These colleagues have witnessed within themselves and with their students and community members the effects of language loss and language learning. They have made language revitalization their life's work. They have experimented with language learning methods, have worked in schools, in communities, with young people and with old. Their combined experience is a wealth of knowledge, some of which this thesis hopes to capture. Most people in the field of language revitalization are too busy teaching and producing resources to formally document best practices. So, although one may not find hordes of previous publications by individuals in this group, their knowledge is extensive and based on many years of experience, hard work and passion. Many of these students also have experience combining language with health and education programs in their communities, and have seen the effects of language learning on community members in these programs.

This group collectively holds knowledge and wisdom about our languages that may have not previously been documented. The shared experience includes developing language and culture curriculum and resource materials such as dictionaries, classroom teaching, public school administration and language program development. Members of the cohort and some of their

family members learned their languages through differing methods such as Master-Apprentice, Total Physical Response and the Accelerated Second Language Approach.

Colleague/participant criteria and selection. Recruitment followed Dene protocols created from discussion with Elders, professors, students in the cohort and my committee members. I reflected on the process over a long period of time and prayed for guidance.

The main criterion for inclusion in the study was that colleagues actively took on learning their Indigenous language as an adult, although most had heard the language while growing up, and learned some basic phrases. At first, I was going to interview only those who have become fluent in the language. Through these discussions, however, I realized that selecting only the fluent speakers would require judgment on my part, which is a non-Dene way of being. I decided to conduct purposeful sampling of adult learners in the class, provided they were willing to take part in the study. This avenue would provide more rich data, including what is important for learning at different stages of fluency. In addition, this research documents information about the first cohort of this unique academic program that may not otherwise be documented.

Many students in the cohort were fluent from childhood, so from the outset, they were not considered as possible candidates. There were only two male students in the class who fit the criteria of learning their language as an adult. Each of them relied on different methods of language learning, and were at different levels of fluency. In order to balance gender and language learning methods, both male students were included. One student became fluent using Total Physical Response (TPR), so was chosen to participate; another three were selected because they achieved fluency through the Master Apprentice Program (MAP). The remaining four colleagues demonstrated a variety of levels of fluency, as well as participated in diverse

learning methods. Consideration was also given to representation from different First Nations and languages, ages of participants, gender and diversity in home geographical locations.

Data collection process. Following a Dene protocol, I personally invited each colleague in an informal way. This approach allowed them to easily refuse my request, and know that it would not affect our relationship. I either made my request face-to-face or by telephone, for those out of town, explaining my goals for the research and the process. This was followed by an email with an attached letter introducing the research. I informed the students that they were free to participate or decline the invitation, and could also withdraw at any time during the process, or after the interviews were completed without any repercussions or consequences. I provided them with my Supervisor's name and contact information should they have concerns that they wanted to pursue.

Once colleagues agreed verbally to participate, I set up a meeting time and place at which we went over the Participant Consent Form and ensured clarity of understanding. Colleagues were required to sign the consent form which contained all the information provided in the introductory letter provided earlier.

Indigenous conversational method. A discussion guide, informed by my literature review and knowledge of Dene protocols, was developed that would leave a lot of openings for individuals to bring components into the conversation that they saw fitting. One-on-one semi-structured conversations were conducted face-to-face in Victoria, B.C. or by telephone or Skype depending upon what proved to be most convenient for my colleagues.

The discussions followed a Dene style of research providing the participants with the opportunity to discuss areas they may have felt as important but which may not have been directly included in the questions. For that reason, some of the guiding questions were very open

ended. One question specifically asked for stories around their language learning, as our Dene ways of learning and teaching usually include stories. All discussions started with an opening and casual conversation, building upon our relationship developed through the previous year. This transitioned into further discussion with me using the discussion guide for prompts as required throughout the conversation.

Discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by myself.

Self in reflection method. Throughout the research process, I kept journal notes on my self-reflections. I took notes before and after discussions with my colleagues and recorded not only what was said, but also my feelings and other ideas that were inspired by the conversations.

Visiting/gifting method. Once the material was written up, my colleagues had the opportunity to review for accuracy the direct quotes that would be attributed to them in the final document for accuracy. We met over the telephone and caught up on changes in our lives since our last contact before discussion of anything else about the research. I called each person first, and let them know I would be sending the document for their review. This discussion time allowed for people to let me know in a non-confrontational way if they had disagreement with any aspects of the process. Minor changes were made to the document for clarity in meaning as requested after their review. Too often in the past, Indigenous people remained unidentified in photos and text; I considered it to be more respectful to include the names with the quotes if they agreed.

Upon completion of the conversation review process, I presented each colleague with a small gift, as a token of my appreciation following traditional Dene culture.

Data analysis. Kovach (2009) suggests that because Indigenous methodologies are relatively new to the academy, a mixed method approach may be relevant when using an

Indigenous methodology, for example, coding data using Grounded Theory. It is important, however, to keep the Indigenous methodologies in the forefront (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2001).

I found that aspects of Grounded Theory worked well with organizing my data and retrieving salient features. Reviewing patterns and relations accords well with Indigenous methodologies (Wilson, 2008). Grounded theory has been successfully used to study health concepts and the meaning of health within an Indigenous Nation (Labun & Emblen, 2007) and in a variety of other works. The data collected was reviewed and categorized using a code re-code method following Glaser's Grounded Theory (Walker & Myrick, 2006) to employ greater accuracy. Common themes and distinctive information were distilled allowing theories to emerge from the data (Kirby, Greaves & Reid, 2006).

Each individual interview was analyzed and separated into themes. As similar themes emerged, groupings from all discussions were made under each heading, and possible direct quotes were identified.

Rigour. Rigour refers to the integrity of the research, and whether the results can be relied upon. Choosing colleagues with a diversity of backgrounds regarding language learning minimized the chance of bias from a single perspective. Kovach (2009) discusses the issue of participant anonymity versus the collective Indigenous thought of "standing behind one's words" (p. 148) and being accountable. Following an Indigenous protocol of allowing my colleagues to take ownership of their statements and be identified lends more credibility to the thesis statements. These are real people and in 'Indian country' it's easy to recognize who people are and where they come from, because we're all related in one way or another. Therefore, their background and current situation can be taken into account by the reader when assessing their contributions.

Ethical considerations. Weber-Pillwax (2001) stipulates that maintaining positive relationships is an ethical requirement for research. As Kathy Absolon says in her conversation with Kovach (2009), it's important to "uphold and uplift Indigenous methodologies, not for the world to see, but for my children and their children and other Anishnabe children" (p. 153). Having grown up in a different time than my children, when our Dene ways were more prevalent and lived on a daily basis by most of us in our communities, I feel an ethical consideration to move forward the Dene protocols and ways of knowing that I was taught. In this way my children, their children and their children's children along with other Dene children will be proud of who we are and know that we too have ways of knowing, and ways of making sense of our world and creating new knowledge. As our Elders have said in many community gatherings, 'never let go of who you are'. Speaking to Mr. Justice Thomas Berger at the Berger Inquiry in 1975, then Chief of Fort Good Hope, Frank Ts'eleie described the transmission of knowledge to future generations (Berger, 1977) as follows:

> Our Dene Nation is like this great river. It has been flowing before any of us can remember. We take our strength, our wisdom and our ways from the flow and direction which has been established for us by ancestors we never knew, ancestors of a thousand years ago. Their wisdom flows through us to our children and our grandchildren, to generations we will never know. We will live out our lives as we must, and we will die in peace because we will know that our people and this river will flow on after us (p. 100).

