

Reaching Advanced Indigenous Language Proficiency:
Innovative Strategies for Adult Learners

by

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B.A. Western University, 2006
M.A. University of British Columbia, 2011

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

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We acknowledge and respect the Ləkʷəŋən (Songhees and Xʷsepsəm/Esquimalt) Peoples on
whose territory the university stands, and the Ləkʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical
relationships with the land continue to this day.

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Abstract

This dissertation explores strategies and supports for advanced Indigenous language learning. As first language speakers pass away, Indigenous communities increasingly depend on adults with high proficiency to carry their languages forward to future generations. Yet, there are very few studies, models, or other supports to guide adult Indigenous language learners towards and through advanced proficiency levels. This study was developed collaboratively with the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship to support their work to reach advanced proficiency. It aimed to identify promising strategies for advanced Indigenous language learning through interviews with individual speakers who have already reached advanced proficiency in their Indigenous language, and participatory research with the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship participants as they worked on advanced language learning.

The research findings are shared in an alternative dissertation format that includes a chapter detailing the history and features of Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh immersion learning; an article manuscript on strategies for advanced Indigenous language learning; a chapter exploring support factors and guiding principles that sustained the participants in their journeys to reach advanced proficiency; and a photobook to showcase the work of the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship. This dissertation emphasizes the holistic and dynamic nature of language learning, and the necessary interplay between individual initiative and community-based approaches to Indigenous language revitalization. It includes practical insights and ideas for Indigenous language learners and identifies cross-disciplinary collaboration opportunities between Indigenous Language Revitalization and Applied Linguistics for the mutual benefit of both fields.

Preface

Chapter 3 of this dissertation was co-authored with members of the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship: Myia Antone (Welwáltenaat), Cheñáxwtn (Swú7wu Billy), Charlene George (S7atsáliya), Evan Gardner, and Reighen Grineage. All other elements of the dissertation were researched, analyzed, and written by the author, Nicki Benson.

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This study was approved by University of Victoria’s Human Research Ethics Board (Ethics protocol number 21-0183) under the original title: *Adult Indigenous language learning: From intermediate to advanced language proficiency and beyond*.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|------|
| Abstract..... | iii |
| Preface..... | iv |
| Table of Contents..... | v |
| List of Figures..... | vi |
| List of Acronyms..... | vii |
| Acknowledgements..... | viii |
| Chapter 1: Introduction..... | 1 |
| Research Questions..... | 2 |
| Study Background..... | 3 |
| Researcher Positionality..... | 4 |
| Significance of the Study..... | 8 |
| Dissertation Format and Chapter Overview..... | 9 |
| Chapter 2: Literature Review and Methodology..... | 12 |
| Literature Review..... | 12 |
| Theoretical Framework..... | 16 |
| Methodology..... | 17 |
| Methods..... | 19 |
| Participants..... | 23 |
| Data Analysis..... | 31 |
| Human Research Ethics..... | 34 |
| Chapter 3: The Skwxwú7mesh Immersion Programs..... | 35 |
| Creating and Sustaining an Adult Immersion Program..... | 36 |
| Supporting Rapid Language Acquisition: Methods that Work..... | 40 |
| Pushing Past the Intermediate Plateau..... | 58 |
| The Future of Skwxwú7mesh Language Learning..... | 64 |
| Chapter 4: “Don’t Just Collect Words”: Strategies for Advanced Indigenous Language Learning... | 68 |
| Introduction..... | 68 |
| Methods..... | 71 |
| Findings: Strategies for Advanced Indigenous Language Learning..... | 78 |
| Discussion..... | 95 |
| Conclusion..... | 100 |
| Chapter 5: Support Factors and Guiding Principles for Advanced Indigenous Language Learning | 102 |
| Support Factors..... | 102 |
| Guiding Principles..... | 110 |
| Conclusion..... | 118 |
| Chapter 6: Wá7us Ta Snichim Chet Photobook..... | 119 |
| Chapter 7: Conclusion..... | 127 |
| Summary of Key Findings..... | 127 |
| Study Limitations..... | 130 |
| Recommendations for Future Research..... | 131 |
| Wa Chayap Yuu..... | 132 |
| References..... | 134 |
| Appendix A: Approval Letters & Research Agreement..... | 152 |
| Appendix B: Human Research Ethics Certificate..... | 155 |
| Appendix C: Verbal Consent Forms..... | 165 |
| Appendix D: Summarized ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines..... | 176 |
| Appendix E: Sample Interview Questions & Observation Guide..... | 178 |

List of Figures

| | | |
|-----------------|---|-----|
| Figure 1 | Example of the Skwxwú7mesh Certificate Calendar Wall..... | 42 |
| Figure 2 | The Skwxwú7mesh Fluency Freeway as of June 2024. | 54 |
| Figure 3 | Wá7us Ta Sníchim Chet Photobook Cover | 122 |
| Figure 4 | Wá7us Ta Sníchim Chet Photobook: Community..... | 123 |
| Figure 5 | Wá7us Ta Sníchim Chet Photobook: Participant Quote..... | 124 |
| Figure 6 | Wá7us Ta Sníchim Chet Photobook: Learning through Teaching..... | 125 |
| Figure 7 | Wá7us Ta Sníchim Chet Photobook: Participant Quote..... | 126 |

List of Acronyms

ACTFL: American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (www.actfl.org)

AL: Applied Linguistics

ALL: Additional Language Learning

ILR: Indigenous Language Revitalization

KAS: Kwi Awt Stelmexw (later became the Sníchim Foundation)

MAP: Mentor-Apprentice Program (also known as Master-Apprentice Program)

OPI: Oral Proficiency Interview

SFS: Sníchim Foundation Society (www.snichimfoundation.ca)

SFU: Simon Fraser University

TWN: Tseil-Waututh Nation

WAYK: Where Are Your Keys (www.whereareyourkeys.org)

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I have truly enjoyed my experience as a PhD student. Of course, it has had its ups and downs, but the opportunity to spend my time thinking about things that fascinate me, working alongside colleagues who inspire me, and collaborating on many meaningful projects in this role is not something I have taken for granted. Not to mention that I've done it all on a flexible schedule that allowed me to be with my family when I wanted or needed to be.

Others lament the long haul of the PhD, but mine has taken me as long as it has because I have had three wonderful children to raise along the way. Amara, Emelina, y Elio, ustedes son lo que más me importa en este mundo. Gracias por su paciencia cuando el trabajo me reclama, por todo lo que me enseñan cada día, y por llenar mi vida de alegría. Los quiero.

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I am grateful for the love and support from all my family and friends. In particular, I thank Koni, Roma, and Tahohtharátye for being my most dependable sounding boards and for all the advice (and commiseration) along the way. Thank you also to my PhD cohort colleagues: your dedication to your languages is an inspiration and I am grateful to learn from each one of you.

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תודה רבה / muchas gracias / thank you so much to all the study participants: your contributions are helping to strengthen understanding and expand possibilities in advanced adult Indigenous language learning.

Chapter 1: Introduction

How can adult Indigenous language learners reach advanced levels of language proficiency in contexts where there are no remaining first language speakers? This was the question facing the members of the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship in the spring of 2021. The group was primarily made up of young Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) and sə́lilwətał (Tsilil-Waututh) adults who had completed full-time adult immersion programs for Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh sníchim (the Squamish language) and had reached intermediate proficiency levels¹. The members of the group had been working as teachers and teaching assistants in the immersion programs and found that their own language levels had plateaued. They knew that the only way to continue progressing with their language development was to spend time as language learners again, so they decided to dedicate ten months to their own proficiency development before running another immersion program cohort. Yet, they were faced with an immense challenge: they had never worked on advanced language learning before and there were no first language speakers who could lead this endeavour. This dissertation research was designed collaboratively with the Stewardship to support their work. It involved participatory research with the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship advanced language learning cohort, and interviews with speakers of other Indigenous languages from across Canada who had already reached advanced proficiency levels. Through these activities, the study aimed to identify promising strategies and supports for advanced Indigenous language learning in contexts with few or no first language speakers.

Advanced Indigenous language speakers play a crucial role in Indigenous Language Revitalization (ILR). As first language speakers age and pass on, communities increasingly rely

¹ According to the proficiency guidelines developed by the [American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages](#) (ACTFL, 2012).

on proficient adults to sustain and transmit the language (Fishman, 1991; Hinton, 2011; Twitchell, 2018; Wilson, 2018). Yet, while the body of ILR research on strategies and methods is growing (Chew et al., 2023; McIvor & Anisman, 2018), I found no studies that examine in detail how adult Indigenous language learners successfully progress from intermediate levels of proficiency to advanced levels and beyond. Studies that document the activities of advanced language learners (such as Brant, 2024; Green, 2017, 2018; Rātima, 2013; Rātima & Papesch, 2014; Stacey, 2024) are from contexts in which the learners have opportunities for immersion learning with first language speakers. This study aimed to expand awareness and discussion about advanced Indigenous language learning for those with few or no first language speakers.

Research Questions

The primary goal of this study was to understand how Indigenous language learners can successfully progress their proficiency from intermediate to advanced levels when they have few or no opportunities to interact with first language speakers. More specifically, the inquiry asks the following three questions:

1. Which strategies from the literature on Additional Language Learning (ALL) could be applied in the case of Indigenous language learning in contexts with few or no first language speakers?
2. Which strategies have been used by advanced speakers of Indigenous languages across North America to reach their current proficiency levels, and which of these are or could be applied in contexts with few or no first language speakers?
3. Which language learning strategies work well for a grassroots group of advanced language learners in a context with no first language speakers?

Study Background

I have been working in language education for almost 20 years as a teacher, researcher, and consultant, and I have a keen interest in understanding and supporting successful language learning. Since 2015, I have worked alongside the Skwxwú7mesh language community on various initiatives to support their language revitalization efforts. It is through our collaboration that this research took shape. Their progress in language learning and teaching over the years led to a mutual interest in exploring effective approaches for advanced Indigenous language learning. We then endeavoured to design a study that could contribute to the broader ILR movement and support those engaged in similar efforts. The study included interviews with additional language speakers of various Indigenous languages who had already reached advanced proficiency to gain an understanding of their experiences, efforts, and insights on advanced language learning. We aimed to identify promising strategies to support Indigenous language learners, while actively working together to support the Skwxwú7mesh learners in their efforts to reach advanced proficiency.

Skwxwú7mesh sníchim (the Squamish language) is one of the original languages of the lands on which the cities of Vancouver, West Vancouver, North Vancouver, Squamish, and Whistler were later built on the west coast of Canada. It is a Coast Salish language in the Salishan language family. While there were tens of thousands of speakers of Skwxwú7mesh sníchim before the arrival of Europeans to the area in 1792 (Baker-Williams, 2006), the language has been classified as “critically endangered” for decades (Gessner et al., 2022; Kuipers, 1967; Simons & Fennig, 2018). In 2020, the Skwxwú7mesh lost their last active first language speaker.

Despite this history of loss, the Skwxwú7mesh people are persistent and highly committed to their language. Various language classes and programs have been offered since the

1970s (Baker-Williams, 2006; Benson & Khelsilem, 2021; George, 2024). In 2016, the community organization Kwi Awt Stelmexw (which later became the Sníchim Foundation) created the first full-time adult immersion program for Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Sníchim with assistance from Simon Fraser University (Gallop, 2016). By spring 2021, the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Language Proficiency Certificate (1 year) program had graduated over 50 new speakers. The Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Language Proficiency Diploma (2nd year) program had also been created and graduated over 30 speakers. Graduates of these programs have been assessed using Oral Proficiency Interviews adapted from the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), and most Diploma program graduates have reached levels that range from Intermediate-Low to Intermediate-High according to the ACTFL proficiency guidelines (ACTFL, 2012). These programs are described in detail in Chapter 3.

In summer 2021, ten graduates from the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh immersion programs embarked on a new grassroots journey to mutually support one another to reach advanced proficiency levels, calling themselves the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship (hereafter Stewardship). The Stewardship spent ten months together working on advancing their proficiency, while at the same time continuously working on curriculum development for future iterations of the other immersion programs. They were working in a context with no remaining first language speakers and no known resources for learning the language at an advanced level. This dissertation was designed in collaboration with the Stewardship participants to support their efforts to reach advanced language proficiency.