Chapter Three: Findings

This chapter will review findings from conversations with my colleagues who were a part of this research. Following a Dene research paradigm, this research followed Dene protocols and values in interview conversations. Guiding questions were open ended to allow my colleagues the freedom of bringing topics or information into the discussion that they thought was important, even though there may not have been a question directly related to their concern. Many direct quotes are included in this section to allow the reader to draw their own conclusions from the information shared by my colleagues. In Dene protocols, many lessons are taught indirectly through the use of a story in which the listener is expected to surmise the message themselves.

The findings are reported in two sections: Language learning themes and health and well-being related themes. Language learning themes comprise the following: i. Motivation for learning the language, ii. Different methods of language learning, iii. Effectiveness of approaches at different language levels, iv. Resources, v. Elders/fluent speakers, vi. Co-learners and vii. Struggles. Health and well-being related themes include the following: i. Identity, ii. Sacredness of the language and connection to the land, iii. Self-esteem and confidence, iv. Physical fitness – healthy weight loss, v. Emotional healing and healthy lifestyles and vi. Long range effects of learning the language.

A. Language Learning Themes

Discussions on language learning were sorted into 7 categories, ranging from motivation behind language learning, techniques used to difficulties encountered along the journey. While a variety of language learning methods are used in Indigenous communities, a few, such as those reported here, are more common than others. Likewise, hardcopy and electronic resources for

teaching and learning Indigenous languages are scant, while Elders are regarded as treasure troves in language and culture, with excellent teaching demeanors. Motivation was often cited in the interviews as a significant factor for overcoming obstacles to language learning.

The catalyst for taking on the challenge of language learning was often cited as assuming responsibility for passing the language down to both their own children and others, through teaching at schools and in the communities.

i. Motivation for Learning the Language

Colleagues reported varied reasons for learning the language: reviving culture, continuing family traditions of language revitalization and carrying the language into future generations. Many also stated that language is the foundation of our culture and "contains the teachings of our people with a deep connection to the land" (G. D. Underwood, personal communication, March 21, 2014). Another compelling reason for learning the language was that the language was "taken away forcibly through the residential school system, and it's going to take a concerted effort to bring it back" (C. Claxton, personal communication, March 24, 2014).

Family priorities were a primary motive for becoming involved in the language revitalization movement in their communities. Colleagues spoke of other family members spanning across generations involved in various aspects of revitalizing the language, from being language teachers and establishing language nests to developing orthographies. G. D. Underwood (personal communication, March 21, 2014) said that he felt "responsible to the language, because it's become a family tradition." J. E. Billy (personal communication, February 25, 2014) saw that family and others working to save the language were "happy, and … their passion for what they were doing came through."

Wanting to pass the language down to their children and knowing how to raise their children properly was often cited as the most significant reason for learning the language. Some knew very little or no language until they had children.

> I started to see the importance of knowing my language so that I could pass it on to my children. And that's when I really seriously started diving into learning my language. I didn't know any of my language up until I had kids (G. Blaney, personal communication, February 21, 2014).

One colleague learned the language because there were no language teachers in the community, and she was told by her Elders to teach the language. Shame of not knowing one's language and not being able to participate fully in cultural and spiritual traditions was a motivation for C. Hill.

> And I think that probably was another eye opener for me, that there were all these people at this other Longhouse of all ages, that were going and could understand what was going on. I think there was probably shame too, you know, that I couldn't understand. I was there, wanting to be a part of it, then feeling, am I just pretending to be a part of it because I still don't know what's being said. I need to know - to feel the full experience - I need to know the language (C. Hill, personal communication, January 29, 2014).

Being strongly motivated to learn the language, my colleagues were prompted to participate in various language learning programs that were available in their community or were sought out by themselves.

ii. Experience with Different Methods of Language Learning

Methods used during their language learning journey included Total Physical Response (TPR), TPR-Storytelling (TPR-S), Master-Apprentice Program (MAP), Accelerated Second Language Approach (ASLA), immersion and team teaching.

Total Physical Response (TPR) and TPR-Storytelling (TPR-S)

J. E. Billy (personal communication, February 25, 2014) was able to get a basic understanding of her language through extensive use of Total Physical Response (TPR).

> TPR, to me, I feel that it gave us a foundation for language, so an understanding of the language, so that we could move in the language. We could listen to a speaker, and we could move around the room in the language, and then by themes, we could learn… kitchen words… bathroom words… classroom words – you know what are some of those basic commands that you would be hearing in those situations… clothing… getting dressed, hang up your coat… So we just had sort of a basic foundation so we could move around in the language. So that's what TPR gave me; it gave me a base.

Once a strong base was developed in the language, TPR-Storytelling was used for building fluency.

> So, TPR-Storytelling took that step for me – how to retell a story, retell it in whatever language I have ability, and yet learning all this new vocabulary at the same time. It started to fit language together for me. That really sped up our language ability - when you are put in a situation to use the language and all agree to speak in the language and use the skills you have… But we had sort of a foundation before we entered into that (J. E. Billy, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

The time came, however, when it was decided that short periods (4-6 weeks) of full immersion were necessary to fully develop fluency in the language, and this worked. J. E. Billy (personal communication, February 25, 2014) stresses the importance of immersing in the language: "And so, of course, a tremendous amount of exposure to the language needs to be done too."

Accelerated Second Language Approach (ASLA)

Two colleagues had success with Dr. Stephen Greymorning's Accelerated Second Language (ASLA) approach, saying that from experience, the method helps people learn language quickly.

> I think he's right in his claim - Dr. Greymorning - when he claims it's learning in a way that is similar if not the same as learning those words from a first language vantage point. It's kind of learned in the same way, right. So, that's through association with those images. So you're kind of, you're weeding out the middle man, you're weeding out the middle ground of having to rely on translations. You make the associations instantly, in some cases faster than the standard immersion, you know. So, it really is a quick and efficient method (G. D. Underwood, personal communication, March 21, 2014).

> I've done a little bit of the Accelerated Second Language Acquisition that Dr. Greymorning does. I've taken night classes where that method is used. It was good for building vocabulary… and that started to train my thoughts to see the picture of the car instead of the word (C. Hill, personal communication, January 29, 2014).

Master-Apprentice (MAP)

Three colleagues gained fluency through adapted versions of the Master-Apprentice (MAP) program, working with an Elder mentor and learning the language in an immersion style program.