Researcher Positionality

Before I continue, I pause to introduce myself. Shawn Wilson (2008) asserts that “all stories reflect the storyteller” (p. 22) and can only be interpreted through an understanding of the

network of relationships that make a person who they are. Wilson explains that our relationships with ourselves, others, the natural world, and the spiritual, as well as our relationships with ideas, shape our decisions, understandings, and interpretations. Relational accountability is foundational to good research with Indigenous peoples (Absolon, 2011; Kovach, 2009; Riddell et al., 2017; Schnarch, 2004), and a fundamental principle that guides my work. So, I begin by briefly describing who I am, the values I hold, and the relationships that are central to my work.

I was born and raised in Skwxwú7mesh, səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh), and x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam) territories in Vancouver. I am a Jewish woman, the daughter of immigrants to Canada. My ancestors were exiled from their original homeland, persecuted and oppressed throughout history, eventually settling in Lithuania (likely sometime between the 14th-16th centuries). My great grandparents and their families fled anti-Jewish pogroms in the region in the late 1800s and early 1900s, ending up in South Africa where my grandparents and parents were born. Although finally able to live freely as Jewish people in that country, my parents could not accept the oppression of people of colour under the South African apartheid system and left for North America in the 1970s, settling in Vancouver.

My parents were not especially religious, but they raised my siblings and me with strong Jewish values and a sense of responsibility to carry on the traditions that our ancestors struggled so hard to preserve. My worldview, the way I conduct myself, and my life choices have been shaped by these teachings. These include a commitment to critical thinking (מחלוקת לשם שמים / Machloket l'Shem Shamayim / “disagreement for the sake of heaven”), hard work (עבודה / Avodah / “work” or “service”), and social justice (תיקון עולם / Tikkun Olam / “healing the world”). I was taught to question everything, to take responsibility for my learning and my actions, to always work hard, and to find ways to meaningfully contribute to the world. I was

taught that no matter what one's life circumstances might be, we all have the responsibility to take care of one another and the world around us.

I fell in love with the Spanish language in high school and later with language education. I was fortunate to travel and live in several Spanish-speaking countries, and to pursue education opportunities that aligned with my passions. I completed a B.A. in Spanish Language and Literature in 2006 and an M.A. in Language Education in 2011. But, while I found meaningful volunteer work with human rights organizations, I also sought to find ways to bring deeper connections with Tikkun Olam in my work as a language teacher and consultant. In 2013, I was hired by UNICEF Peru for a research project with Quechua communities in the Andes. It was there that I came to understand the social justice objectives embedded in Indigenous language education and where I first felt called in to ILR work. I returned to Canada a year later where I became a self-directed student of ILR and the Indigenous languages of the lands I grew up on (information that was not part of my education growing up in Vancouver). I completed online courses, and I began consulting work for Indigenous language curriculum development with the B.C. Ministry of Education.

I was honoured by an invitation from Victor Guerin to participate in *hənq̓əminəm* classes with the Tsleil-Waututh Nation where I first met Khelsilem, a *Sḵw̓x̓wú7mesh stélmexw* who was one of the *hənq̓əminəm* teachers at the time. He was working on building a non-profit to support *Sḵw̓x̓wú7mesh sníchim* education and, in 2015, he hired me as the Education Initiatives Manager. In that role, I helped administratively to create the first full-time adult immersion program for *Sḵw̓x̓wú7mesh sníchim* in partnership with Simon Fraser University (SFU) which began in 2016. It was the success of that program that compelled me to pursue a PhD in ILR. I knew that the story of the program would be an inspiration for other ILR practitioners and

communities who could benefit from understanding the strategies that made the program successful. I also wanted to support the Skwxwú7mesh learners through collaborative research that would be directly beneficial to them. Over the years, I developed relationships with many people involved in the programs, in particular with Charlene George (S7atsáliya) and Cheńáxwtń (Swú7wu Billy) who became the main teachers in the programs in subsequent years. We discussed and dreamed of many possible directions for my research. As the programs evolved over the years, so too did the potential directions for our work together.

Since I was first accepted to the University of Victoria for this PhD program, I have had three children. My first daughter was born in 2017, the year I was accepted into the program. I deferred my start date to 2018 to be home with my baby. My second daughter was born in 2020, and my son was born in 2023. I took a year of maternity leave with each of them. This has meant that, along with me and my family, the Skwxwú7mesh programs and participants have had many years of growth and change since we first agreed to work together. When the time came to solidify the focus of the research, the group was working on advanced language learning so that is the primary topic of this study.

I am raising my children with Spanish as their first language. Despite having no Spanish-speaking extended family, my husband and I wanted to give our children the gift of bilingualism. My journey in maintaining advanced proficiency while raising my children in my second language has parallels with some of my Skwxwú7mesh and other Indigenous colleagues. It has been particularly meaningful for me to work in this context, opening opportunities for mutual learning, support, and reflection.

Significance of the Study

Advanced adult Indigenous language speakers are essential in ILR. Languages thrive when children are raised in the language in their homes and have opportunities to speak the language with others in the community. This is only possible if there is a cohort of adult speakers to support such an environment (Brant, 2024; DeCaire, 2023; Fishman, 2001; Twitchell, 2018; Wilson, 2018). Yet, I could find no studies that explore how advanced levels can be reached in cases where there are no first language speakers to rely on. This study responded to these needs by profiling adult Indigenous language learners who have attained advanced proficiency, and by following the activities of a group of Sḵw̱x̱wú7mesh sníchim learners as they worked to reach advanced proficiency.

The study identified promising strategies to progress Indigenous language learning to advanced levels, including individual study activities, group-based activities, and expanding language use into homes and communities. The study also identified important support factors and guiding principles that contribute to successful language learning. The knowledge gathered in this dissertation will be useful to other ILR practitioners who are working on advanced language learning through sharing promising strategies that can be replicated or adapted in their contexts. The study also provides a record for the Sḵw̱x̱wú7mesh language community about an innovative initiative that may prove integral to the return of Sḵw̱x̱wú7mesh sníchim to everyday use.

The most significant aim of this research was the proficiency advancement of the Sḵw̱x̱wú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship members. The project was able to directly support the participants by bringing research findings to them and collaborating with them to adapt and implement promising strategies as they worked to reach advanced language proficiency.