> Master-apprentice was great… I'll forever give that program praise because that was the program that enabled me to work with my late mentor, Ray. And you know that's always something that I refer back to, was being able to work with Ray, and where… I primarily began to speak, you know where I became a speaker (G. D. Underwood, personal communication, March 21, 2014).

One effective technique was highlighting things they wanted to know, for example, speech to their children around getting dressed in the morning, or giving acknowledgement and praying in the language. They would then go through different immersion activities that simulated those themes. A reported effective adaptation to the original MAP design used in the British Columbia Mentor Apprentice Program is that once having learned a number of items in a theme, such as different trees and plants, they would have to teach someone else what they had just learned.

Other common activities included sequencing pictures in a story line and then talking about it, creating songs and talking about all the things in a room. As C. Weir (personal communication, February 6, 2014) points out, pictures and concrete objects were helpful in the earlier stages of her learning.

> In the beginning, I needed a lot of visuals; visuals gave me a lot of clues. So for new words, they were visual pictures or the actual visual themselves, and then it was for the storytelling, we had a visual for the whole story, and it didn't have the words on there,

> but you see the visual, the image, or the caption or the statement and then after a while, as I became more advanced, I didn't need the visuals, I was just able to tell the story.

Teaching With a Mentor in the Classroom

Some colleagues furthered their language skills by working with a fluent speaker and team teaching in a classroom.

> I have a mentor teaching in my classroom with me… I'll be using the language, and when I run into something that I don't know, I'll just ask for guidance, and he'll write it on the board, so that when I'm teaching it, I'll leave it on the board until I remember whatever the terms are (R. Sampson, personal communication, March 7, 2014).

During this time they also participated in separate classes just for the adults either in the evenings, weekends or summer months where their language had a chance to progress. Some colleagues learned material in the summer that they were expected to teach in the fall.

Immersion

It was noted by some of my colleagues that immersion was an efficient method, once some of the basics in the language were established. Fluency in certain phrases such as key questions like, "I don't know what you mean; say that again." helped prior to participating in immersion programming.

Colleagues appreciated immersion environments "because you were hearing it at dinner, or when there were social events going on. You would hear it for the whole weekend. That made a difference for me" (C. Hill, personal communication, January 29, 2014). They were encouraged to speak even if what they were saying was inaccurate and didn't make sense or sounded like baby talk, and were not put down for incorrect grammar or pronunciation. People

mentioned that when around Elders or other acquaintances they will still get your message from non-verbal cues.

One helpful technique that was used was to stay in the language for most of the day and speak English for the last 15 minutes to debrief. Another was venturing out of the classroom into the community to events such as ballgames and staying in the language. This had a ripple effect as other Elders in the community would hear them speaking and would speak to them in the language whenever seeing them around town. As the students progressed in their language learning, their instructors would provide them with increasingly difficult learning activities and progressively more complex language. For example, they might include others in conversations and move from present tense to past and future tense, or teach words that don't occur in English once basic concepts are grasped. For example, some verbs in Tłı̨chǫ K'èè differ depending on the number of people doing the action: one, two or three.

iii. Some Approaches More Effective at Different Language Learning Levels

Most colleagues found that certain methods produced better results at different stages of their language learning. For example, TPR was recommended as ideal for a beginner especially if themes are used consistently and are in line with the learner's interests. Both TPR and ASLA were considered valuable methods for vocabulary building. TPR-S was seen as a good bridge between TPR and full immersion, as it allowed for independent re-telling of stories learned. Some form of immersion was considered necessary to fully develop language skills.

Using themes was a common thread between methods used especially at a beginner's level of language learning. As novice learners, most focused on learning nouns and verbs in themes until they could form sentences on their own.

Some colleagues found as a beginning speaker that orthography helped with pronunciation because there is only one way to read the word correctly. This was especially beneficial for one who did not grow up hearing the language and reported not having a trained ear for the language.

> I don't have a trained ear for the language because I didn't grow up speaking it. So when I look at a word, if something is written in the orthography, I could stand there and read it and sound like I really know my language, and what I'm saying. It will sound good, and people will understand what I'm saying but you know, more than likely, I probably don't even understand what I'm saying. So, to pronounce words properly, the orthography really helped me in that way (G. Blaney, personal communication, February 21, 2014).

Later, however, they expressed the need for more fluent speakers to advance in speaking levels.

> I would say I know 1000 words and I'm nowhere near fluent… As I'm trying to, attempting to advance in my speaking, word lists and that don't help me. I really need someone to actually speak to me, and I need to be pushed or forced into that next level of speaking… which I think is probably immersion… I need somebody else to speak to (G. Blaney, personal communication, February 21, 2014).

One person found knowing grammatical structure helped while others said that linguistic classes taken too early in their language learning didn't really help because they didn't have enough of an understanding of the language. Classes on linguistics, however, did help at a later date when they had enough of a language base to reflect on their learning. While learning plural and negative forms fairly early on was found to be helpful, engaging in reading and writing was found to be more beneficial after a speaking base was established.

A lot of echoing was used early on by participants in the MAP program, as well as practicing saying things in different ways if it didn't sound quite right. Some colleagues

expressed the current need to go into a MAP program or work with Elders to increase their conversational abilities. Immersion programs or settings of any sort were stressed as the best methods for increasing fluency beyond beginner and intermediate levels. This included spending time with Elders or other fluent speakers at different community events.

iv. Elders / Fluent Speakers

Fluent Elders were considered the most essential resource and the best teachers.

> Those Elders we're listening to are like super proficient first language speakers, right? And, that for me I think is really, that along with spending time with my late mentor speaking with him have been some of the main things for me. I felt like the listening has been more preparation for me than anything. It sounds kind of funny, but to listen to the intonations and the way that they speak and there's a certain confidence and a certain song to the language when they speak … that it's sort of uplifting (G. D. Underwood, personal communication, March 21, 2014).

Elders offered praise and encouragement, were non-judgmental, used songs and stories and continually assessed their language learning, had a positive approach to teaching and made the learning sessions fun.

> What makes him really an awesome mentor is because he's so patient and kind, and really positive about the language… He always makes you feel like there's hope… He always makes you feel like you can do this… He never discourages you if you say it wrong or whatever, or make you feel embarrassed or punish you abruptly. He's just continuously encouraging, so I think that makes him a really great mentor (R. Sampson, personal communication, March 7, 2014).

My classmates talked about the personal touch of learning from Elders rather than in a classroom setting, and the humility of the Elders who would insist that they were not teachers but rather each were helping one another as family would. Many spoke of the patience exemplified by Elders and the time they would take to ensure that the student understood what they were saying. They talked about how the Elders would tell them to let the language in; let it in to their inner being.

Colleagues mentioned that it was good to have different Elders with a variety of strengths, such as writing or storytelling so there is a balance of different personalities and knowledge bases.

One particularly liked how her Elder would spend a lot of time considering how she would express things to her student both in the language and in English. Most of those involved in mentor relationships discussed how it was a win-win situation with the Elders. While the students gained their language, the Elders received companionship and something to look forward to on a regular basis.