Dissertation Format and Chapter Overview

This dissertation does not follow a conventional five-chapter format. The traditional dissertation model typically consists of five main sections: introduction, literature review, methods, results, and discussion. However, alternative formats are becoming more prevalent for dissertations as authors seek to make their work more engaging, accessible, and relevant (Anderson et al., 2022). Some alternative formats include manuscripts or other works that have been, or can be, published in other venues. This dissertation is what Anderson et al. (2022) call a “topic-manuscript hybrid” (p. 597). It includes the elements of a traditional dissertation, but the chapters are organized around sub-topics related to the main study. One of the chapters of this dissertation is a stand-alone manuscript which has been published in an academic journal (Benson, 2024), and another describes a photobook which was printed and shared with the Skwxwú7mesh community. Below is an overview of the structure of this dissertation:

- **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

This chapter (current) includes the study introduction, rationale, background, and research questions as well as author positionality, and dissertation format.

- **Chapter 2 – Literature Review and Methodology**

This chapter begins with a literature review, followed by the study’s theoretical framework, methodology, methods, participant information, and data analysis processes.

- **Chapter 3 – The Skwxwú7mesh Immersion Programs**

This chapter explores the history and current context of the Skwxwú7mesh immersion programs. This chapter was co-authored with members of the

Słkwxwú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship and is planned for later development into a manuscript for publication.

- **Chapter 4 – “Don’t Just Collect Words”: Strategies for Advanced Indigenous Language Learning**

This is a manuscript that was published in the Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics (CJAL) 2024 Special Issue. It presents the primary category of findings from the study: specific strategies for Indigenous language learning used by the participants to reach advanced proficiency. As the Special Issue aimed to explore relationships between ILR and Applied Linguistics, the manuscript includes a discussion on how findings from this study can contribute to understandings and connections between the two fields. As the manuscript was a stand-alone publication, it required an overview of the entire study and thus includes some sections that overlap with other parts of the dissertation, though care has been taken to avoid word-for-word repetition.

- **Chapter 5 – Support Factors and Guiding Principles for Advanced Indigenous Language Learning**

This chapter presents two additional categories of findings from the study: support factors and guiding principles that sustained the advanced language learners in their proficiency journeys.

- **Chapter 6 – “Wá7us ta Sníchim Chet” Photobook**

This chapter presents a photobook that was created for the Słkwxwú7mesh community. This was a creative output designed to celebrate the work of the community and share the study findings in an accessible way. The photobook

includes findings directly related to the Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship, alongside images and quotes from the Stewardship participants. This chapter briefly describes the photobook and includes images from the photobook pages. The full photobook can be accessed at <https://tinyurl.com/skwxwu7mesh-photobook>. As the photobook is a stand-alone output designed to share the study and some outcomes with the community, there is information and quotes within it that overlap with other segments in this dissertation.

- **Chapter 7 – Conclusion**

The final chapter provides a conclusion to the overall study. It includes a summary of key findings, some limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Methodology

This chapter begins by sharing the findings from a review of the literature on Additional Language Learning (ALL) which explored promising strategies for advanced Indigenous language learning. This is followed by a description of the study design, including the theoretical framework, research methodology, project participants, information gathering methods, and data analysis procedures. It includes details about the participants, including the individual advanced Indigenous language speakers and the members of the Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship.

Literature Review

Literature from the field of ALL was reviewed in search of insights and strategies to support advanced Indigenous language learning in contexts with few first language speakers. I used different combinations of search terms such as *strategies*, *methods*, and *activities*, with *advanced language learning* or *advanced language proficiency*. I read through sources and sought out ideas immediately relevant to the work of the Stewardship. As the individual advanced additional language speakers of other Indigenous languages began to share ideas with me during our interviews, I also searched for literature on specific activities that they indicated helped them reach advanced proficiency. The results of the literature review were limited and are briefly described in the following paragraphs.

Much of the literature on advanced language learning focusses on what learners can do at advanced levels (e.g., Malovrh & Benati, 2018), rather than on the strategies they used to reach those levels. Where strategies are described, some would be impossible for Indigenous language learners, such as immersion or exchange experiences in places where the target language is the dominant language (e.g., Brown & Brown, 2014; Hyltenstam et al., 2018). Many other ideas could work for Indigenous communities with more resources and speakers but would not be

possible for S_{kw}wú7mesh learners. These include content-based learning opportunities in which other subjects are taught using the target language as the medium of instruction (Lyster, 2017) and strategies that rely on resources such as grammar books, story books, videos, podcasts, or other kinds of media in the target language (e.g., Arnold, 2009; Hamada, 2019; Hyltenstam et al., 2018).

Some of the activities reviewed would be possible in the S_{kw}wú7mesh context but only if the learners themselves spent time developing the required resources. For example, they could create written grammar-based activities for one another such as cloze activities or sentence completion tasks (Richards, 2008), or set up scenarios to practice task-based activities (Aleksandrak, 2011; Ellis et al., 2019)². Other strategies were already in use by the S_{kw}wú7mesh learners such as output-intensive practice (Aleksandrak, 2011; Brown & Larson-Hall, 2012; Gass & Mackey, 2006) explicit advanced grammar focus (DeKeyser, 2018; Richards, 2008), contextual vocabulary learning (Nation, 2012), and collaborative language learning (Brandford-Watts, 2011; Pérez Gómez et al., 2021; Swain & Watanabe, 2013). A detailed description of the S_{kw}wú7mesh immersion programs is found in Chapter 3, including the language learning strategies that were in use before this research project began.

The following strategies from the ALL literature were identified as useful for the S_{kw}wú7mesh learners:

- **Pre-listening tasks to ensure input is comprehensible during listening activities:**

These tasks include predicting content, reviewing vocabulary, and discussing

² The Where Are Your Keys (WAYK) method used in the S_{kw}wú7mesh programs includes many activities which could be considered task-based, as they are hands-on activities that have students and teachers instructing their peers through tasks. However, the ALL literature speaks to other kinds of task-based activities with an emphasis on role-playing scenarios in which students use language to complete tasks that they may encounter outside the classroom, such as asking for directions, shopping in a store, ordering at a restaurant, etc.

background knowledge related to a recorded story or other listening material. Such tasks activate prior knowledge and can help build a cognitive framework to facilitate better comprehension and engagement with the listening material (Goh & Vandergrift, 2021; Richards, 2008).

- **Interactive tasks to focus on language output:** Templates can be found online for “find the difference” activities or games like Charades and 20 Questions. These can be a fun way to practice different vocabulary and topics while developing learners’ ability to use language spontaneously while adjusting for different topics or contexts (Brown & Larson-Hall, 2012; Richards, 2008).
- **Interactive tasks to focus on specific grammar forms:** Activities such as circle drills encourage repetition of grammar forms to enhance accuracy and automatization of grammar use (Richards, 2008). In circle drills, learners take turns practicing a sentence while substituting one of the words, such as the subject pronoun, and ensuring that the rest of the sentence is accurate depending on the substituted change. This kind of activity also provides opportunities for learners to notice areas of difficulty to work on (Brown & Larson-Hall, 2012; Ellis, 2008).
- **Vocabulary tracking and drilling:** Using tools such as digital flashcards, spaced repetition software, or personal vocabulary logs to systematically review and practice new words helps build vocabulary retention and retrieval speed by ensuring learners encounter and actively recall target words multiple times (Nation, 2012).
- **Self-recording activities:** Learners record themselves speaking and review their recordings to help identify areas to work on including vocabulary, pronunciation,

intonation, and fluency while allowing learners to track improvements over time (Madison, 2021; Pham & Le, 2023; Wong & Nunan, 2011).

- **Focussing on lexical chunks and collocations:** Richards (2008) explains that vocabulary development at the advanced level is not only about acquiring more words, but “also involve[s] expanding knowledge of the collocational patterns that known words can enter into” (p. 15, see also Byrnes, 2012). Learners at this level can practice phrasal verbs, fixed expressions, idiomatic phrases, and other “lexical chunks” through text analysis, sentence examples, writing activities, and deliberate speaking practice.
- **Hands-on activities focussed on personally relevant topics:** Learners can create presentations, lead discussions, provide demonstrations, or teach skills around topics and activities that are meaningful to them. Personal relevance enhances learner engagement and motivation, leading to deeper processing and better language acquisition (Byrnes, 2012; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009).

As part of the design of this study, I brought these strategy ideas to the Stewardship group for their consideration. We held three meetings where I shared suggested strategies from the literature and further ideas from the interviews with advanced Indigenous language speakers. Of those listed above, the group decided to try “find the difference” activities, circle drills, and self-recording during our time together. They had already been engaging in hands-on activities focused on personally relevant topics and expanded on these after our time together (as described in Chapter 3).

Theoretical Framework

Indigenist Research Paradigm

As a non-Indigenous scholar working in the field of ILR, I seek to engage meaningfully with the Indigenous people I work with to do research that benefits their languages and communities. For guidance on how to do this well, I turn to the work of Indigenous scholars who have articulated Indigenous methodologies and approaches to research (Absolon, 2011; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). While some aspects of these approaches are unique to Indigenous peoples, Wilson (2007) argues that non-Indigenous scholars can engage in *Indigenist* research. Wilson argues that just as one does not have to be a woman to be a feminist, “researchers do not have to be Indigenous to use an Indigenist paradigm... [it is] the choice to follow this paradigm, philosophy, or world view that makes research Indigenist” (p. 194).

For Wilson (2007, 2008), the fundamental element of an Indigenist paradigm is respectful relationships, and I use his notion of ‘relational accountability’ as an overarching principle to guide all aspects of my work. Healthy research relationships are respectful, responsible, and reciprocal (Castleden et al., 2012; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Kovach, 2009; Riddell et al., 2017). My research is grounded in, and accountable to, the relationships that I have developed with members of the Sk̓w̓x̓wú7mesh language community over several years. I sought their advice and guidance in developing my research ideas and continue to work collaboratively with them through all aspects of this study. The research was responsive to their needs and, above all, sought to provide meaningful outcomes for them and their language.

Ecological Understanding of Language Learning

The Douglas Fir Group (DFG) (2016) argues that “language inextricably involves cognition, emotions, consciousness, experience, embodiment, brain, self, human interaction,

society, culture, mediation, instruction, and history in rich, complex, and dynamic ways” (p. 39). A single approach to studying Additional Language Learning (ALL) would therefore be impossible and undesirable. Instead, the DFG offers an ecological model for understanding language learning. Their framework presents the individual learner in the center surrounded by concentric circles representing three overlapping levels: “the micro level of social action and interaction, the meso level of sociocultural institutions and communities, and the macro level of ideological structures” (p. 36). Each level is in continual interaction with the others and the components within each cannot be understood in isolation.

This ecological model represents my understanding of language learning and guides my approach to research in ALL. It also aligns with many Indigenous worldviews which are holistic, understanding that the physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual cannot be separated (Absolon, 2011; Battiste, 2013; Kovach, 2009; Meyer, 2014). These worldviews also uphold the primacy of relationships, recognizing the interconnectedness between all beings and their environments (Wilson, 2008). I believe that the ecological model is more relevant to ILR than others in ALL as it aims to describe complexity, rather than separate the cognitive from the social, the micro from the macro, or the personal from the political. As I listened to stories of language learning and witnessed language learning programs in action, I was attuned to the social, cultural, and political dynamics that support or hinder language learning in addition to specific learning strategies and methods.

Methodology

Community-Based Research

Community-based research (CBR) is an approach to research which is both consistent with an Indigenist research paradigm and can create the conditions for applying an ecological

understanding of language learning. CBR is research that is conducted in partnership and close collaboration with the community in which the research takes place and that aims to contribute to positive change in that community (Bischoff & Jany, 2019; Czaykowska-Higgins, 2009; Rice, 2019). CBR moves away from traditional research relationships in which researchers view participants as sources for data to analyze for their own academic interest or gain and instead views participants as active partners in all stages of the research. Bischoff and Jany (2019) identify four central tenets of CBR: “community situated, collaborative, action-oriented, and community involvement through all stages of the research” (p. 2). My research follows these principles and takes inspiration from a growing number of CBR initiatives in linguistics and ILR.