> I found that spending time with an Elder … 90 percent of the time, most of the Elders were alone, like they lived alone and so it was a treat for them to have company every day, and then at the same time I was enjoying the company of the Elder and then also the learning from the Elder. So it was something we both enjoyed (C. Weir, personal communication, February 6, 2014).

Elders found hope for the continuance of the language as their students' language learning progressed, and were happy that their protégés were sticking with their language learning over a long period of time.

> To see him getting happy was kind of a real confidence boost for me too. So to make the Elders happy in itself is a great reward…When you use the language with them… they're happy to hear it, especially if they're not hearing it too much. I remembered that about my late mentor, he used to get really happy when we'd really start to converse (G. D. Underwood, personal communication, March 21, 2014).

Colleagues expressed the importance of having mentors with fluency and precision in the language. Elders also had their own teaching style, as expressed by C. Austin (personal communication, February 13, 2014):

> What's interesting is her way of teaching. It's not, I'm going to teach you this one thing right now or I'm going to plan to teach you these three things next week… It's as if she understood what needed to be learned, and then she would start talking about what needed to be learned and then she would share stories about how she learned those things, primarily that was her main thing, sharing stories about the way she learned.

Other fluent speakers, especially those who followed the examples of the Elders, were also noted as essential resources particularly for teachers who did not yet have a full command of the language.

> She was my best teacher because she could speak fluently and anything that you could ask her it was right at the tip of her tongue, like, she knew everything. She could write it, she could speak it, she knew all the hymns, she knew all the prayers, she knew all the stories, all the legends (G. Blaney, personal communication, February 21, 2014).

> I think that the best teachers that I've had are probably those that are fluent speakers and our Elder fluent speakers. Part of it probably is the patience that they have, that I've

> experienced… and the praise that they give you, the encouragement. And even when I think I'm not doing very well, and they'll say, you're doing so well, you're picking it up, just keep working at it (C. Hill, personal communication, January 29, 2014).

People who are aware of Indigenous value systems and who live by example were also considered good teachers, even if they were not fully fluent in the language.

Many colleagues such as J. E. Billy (personal communication, February 25, 2014) spoke about how the best teachers make language learning fun, "My mother, Anne Michel's teaching is fun; it's dramatic. She's active, she's lively. We laugh all the time in her classes."

More than one participant talked about how ongoing assessment was very helpful; the mentor would ask questions to make sure the student understood what was being taught and scaffold the language learning from there.

> She was constantly assessing me… to make sure that I got it every step of the way. I thought that was fantastic. And actually now as a teacher, I'm actually implementing that, and I've discovered that there's actually a lot of research that's happening around that – common formative assessment – it's called. It's interesting that she just did it naturally (C. Austin, personal communication, February 13, 2014).

Elders/mentors would instill confidence in people and coached the learners along, being willing to answer any questions. They were always encouraging and never put the learners down as G. Blaney (personal communication, February 21, 2014) explains:

> She was very gentle. She wasn't chastising… I've tried learning the language, I think when I was younger, and then you always hear, no, not like that, no, do it like this. You're forever being told, no, you're doing it wrong, constantly… But this lady wasn't like that.

> She was very gentle, she wouldn't say, you're saying it wrong. She would say, that's really close. That was a really good try, and then she would just say it again, but she wouldn't chastise. She had a gentle, kind approach to it…So, I knew that I hadn't said it right, because she would say that's really close, but she wouldn't say, you're saying it wrong.

Another important aspect of working with the Elders is how they strengthened their students by encouraging acceptance of inheritance and ownership of the language.

> They make you feel like the language belongs to you, and it's your birthright, and it's in all of us, and we all have the ability to learn the language. That positive approach to mentoring really made me feel like I **can** do it. They didn't make me feel dumb. They didn't make me feel like a failure, or make me feel ashamed when I was learning. They were always really nurturing (R. Sampson, personal communication, March 7, 2014).

Along with mentoring and nurturing students, Elders filled the void for resources.

v. Resources

Resources identified by my colleagues ranged from Elders to social media. Most resources including dictionaries, curricula and audio recordings of Elders had to be developed by the learners themselves or their co-workers. Dictionaries, iPads, word lists on phones and computers were all utilized so the language would be accessible when needed. Social media was cited as a good tool especially for communicating with people in other locations.

R. Sampson (personal communication, March 7, 2014) talks of the importance of building your own resources: "I've created my own little SENĆOŦEN survival binder …so whenever I need anything I just go look in there… So, it's continuously building resources, everyday we're building something, basically." J. E. Billy (personal communication, February 25, 2014) affirms

the advantage of developing resources, "…It's developing our own dictionary too that's been more beneficial to us too." R. Sampson (personal communication, March 7, 2014) explains how dictionaries aid in teaching oneself, "and when I want to know something …I look into our dictionary work. That's how I'm learning, self-learning now, and also with our mentor." Creating flashcards and games for hard to remember words and then teaching them to students also helped solidify learning for one teacher.

Some people found that using technology helped and can be fun; they communicated in writing with people from other communities on Facebook and used different programs such as Audioboo for sharing verbal clips. One person reported transcribing audio tapes she listened to as a self-directed exercise. Audio tapes and CD's were used to learn themes and listen to archived recordings of Elders, as described by G. D. Underwood (personal communication, March 21, 2014): "For a few years, the recordings have been the most important thing to me. Because … I could listen to them over and over again, and there's somewhat of an effortlessness about it."

Many found written materials such as notes and books invaluable, especially those that are mono-lingual and left behind by Elders no longer with us. It was reinforced that the tools must be used in order to be effective.

vi. Co-learners

Co-learners of the language were also heavily relied-upon resources for the people I interviewed. R. Sampson (personal communication, March 7, 2014) spoke of her experience with other language students persisting in describing the language in different ways until she understood, without using English.

> If I don't get it… he won't break out of SENĆOŦEN, he'll just say it in different ways in SENĆOŦEN until I get it. So, he's just really hard on me… They won't just tell me the answer. They'll make me work for it… well what does this mean? What is this root? Well, the prefix for this or the suffix for that, like they really go linguistically into the language to try to make me understand.

Although it was difficult at times, she found that this approach helped significantly in her language learning.

vii. Struggles

Each of my colleagues experienced some difficulty or another while learning their language. Some found it difficult to find speakers to converse with which limited their ability to progress. Others spoke about how although people are fluent, they would break from the language very quickly thus ending the learner's train of thought in the language. People would sometimes become frustrated with the length of time it was taking to learn the language. All of the participants lead busy lives and sometimes finding the time was a struggle. One colleague spoke of sometimes feeling exhausted because there is so much work to do in revitalizing her language. Yet, these feelings are mixed with joy at bringing the language into her home and hearing her children speak the language. Others that would not call themselves fluent did not have access to immersion or other teaching methods such as TPR, ASLA or MAP. Losing Elders and fluent speakers was a major concern especially in communities where speakers are few.

Language Learning Themes Conclusion

Although most of my colleagues experienced some difficulties along their language path, their motivation helped them to persevere. Most stated that no matter which language learning method is chosen, it's important to try it out wholeheartedly with enough time to see some

results, before opting for a different method. Combining methods was also suggested as a viable option. They especially noticed that some methods worked better at the very beginning of language learning, while others such as immersion, were best after some basic vocabulary had been learned. Elders and fluent speakers were promoted as the most valuable resources while language learning colleagues also provided beneficial support. Despite obstacles ranging from exhaustion to a lack of fluent speakers available, my colleagues' desire to learn the language fueled by positive outcomes in their general health and well-being propelled them forward.

B. **Health and Well-being Related Outcomes**

In this section, discussions with my colleagues relating to areas of health and well-being, including physical and emotional well-being and identity, are reviewed. The guiding questions used did not specifically refer to health, but rather left the questions open-ended around well-being to allow my colleagues to define for themselves what well-being means to them. Improved physical health was an outcome attributed directly to learning the language in line with other research findings (Jenni et al., 2017), however, I was pleasantly surprised with these results as I had not known that any of my colleagues had experienced issues with weight gain prior to my meeting them.

i. Physical Fitness – Healthy Weight Loss

> "And when I think about how my health has changed with the weight alone, it has a direct link to the process of my language learning … as my language learning ramped up, so did my health" (C. Austin, personal communication, February 13, 2014).

Two colleagues became a significantly healthier weight and more physically fit once they started learning their language. One person went from close to 350 lbs. down to 175 lbs. She started to connect to her physical fitness and started to eat better and to exercise and said she wasn't taking care of herself like that prior to learning the language. Some time after starting to

learn the language she trained for a ten-kilometer run and did it several years in a row, all the while continuing to learn her language. In light of the relation of culture to language, another significant and expected result of learning the language was developing a greater sense of self and connection to community.

ii. Identity

> Once I began to understand the language and hear the language, I began to think in the language. And when I began to think in the language, I began to change (G. D. Underwood, personal communication, March 21, 2014).

The most common benefit attributed to learning the language was the development of a stronger sense of identity by negating the emptiness experienced by the absence of language, as explained by R. Sampson (personal communication, March 7, 2014), "I always felt this void, like who am I?… I always knew that when I was in public schools I was different." G. D. Underwood (personal communication, March 21, 2014) repeats his great-grandfather's wisdom that, "The people are longing for the language and they don't even know it. There's so much hurt with our people and oftentimes they don't know what that is." Many ascribed this loss to the experience of parents and grandparents going to some of the most terrible residential schools in the country and so would only say a few words in the language to their children, leaving their identity incomplete.

G. Blaney (personal communication, February 21, 2014) discussed a shared experience in many Indigenous communities of fluent speakers not passing the language down to their children after leaving residential school because they wanted their children to succeed in life.

> As a child growing up, it was always we were wanting to integrate into the schools… so we were all about English. It was all about fitting in to that society. So, you know, my mom, as

> fluent as she was, didn't say anything to me in the language. Nobody down here, none of the Elders spoke to us in the language. So I just feel really sad that I grew up in a time where there were so many fluent speakers, and it would have been so easy for me to learn my language, if they had only, you know, spoken to me in the language. But they were trying to maybe protect us, or you know, trying to ensure that we were going to make it in the big world.

After much hard work and dedication to learning the language, colleagues experienced dramatic change within themselves and a strengthening of their identities.

> It's a night and day thing… learning my language makes me be truer to who I really am as a person… I'm more passionate, I'm more caring… I feel I'm a better person because of the language, I'm a fuller person, because I now have a better foundation of who I am, through the stories, through the language, through my teachings through the language… It just makes me a better Secwepemc person; I'm a Secwepemc, so I have a better understanding of what that is from learning the language… My sense of identity has changed because I've seen it unfold in front of me, and I've now experienced it myself (J. E. Billy, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

> I think I became more comfortable in my own skin and not having to worry so much about materialistic things that I might have when I was younger. That they were no longer important, but just being me and taking care of myself and taking care of my girls is what was important (C. Hill, personal communication, January 29, 2014).

"It validated my identity… it provides insight to my identity" (C. Claxton, personal communication, March 24, 2014).

Colleagues talked about taking on the values of the Elders the more proficient they became in the language. One classmate grew up not knowing she was First Nations and spoke about how as she learned the language, answers to questions she had while growing up were being answered.

> Basically learning Sm'algyax has changed … everything for me … it has been a game changer. … learning Sm'algyax… has connected me to my ancestral heritage, which I wasn't raised with… I feel like I was adopted and I didn't know who my parents were, but when I started learning Sm'algyax, I found out who my parents were. And it wasn't just my parents, I knew who my grandparents were, and who my great-grandparents were, and so on. And it was just beautiful (C. Austin, personal communication, February 13, 2014).

Parents and teachers noticed how their children and students' sense of identity soared. Children started taking part in more cultural activities such as traditional singing and dancing. C. Austin (personal communication, February 13, 2014) shared how her students came to understand their identity more clearly once they began learning their language.

> And suddenly the kids started to think about who they were in their relationship to language speaking… some of the kids who spoke the language… said that they made a better connection to themselves … in terms of their identity as a result of their language learning.

Many colleagues reported language usage trickling down to immediate and extended family because they are learning and using it; how family and friends are excited about it, and try

to use the language in different places like at suppers and other gatherings. They also credited their language learning journey as a motivating factor for getting involved in more traditional activities and creating a greater sense of belonging in the community; thus, a stronger sense of identity for themselves and their families.

> It helped increase my identity. It just helped me understand more of who I am, and the connection of more literally knowing something as simple as knowing for example my clan name, and giving me a broader understanding of exactly, the understanding of my clan name. Yah, so, it's given me a much deeper understanding (C. Weir, personal communication, February 6, 2014).

> I really do think that my identity has changed a lot… Our children are really starting to grasp on to that whole identity thing, you know… we're W̱SÁNEĆ and we speak SENĆOŦEN (R. Sampson, personal communication, March 7, 2014).

Confidence and self-understanding were common threads in discussions.

> I feel grounded because I have a sense of who I am, and where I belong and where I'm going and what my responsibilities are. I don't feel lost in this world. You know, I know where I can go, I know where my people have been, and I know where I am now, and I know where we need to go (J. E. Billy, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

Becoming more involved in language and cultural activities led some colleagues to taking better care of themselves and healthier lifestyles.

iii. Emotional Healing and Healthy Lifestyles

One colleague spoke about stopping drinking because he felt that he didn't want to give the language a bad name. Others spoke of the choice to live traditionally:

> This is how I'm going to live my life, and that's going to be traditionally. There's no part for any mind altering things of any sort in my life. Like I had to have a clear mind you know to do what I want to do. I want to do it to learn language, culture, and all the ceremonies (C. Hill, personal communication, January 29, 2014)

C. Hill (personal communication, January 29, 2914) went further to explain that once learning the language, she took "more of an interest in looking after myself in every sense of the word."