Participatory Action Research

CBR is closely related to Participatory Action Research (PAR). Both approaches advocate for close collaboration with research participants to act for positive change. PAR is more explicit about involving participant in projects aimed at achieving social change and social justice (Kindon et al., 2007). However, Czaykowska-Higgins (2009) explains that this is also often implicit in CBR projects with Indigenous language communities. My research was carried out in close collaboration with the Stewardship participants and involved taking action with them in support of the wider social justice goal of language reclamation (Chew et al., 2023; Leonard, 2021). Johnson and Christensen (2014) describe a cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting commonly used in PAR studies which informed my approach to meetings with the Stewardship in which we shared and reflected on language learning strategies.

Constructivist Grounded Theory

My research also draws on principles and methods from Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT). This methodology builds on traditional Grounded Theory which “aims to generate theory

that is grounded in the data” (Tie et al., 2019, p. 2) rather than impose theory on the data through a deductive approach. Grounded theory is usually described as a process for allowing theory to “emerge” from the data (e.g., Strauss & Corbin, 2015). However, Charmaz (2006) challenged this notion, arguing that “neither data nor theories are discovered. Rather, we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We *construct* our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices” (p. 10). This is my understanding of theory development. As I worked to co-construct an understanding of advanced Indigenous language learning with the participants in my study, I include methods suggested by Charmaz (2006) for how to do this well. In particular, gathering rich data, and simultaneously collecting and analyzing data through a constant comparison approach.

Methods

This study was designed in collaboration with the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship. I had originally intended to do case study research with the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh immersion programs. However, the language work progressed in the community, and we determined that a research project to support their work to reach advanced proficiency was most needed. My original research proposal included three components: (1) a systematic literature review on promising strategies for advanced Indigenous language learning, (2) interviews with advanced language speakers of Indigenous languages across North America, and (3) collaborative activities with the Stewardship participants throughout one academic year. Elements of each component were planned to occur simultaneously, rather than in a linear fashion.

Based on my conversations with Charlene and Chená̓xwtn (the main language teachers), I drafted a research proposal and presented it to the wider Stewardship group during a virtual meeting in August 2021. Following this, they provided a detailed list of comments, questions,

and concerns via Google Docs which I addressed in writing within the shared document. They met again to review my answers and agreed to the proposal (see Appendix A). I then sought and received approval to conduct the research from the Sníchim Foundation and the Tsleil-Waututh Nation, as these were the main employers of the Stewardship participants (see Appendix A). The proposal was then presented to, and approved by, my doctoral committee and the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Board (Appendix B). At the conclusion of these processes, my research began in December 2021.

Prior to approval from the Human Research Ethics Board, I began the literature review searching for promising strategies within the field of ALL to support advanced Indigenous language learning. Review and reference to this literature continued throughout the rest of the study. However, the results of the literature review were more limited than expected. Due to this result, it was decided to include the literature review in this chapter rather than as a specific outcome of the study.³ The following sections provide details of the latter two components of the study, individual speaker interviews and collaborative activities with the Stewardship, and the procedures within each.

Interviews with advanced additional language speakers

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight advanced additional language speakers from diverse Indigenous language groups. The purpose of these interviews was to understand how Indigenous language learners can successfully progress their proficiency from intermediate to advanced levels and beyond, and to identify promising strategies for advanced Indigenous language learning that could be useful for the Stewardship participants. The

³ Note that the decision to present the literature review in this way was made after the publication of the article manuscript presented in Chapter 4. In that chapter, the literature review is listed as one of the study components and briefly discussed at the beginning of the Findings section.

individual advanced speakers were recruited through a relational process, based on existing relationships and acquaintances. I worked together with my doctoral committee to brainstorm a list of advanced language speakers who had learned in contexts with some similarities to the Stewardship. This included participants who speak languages related to Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim as well as those from unrelated language families, to seek out strategies that may be specific to the language structure and others that are universal to Indigenous language learning.

I reached out to participants initially via email. I sent another email to those who expressed interest arranging a time to meet virtually. That message included two attachments: the verbal consent form (Appendix C) and a summarized version of the ACTFL proficiency guidelines (Appendix D). I explained that we would review these documents together and that I hoped they would be able to identify their proficiency level according to the ACTFL guidelines. In some cases, I met with participants to review these documents before finalizing their participation in an interview. In other cases, the speakers confirmed their participation via email, and we went straight to scheduling an interview. Once we had confirmed a meeting time, I also sent sample interview questions that they could review in advance (Appendix E).

The interviews were conducted virtually, using videoconferencing software. Six interviews were conducted between January and February of 2022, and the other two between April and May. They ranged from 45 to 80 minutes each. As I conducted each interview, I noted strategy ideas that could work for the Stewardship which I brought to the group as soon as possible afterwards. I had originally aimed to interview around 10 speakers, but once I had reached eight participants, my supervisor and I determined that the group was representative of a wide range of languages and perspectives and would provide sufficiently rich input for the study.

Collaborative activities with the Stewardship

From December 2021 to May 2022, I participated regularly in the activities of the Stewardship. When our time together officially began, I reviewed a verbal group consent form with the participants which they agreed to (see Appendix A). I attended the Stewardship multiple days per week, acting as an observer throughout and as an active participant whenever appropriate. The purpose of this level of engagement was to continue to develop positive relationships and trust with the program participants, as well as develop a deep understanding of program activities and dynamics. Mela Sarkar (Sarkar & Metallic, 2009) engaged similarly with a Mi'gmaq language program over several years, explaining that innovative language programs constantly evolve to meet the needs of students and truly understanding what is working requires participation and observation over time.

During this six-month period, I hosted three meetings in which I shared promising language learning strategies that I had learned about from the literature and the interviews with individual advanced additional language speakers. We had originally planned to meet biweekly to review strategy ideas, but scheduling the meetings proved challenging, and some participants' involvement became sporadic due to their responsibilities during S_kw_xwú7mesh winter ceremonies. During these three meetings, we discussed strategy ideas, collaborated to adapt them for use in the Stewardship, and reflected together on which strategies were working well for the group.

I also conducted semi-structured interviews with the Stewardship participants at the beginning and at the end of our time together (see Appendix C for the verbal consent form used, and Appendix E for sample interview questions). While there were 15 original members of the Stewardship, three were no longer participating when my research began. I interviewed the

remaining 12 near the beginning of our time together, and ten of the participants near the end of our time together. The purpose of these interviews was to understand the participants' language learning journeys, to identify strategies that had helped them reach their proficiency level prior to their time with the Stewardship, and to identify what had worked well for them during the Stewardship. I also asked participants to share their ideas and advice for other Indigenous language learners working to reach advanced proficiency in contexts with no first language speakers. The interviews varied in length with the first set of interviews ranging from 25-75 minutes, and the second set of interviews between 15-45 minutes each.