One colleague shared how learning her language helped to heal a tremendous amount of emotional pain she had endured as a child. It also offered an opportunity to view potential in her life differently. C. Austin (personal communication, February 13, 2014) shared positive feelings associated with learning the language:

> When I started learning Sm'algyax, I was… I felt connected to my ancestors… I felt connected to my ancestry, I felt connected to a community, I felt connected to people who cared about me, and I started to … I started to grow in my happiness… and now teaching Sm'algyax, I feel very fulfilled in what I'm doing as a result of it.

Taking on the values of the Elders was an additional benefit as expressed by G. D. Underwood (personal communication, March 21, 2014).

> I didn't want to represent the language in a bad way, so it was just sort of taking a lot of those principles that the Elders often talk about that's really said in the language too, those principles about being good to one another, and showing respect, and to, yah to be confident, yet to be disciplined and to be determined.

Many colleagues spoke about the happiness of now being able to pass their language on to their children. As R. Sampson (personal communication, March 7, 2014) says, "For my well-being with my family, I feel really good, because now, in my home, we're bringing in the language with our children."

iv. Self-Esteem and Confidence

> "It gave me confidence… It's given me more self-esteem...I'm lucky I got to learn from Elders where they enforced the importance of speaking and encouraged us. It really helped with our self-esteem" (C. Weir, personal communication, February 6, 2014).

For most of the language learners, self-esteem grew as their language abilities improved. Participating in events where they had to use what they just learned and be open to new learning cemented their knowledge and instilled greater confidence. C. Austin's (personal communication, February 13, 2014) self-esteem improved as her mentor "pushed her under the bus" and made her speak in front of crowds and practice what she had just learned where the language was hardly ever spoken:

> She would say, "Now that you know how to do the introduction and the greetings, you're going to be emceeing a soup feast and you're going to be speaking the language, okay?" And I'm like, whaaat? She was like, "You can do it", and I would prepare myself. And I would be as nervous as heck, and I went up there, you know, in front of hundreds of people and introduced myself in a feast hall where the language was hardly ever spoken.

Other experiences recounted as self-esteem boosting included proficiency in the language, new ability to teach and develop language programs and overcoming shame and guilt. Teachers discussed how their self-esteem grew because it's very difficult developing and implementing language programs when you are a language learner yourself.

> I feel like I'm doing something that's really meaningful, and I'm doing something that I love and am passionate about and it makes me happy to see people learning, people working really hard… like the children learning. It makes me feel really good (R. Sampson, personal communication, March 7, 2014).

Colleagues talked about how their self-esteem was enhanced because previously they felt ashamed and guilty about not knowing their language as G. D. Underwood (personal communication, March 21, 2014) explains: "I know that I was longing for the language, and part of me, I always felt a little bit guilty that I didn't have it." R. Sampson (personal communication, March 7, 2014) talks about how she doesn't want her children to feel the shame she felt in not knowing her language, "ashamed or… you know, that I don't know my language and I know a lot of people feel that way, because I was there before, and it made me feel bad."

iv. Sacredness of the Language and Connection to the Land

Stories were shared of metaphysical events that happened while learning the language and a resulting realization that the language is sacred.

> I'm noticing phenomenon that's been occurring around… like our office and our home. Sometimes they're just affirmations. Other times they're messages…To me those kind of things, they tell me that the work is important. The spiritual side of things is a really good - for me it's a really good motivator in itself. I take it to heart that there's more substance than just sounds coming from the language, that the language is a sacred thing (G. D. Underwood, personal communication, March 21, 2014).

Colleagues spoke of how they connected with the land and had spiritual experiences as a result of learning the language. They are able to see the land in a different way; in the same way

that the Elders see it, because the language is tied to the land and provides an awareness of the spiritual world.

> Also that when it comes to place names… names of places and their meaning… it's kind of like learning the land all over again. You see the land in the way that the old people see it, the way that the language describes it, you make that connection with the meaning to what that place is, you find out what it is for yourself on the land (G. D. Underwood, personal communication, March 21, 2014).

"When you connect language with the land… I think that's a pretty key component… connecting the language with the land and creating that bond is… it certainly can be a life changing experience." (G. D. Underwood, personal communication, March 21, 2014).

Considering the sacredness of my colleagues' relationships through language, it is with respect that I have decided against fully recording in this thesis spiritual experiences shared with me. The teachings I have been fortunate to receive from my parents and others instil that some of our spiritual experiences are not to be written down. The importance of selective reporting of information considered sensitive to Indigenous communities is reinforced in the literature (Dana-Saco, 2010).

Colleagues expressed hope for the future of the language especially through seeing younger people become more fluent and learning more about themselves.

v. Long Range Effects of Learning the Language

One colleague noted how she sees her nephew's belief system is different from hers because he is growing up in the language. He's learned his beliefs through the language and has experienced and believes it, resulting in a very strong Secwepemc identity.

> And I'm thinking, that's my Elder speaking… His world view is just so much greater than mine is, brought up in English as a child… He says things to me now because of his training in the language (J. E. Billy, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

Chapter Summary

This chapter relates colleagues' direct experiences with learning their languages and other outcomes they attribute to their Indigenous language learning. The colleagues who reported the most success in attaining fluency had access to immersion style methodologies such as ASLA, TPR and MAP. My colleagues stressed the importance of dedication, finding the method that works for them and not giving up. Being willing to make mistakes and not taking corrections personally are recommended attributes.

Benefits colleagues realized ranged from increased physical fitness to a deeper sense of identity and greater participation by other family members in language learning, cultural and spiritual activities.

Concern for their children and for future generations was a prime factor in motivating my colleagues to engage in and continue on their language learning odyssey. One colleague from an area where her language had not been spoken for 50 years spoke about how the Elders tell the young language learners that the more they speak the language, the freer they will be and the healthier the communities will be in the future.

> One of the things our Elders are always talking about is, the more we learn our language, the more we become free… They talk about freedom of the mind and freedom of the heart, because we're able to express ourselves in our own language… It's because we're able to think, we're able to speak… with the language that our Creator has given us. So they said the more that we pass on the language, the more that we're going to be free because we're

going to be healthier people because we'll know who we are as W̱SÁNEĆ people, and I really believe that (R. Sampson, personal communication, March 7, 2014).

Chapter Four: Conclusions and Recommendations

One does not have to look far to find material presenting the ever deepening loss of Indigenous languages in Canada and across the world. It is harder, however, to find evidence reflecting the effects of regaining those languages on the health and well-being of our people (Jenni et al., 2017; McIvor et al., 2009; Whalen et al., 2016). Because language is a major marker for identity, its decline contributes heavily to decreased wellness outcomes (King et al., 2009), as does unresolved historical trauma (Duran et al., 1998) such as that experienced by residential school survivors (Assembly of First Nations, 1994; Chrisjohn & Young, 1997; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). In this study Indigenous adults reclaiming their ancestral languages reported experiencing benefits related to health and overall well-being. Physical fitness and healthy weight loss, emotional healing and a greater sense of identity all surfaced for my colleagues involved in this study, while working towards or achieving fluency in their ancestral languages.

Health advocates have called for recognizing Indigenous language revitalization as a health promotion strategy (King et al., 2009) as language is considered as a gateway to cultural activities and integral to health (Jenni et al., 2017; Ventura, 2018). Indigenous health scholars argue further for a change in paradigm, suggesting that our languages and histories be taken into account when establishing determinants of health for Indigenous peoples (Dana-Sacco, 2010; Dion-Stout, 2015; Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2012). Indigenous Peoples must determine for ourselves factors contributing to health and retain control over wellness strategies (James, 2017). For example, the Cree concept of daily rituals of taking care of and healing ourselves, nanatawihiwewin, allows the individual to take more responsibility for their own health and wellness, in contrast to the medical model where medical personnel dictate a healing path to

follow (Dion-Stout, 2015). These practices of conforming to foreign wellness models can be damaging and unsuccessful (King et al., 2009).

Language has long been documented as a stronghold of personal and group identity (Fontaine, 2017; James, 2017; McCarty & Zepeda, 2010; Norris, 1998; Pitawanikwat, 2009; Rosborough, 2013; Young, 2003). In this study, experiences shared by my colleagues confirm those findings: as their language proficiency increased, their sense of Indigenous identity and/or cultural understanding amplified. Because language is intrinsic to how we think and view the world (Battiste and Henderson, 2000; Fontaine, 2017; Little Bear, 2000; Mead, 1996; Michel, 2005) language instruction should be the predominant focus in health and cultural programs. In order for First Nations to regain identities and well-being, languages must be revived and passed on to future generations (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2010).

Evidence from this research project supports the claim that further research on the health and wellness related outcomes of learning one's Indigenous language is critical (Jenni et al., 2017). One way to do this would be to sponsor much needed language learning programs for Indigenous Peoples, with evaluation components focusing on not only language learning milestones but also other benefits accrued during the process. Assessment of health outcomes as a function of language learning must be a key component of future programming (Whalen et al., 2016).

Any opportunity to expand on existing language programs should be taken. Because of the history of colonialism and cultural genocide practiced in residential schools (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015a), it is important that language programs be developed from the ground up by and for Indigenous communities themselves. To do otherwise would risk re-colonization with Indigenous languages as its primary tool (Warner, 1999). Self-regulation has

long been argued by First Nations as critical, and thoroughly documented as early as 1969 in a two-volume report by the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians leading to the development of the foundational statement, *Indian Control of Indian Education* (Assembly of First Nations, 2010). Language as an aspect of self-governance is ratified in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission lists several calls to action on language and culture, including urging the Federal Government to acknowledge that Aboriginal language rights are inherent within Aboriginal rights, and that "Aboriginal languages are a fundamental and valued element of Canadian culture and society, and there is an urgency to preserve them" (Government of Canada, 2016). Others such as the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba, and Assembly of First Nations, earlier provided extensive and highly recognized research, and advocated on behalf of those whose voices have been muted. These directives must be implemented with practical, recognizable, on the ground results, in communities across Canada. The urgency noted requires action and long-term commitment at all levels of government, in all domains of language revitalization and for all age groups of learners.

In response to the TRC, the Government of Canada (2016) committed to co-developing with Indigenous Peoples an Indigenous Languages Act that will preserve, promote and protect Indigenous languages, and dedicated $89.9 million towards Indigenous languages over a period of three years. Canada has met with representatives of the Indigenous community who stressed the importance of acknowledging languages as a right under Section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* and adequate funding (Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada & Indigenous Services Canada, 2018). Also in response to the TRC Calls to Action, the

Government of British Columbia has dedicated fifty million dollars to Indigenous language revitalization for the Indigenous Peoples of B.C. in an effort to assist with connections to identity, spirituality and land (FPCC, 2018). The Government of Alberta in 2018 followed suit and committed $6 million dollars towards Indigenous language education to increase the number of Indigenous language teachers and develop Indigenous language resources (Jeffrey, 2018).

Adult speakers need to be generated as well as young speakers, in order to successfully combat the erosion of our languages. Fluent adults are essential to language revitalization methods for at least two reasons: a critical mass of people taking responsibility for learning the language is required, and adults are the ones who create the domains for children and others to use the language (Grenoble and Whaley, 2006). I, myself, was involved at a coordinating level in early childhood language centres in fifteen communities across the Northwest Territories and witnessed one of the most frequently cited obstacles to a thriving immersion setting: the lack of fluent adult speakers who are willing and able to work in early childhood settings. Hume & colleagues (2006) validated this finding in their 2006 evaluation of the NWT language nest initiative. While passing down the language to the next generation is a cornerstone of reversing language assimilation (Fishman, 1991), this intergenerational transfer of language is not happening to the extent required for healthy language transmission across Canada (Canadian Heritage Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures, 2005).

Because language programs for children and inter-generational language transmission in the home require adult speakers, and language loss has already progressed though several generations, increased human and financial resources must be made available for adult language programming. Although many believe learning language as an adult is too difficult, this study provides evidence that given the motivation, proper techniques, instruction and perseverance,

adults can and do achieve fluency. Pilot projects for 'silent speakers' in British Columbia have shown some success in adults reclaiming their languages, using cognitive behaviour therapy (Ventura, 2018). Silent speakers are those people who understand the language but have difficulty speaking it, usually due to trauma experienced at residential schools. They are a hidden resource and have an important role to play in language revitalization. The First Peoples Cultural Council in B.C. is leading the way by tapping in to this resource and expanding their programming with the funds received from the Government of B.C. With increased financial resources, other communities may be able to develop adult language learning and re-claiming programs as well.

Indigenous language resources are scant, and yet, as in any language learning program, essential for success in language instruction. Therefore, a concerted effort and immediate action is required to develop quality resources. We are losing one of our most valuable resources each day that passes – our Elders. The Elders hold not only the language in all its intricacies but also original methods of teaching and being, which are essential to holistic and authentic teaching. Indigenous languages have also been shown to hold instructions for healthy ways of living (Dana-Sacco, 2010; Dion-Stout, 2015). Language revitalization then, is not only a health promotion strategy, but one with a small window of opportunity to seize. In Mom's words: Now is the time.

Best Advice for Learning Indigenous Languages

While there are practically as many varied methods of instruction as there are teachers, many Indigenous community members are still seeking best practices in language teaching and learning (Napoleon, 2014; Pitawanakwat, 2018; Rosborough, 2012). As McCreery (2013) and Pitawanakwat (2009) note, there is a gap in research on how best to acquire Indigenous languages. In the Dene worldview, we are taught to do things in the best way possible, to seek out time-saving ways and to share our knowledge with our community. This research therefore sought to elicit methods of learning the language that have worked for adults; and identify some key components crucial to effective language learning.