In early February of 2022, I was contacted by the Squamish Nation to inform me that a Collaborative Research Agreement would be necessary to continue research with Squamish Nation members. I paused my research activities and began to collaborate with staff of the Squamish Nation to prepare the necessary documentation to share with the Squamish Nation Council for their approval. I presented my research to the Council on March 3, 2022. It was approved and I was able to continue with my research activities at that point (see Appendix A for the Collaborative Research Agreement).

Participants

Individual Advanced Additional Language Speakers

I had the privilege of interviewing eight incredible Indigenous language revitalization leaders for this study. They had each dedicated their lives to learning and, in most cases, teaching their languages, and were each recognized as leaders in their communities. All continued to be deeply involved in language work at the time of the study and I was honoured that they agreed to share some of their most valuable time for this study. In this section, a general description of this

group is shared, followed by individual introductions of each of the advanced additional language speakers.

None of the individual advanced additional language speakers had been raised in the language. While some had parents who were first language speakers, it was more common that their grandparents had been the last generation of first language speakers in their families. They all heard everyday words and phrases in the language when they were growing up, but they did not start to learn in earnest until they were young adults. At some point, they each felt compelled to become speakers of their languages and each described strong personal initiative, hard work, and determination that were integral to reaching their current proficiency levels. I asked the participants to review a summarized version of the ACTFL proficiency guidelines (Appendix D) and to self-assess their level according to these guidelines. All but one of the advanced additional language speakers self-assessed, rating themselves at levels ranging from Intermediate-High to Superior.

All but two of the individual advanced speakers had participated in formal language programs such as language classes, immersion programs, or Mentor-Apprentice Programs (MAP). The two who had not learned through any formal programs had unique opportunities to learn the language through work as teaching assistants with first language speakers. All had engaged in many years of self-study, sharing that they tried everything that they could and relied on all resources possible to learn their languages. Five of the participants had children who they had raised or were raising in the language. Below, I introduce each of the individual advanced language learners. They are presented in alphabetical order by first name⁴.

⁴ The names of participants and their languages appear as requested by each participant. The write-ups included here were approved by each participant after receiving draft copies to review and request changes. Some participants have published a Master's thesis, PhD dissertation, or other writing about their work, and I have included links to their work following their biography.

Aaron Fay is Red River Métis (Caplette/Lafournaise) from Rocky Mountain House and currently resides in West Kelowna, BC. He grew up with an awareness of his Métis heritage but only became actively involved in ceremony and culture as a young adult. He would spend many years hearing and wondering about nēhiyawēwin (Plains Cree), but he did not endeavour to learn the language until age 40. Since then, he has taken several nēhiyawēwin classes; participated in conversation groups; sought mentorship from advanced additional language speakers; visited with first language speakers; and engaged in self-directed learning activities. Aaron self-assessed between Intermediate-High and Advanced-Low according to the ACTFL proficiency guidelines.

Cameron Adams is ininiw (Swampy Cree), Anishinaabe (Ojibwe), and French Canadian from Gimli, Manitoba. He started studying nēhinawēwin/ininīmowin (Swampy Cree) about six years prior to our interview during the latter years of high school. At that time, he began self-directed learning activities including engaging with language groups on social media. He went on to study the language in university, taking all available university courses, and completed a MAP. Through his third and fourth years of university, he worked with an Elder-speaker to record stories and create a digital app for the Swampy Cree dialect. He partially attributes his rapid language acquisition to continual engagement with the app materials and active participation in online language communities. Cameron is now pursuing a Master of Arts in Indigenous Language Revitalization at McGill University. He self-assessed at Intermediate-High according to ACTFL.

Jaskwaan Amanda Bedard is a Haida woman. She grew up in Prince Rupert, BC where she participated in a Haida dance group and would hear songs in X̱aad Kíl (the Haida language). She would also hear her grandparents speaking the language, but she didn't begin to learn it herself until she was a young adult and ready to have her first child. That was 19 years ago, and

she had been continuously involved with the language ever since. She began learning with her daughter in a Language Nest on Haida Gwaii and went on to complete several university courses, three years in MAP, and a four-month intensive language program. She became a language teacher and has worked in curriculum development, language programming, and language planning at various levels including for the Nation, the School District, and universities. At the time, she was teaching two Xaad Kíl classes through SFU. Jaskwaan chose not to self-assess her language level. (See Bedard, 2019, 2021 in References for published works by Jaskwaan)

Kahrhó:wane Cory McComber is Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) from Kahnawá:ke. He grew up speaking English but at age 18 he asked to volunteer in a Kanien'kéha (Mohawk language) immersion kindergarten. He ended up working there for five years, learning from first language speakers in an immersion environment alongside the students. From then until age 38, he engaged in self-directed learning, reading linguistic texts, working on translations, and engaging with speakers as much as possible. He was committed to raising his children in the language, and at one point took four years off from work to homeschool them. At age 38, he took his first formal language class with a Kanien'kehá:ka linguist, and at age 40 he began teaching the language in a full-time adult immersion program with a co-teacher who had learned through a grammar-based immersion program. Kahrhó:wane had been formally assessed as a Superior speaker according to the ACTFL proficiency guidelines.

Karonhiíóstha Shea Sky is Kanien'kehá:ka also from Kahnawà:ke. She began learning Kanien'kéha four years prior to our meeting in a two-year full-time adult immersion program. By the end of the two years, she was assessed at Advanced-Mid according to the ACTFL proficiency guidelines. Since completing the immersion program, she has been involved with language and culture initiatives and continuously engaged in self-directed Kanien'kéha learning

activities. The first summer after graduation, she and her friends created and ran a 10-week summer immersion program for advanced language learners. They subsequently founded Ionkwahronkha'onhátie', a grassroots community-based collective who support adult Kanien'kéha language learners working towards or through advanced proficiency levels.