My colleagues found success using a variety of methods such as MAP, TPR, TPR(S) and ASLA. Summarized below are words of wisdom from my colleagues around learning our languages as adults. I have chosen to portray their suggestions with their own words.

1. *Be motivated and reflect on your motivation for learning the language.*

> They need to really want to do this… and understand their reasons for doing it… By determining your motivation and sort of establishing some goals it will help to understand what kind of a commitment needs to be made… in terms of activities or things we need to do (C. Austin, personal communication, February 13, 2014).

2. *Commit to learning the language and establish goals.*

> I think the level of commitment, personal commitment is really important to your success in learning your language because if you're doing it not for yourself, for other reasons, maybe not personal reasons it might not be as successful… It's 24 hours a day, seven days a week, it's your whole life, and if you can put that into it, and feel like you have that big of a commitment, then you're going to be

successful regardless of how old you are (C. Hill, personal communication, January 29, 2014).

3. *Be willing to devote time usually spent on other activities to the language instead.*

   You kind of have to sacrifice some of your music time, you know? Like, I used to listen to a lot of music, and I don't listen to as much music anymore, because I spend so much time with the language… So, anywhere you can listen to it, where you can plug it in, even if it's just background noise, so having… more of a constant exposure to the language, I think is really key, and that's for the listening component of it (G. D. Underwood, personal communication, March 21, 2014).

4. *Pair up with someone who speaks the language to learn the language.*

   "Just spend as much time as one can learning from them. You know, never miss a golden opportunity. That's how lucky I feel; I had that super golden opportunity" (C. Weir, personal communication, February 6, 2014).

5. *Use the language outside of the classroom.*

   Go to classes, do the homework, but don't treat it like homework. Practice what you've learned every chance you get. Learn to love the language, learn to love learning it (G. D. Underwood, personal communication, March 21, 2014).

6. *Let the language in.*

   The Elders said we need to let the language in gently, we need to let the language be inside of us, like in our inner being…They used to say that in the language all the time, and I was just like, ya, ya, and then one day I finally got it… It was just like a light bulb went on in my head (R. Sampson, personal communication, March 7, 2014).

7. *Learn by listening.*

   Listen even if you don't understand it, because you can make out chunks and soon you will understand more (G. D. Underwood, personal communication, March 21, 2014).

8. *Listen to audio in the language as often as you can.*

   If they don't have the luxury and the beauty of having a fluent Elder, access whatever audio is at hand, just go for it, and just do it, and don't get discouraged, just keep on keeping on. It's a long road, but it's a fun road (C. Weir, personal communication, February 6, 2014).

9. *Stop translating the language.*

   "In order to really understand the language… Abandon that reliance on translating, and switch to hearing and understanding it" (G. D. Underwood, March 21, 2014).

10. *Use the orthography and social media.*

    As a non-speaker, I would say that one of the best things that I've done is learned the orthography, only because I can then properly say the words… there's only one exact way of saying it when it's written properly (G. Blaney, personal communication, February 21, 2014).

11. *Ask people to repeat what they've said. Repeat phrases.*

    "Use repetition, repetition, repetition." (C. Weir, personal communication, February 6, 2014).

12. Tune in to the music of the language.

> For awhile, I was just kind of mimicking the sound of the Elders and used their tone, and to just sort of synchronize myself with that song of the language. And somehow it helped me to form things better grammatically, like it just started to fall into place (G. D. Underwood, personal communication, March 21, 2014).

13. Use the language when you learn it, focusing on communication rather than grammar or pronunciation.

> "Test yourself. Just try what you know even if it's broken language or not quite right." G. D. Underwood, personal communication, March 21, 2014).

14. Push yourself out of your comfort zone.

> "So, I'm continuously learning by working with more proficient teachers than myself, everyday." (R. Sampson, personal communication, March 7, 2014)

15. Teach what you learn.

> What really helped me I think was teaching the language got me to learn the language really fast …because I had to teach somebody else, I had to learn what I had to teach. My language just rocketed from there (R. Sampson, personal communication, March 7, 2014).

16. Try different methods but don't give up on any one method too early.

> Try different ways, but don't give up on one way of learning the language… like don't go for 2 weeks or 1 month on one way. Try it for a while and hopefully you can progress in whatever program you've chosen (R. Sampson, personal communication, March 7, 2014).

"I think different learners learn in different ways. I don't think there's one set strategy that would work for everyone." (G. Blaney, personal communication, February 21, 2014)

17. *Develop a thick skin when it comes to language. Be open to correction; don't take it personally.*

They have to build up that confidence to be able to endure any sort of criticisms. I needed to be able to take their criticism, you know. and not to take it personally. I really had to coach myself into not taking it personally, and to actually listen to what they're saying.

So, yah, toughening up the skin… When it comes to speaking, you have to be a little bit stronger, a little bit stronger in your spirit and to be ready for… to endure those criticisms, to welcome it, you know, to be right on board with it. … you just kind of have to sort of bite your tongue and say, ok, and then move on. So, we have to be okay with speaking really broken language (G. D. Underwood, personal communication, March 21, 2014).

18. *See the connection of language to the land and identity.*

"Learn and respect the land and the language – that they are tied, and also it serves to reinforce your identity as an indigenous person." (C. Claxton, personal communication, March 24, 2014)

19. *Never give up.*

Well in the beginning you're just piecing language together, and you think, how silly, you know – stand up, walk to the door, touch the window, do all this, and then you're going, am I ever going to learn this language? It's taking so long to

> learn language … and then you're going, well how many years do I have to do this and I still don't understand … But I remember a time too that I was at… a Band gathering and another Elder spoke Secwepemctsin, and it just sort of hit me between the eyeballs there, and my whole being and I just thought I know what he said. I understand what that Elder just said, and I just felt like jumping up and down and going, hey I understand what you said (J. E. Billy, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

20. Enjoy the gift of language and pass the language on.

> One of the things our Elders are always talking about is, the more we learn our language, the more we become free. … they talk about freedom of the mind and freedom of the heart, because we're able to express ourselves in our own language… It's because we're able to think, we're able to speak… with the language that our Creator has given us. So they said the more that we pass on the language, the more that we're going to be free because we're going to be healthier people because we'll know who we are as W̱SÁNEĆ people, and I really believe that (R. Sampson, personal communication, March 7, 2014).

Moreover, perhaps the most important reason for renewing and re-invigorating our languages is that Indigenous languages are a gift from our Creator to Indigenous Peoples. As the old man so delicately explained in his relation of the Plains Cree Creation Story to the young Ahtahkakoop and others gathered, language is regarded as a sacred gift from the Creator. "*Nehiyawak oma kiyanaw*. We are the Nehiyaw. The Nehiyawak. Exact body. Exact body of people. We are a spiritual people with sacred ceremonies, songs, and language, all gifts of the Creator" (Christensen, 2000, p. 3).

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