Kathryn Michel is a Secwepemc woman. She grew up in Kamloops, BC. Her parents were first language speakers of Secwepemctsin (Shuswap) but raised their children in English. Kathryn's father taught her the alphabet and she would assist him with transcription work when she was in high school, but she didn't learn to speak the language until adulthood. When her first child was two years old, Kathryn was inspired to start a Secwepemctsin Language Nest. She moved to Adams Lake, where her parents were born, and began to bring together the necessary resources. Along with other young mothers, she helped create the Language Nest in 1987, and later an immersion elementary school, Chief Atahm School. At first, she learned alongside the children but later she organized language camps, evening classes, and summer immersion experiences for adults including herself. Over the years she has worked in many roles teaching the language and supporting language teachers. At the time of the study, she was teaching a two-year training program for Secwepemctsin teachers through SFU. Kathryn self-assessed her comprehension skills between Advanced-Low and Advanced-Mid, and her speaking and writing skills at Intermediate-High. (Link to Master's thesis: <https://summit.sfu.ca/item/5641>; link to Doctoral dissertation: <http://hdl.handle.net/2429/42160>)

PENÁĆ David Underwood grew up hearing some SENĆOŦEN (Saanich language). As a baby, his mother would take him along to language classes taught by his grandfather who was a first language speaker. Although he had early exposure and some classes in elementary school, he did not become a speaker until adulthood. As an adult, he took some evening classes but

credits his big break-through with the language to participation in a group MAP in 2009. He then began teaching the language in the local high school, completed another individual MAP, and in 2012 started teaching in the immersion elementary school where he has worked ever since.

PENÁĆ and his coworkers have engaged in several professional development programs and initiatives around the language, and he also teaches the language to adults through the University of Victoria. PENÁĆ has a daughter who he is raising in the language. He self-assessed as Advanced-Mid according to the ACTFL proficiency guidelines. (Link to Master's thesis: <http://hdl.handle.net/1828/9852>)

Vanessa Campbell (Iyál) was raised by her grandmother who spoke multiple Indigenous languages. She would hear some Sḵw̓x̓wú7mesh sníchim (Squamish language) growing up, but English was the language of daily life. As a child, Vanessa attended residential school where she was obligated to use English. Vanessa first took evening classes for Sḵw̓x̓wú7mesh sníchim when she was in her 20s in the early 1970s. The classes were taught by Louis Miranda (Sx̓áaltx̓w Siyám̓), known in the community as Uncle Louis. A few years later, Uncle Louis was asked to teach the language in the local high school, and he asked Vanessa to be his teaching assistant. She worked with Uncle Louis for 17 years and went on to teach classes at all levels, including post-secondary, for another 15 years. She has been a mentor through MAP for several young learners and is the co-editor of the Sḵw̓x̓wú7mesh-English dictionary. Vanessa self-assessed at Advanced-High according to the ACTFL guidelines. Although she might be classified as a “silent speaker,” she does not consider herself to be a first language speaker due to her limited exposure and opportunity to interact in the language as a child.

Sḱwḱwú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship Participants

The Stewardship participants had all been involved with the language for several years. The majority had completed the Sḱwḱwú7mesh Language Proficiency Certificate, the Sḱwḱwú7mesh Language Proficiency Diploma, and participated in summer intensive programs for the language as well. The Where Are Your Keys (WAYK) learning organization, on contract with the Tseil-Waututh Nation (TWN), had provided pedagogical and logistical support to the programs over the years, and continued to do so for the Stewardship. The participants were supported to be in the Stewardship by their employers. Eight of the Stewardship participants were employees of the Sníchim Foundation, three were employees of the TWN, and four were employees of WAYK. The Stewardship operated full-time, primarily meeting virtually over Zoom due to the global pandemic that was ongoing at the time. A few members participated only part-time, as described below.

None of the Stewardship participants were raised in the language. The four WAYK team members (listed later in this section) are non-Indigenous. The rest of the participants are primarily of Sḱwḱwú7mesh and/or sə́lilwətał descent. The sə́lilwətał (Tseil-Waututh) and Sḱwḱwú7mesh have shared territory and shared history including intermarriage and bilingualism with Sḱwḱwú7mesh Sníchim and hə́nqəminə́m, the language of the sə́lilwətał people. For the Indigenous participants, their grandparents or great-grandparents had been the last generation of first language speakers in their families. They all heard common words and phrases in the language when they were growing up, and some attended language exposure classes in high school, but none began to learn in earnest until they got involved with the Certificate program as young adults.

Charlene George (S7atsáliya), Cheńáxwtn (Swú7wu Billy), and Xats'alanexw (Victor Harry) were students in the first iteration of the Certificate program offered in 2016. They went on to become teaching assistants in the Certificate program and participated in the first iteration of the Diploma program. Charlene and Cheńáxwtn have been the main teachers in both programs since 2018. These three, along with **Breann Baker, Brent Nahanee, Myia Antone (Welwáltenaat), Sarah Jeffrey, and Victoria Swahámiya Gabriel** were employed by the Sníchim Foundation. When I joined the group in late 2021, Brent, Sarah, and Victoria were no longer participating in the activities of the Stewardship, so I was unable to conduct interviews with them. Cheńáxwtn and Xats'alanexw were participating part-time due to their responsibilities in Sķwxwú7mesh winter ceremonies, and Charlene was also participating part-time due to her Master's degree program. In late spring 2022, **Danzel Baker (Gausdis)** joined the group, and I conducted an interview with him. He is a graduate of the immersion programs, had worked previously and had been hired again as a teaching assistant for the upcoming iteration of the Certificate program.

Gordon George, Jade George (Smnalh-tnaat), and Nicholas George were members and employees of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation. Gordon and Jade both completed the Certificate and Diploma programs and participated in summer intensives. Nicholas participated in all the programs since 2018, though he hadn't taken any of them for credit. The three of them taught the language part-time in the elementary and high school in their Nation and spent the rest of their time with the Stewardship. Along with the Sníchim Foundation employees, they were all planning to continue working in the immersion programs as teachers, teaching assistants, and other supportive roles.

Evan Gardner is the founder of WAYK. His relationship with Sk̄w̄x̄w̄ú7mesh Sníchim began around the year 2008 when he was first contacted by Khelsilem who was seeking support for language teaching and building a language learning community. Evan provided mentorship for Khelsilem from then until the latter launched the Certificate program in 2016. **Susanna Ciotti** joined WAYK in 2014. The organization started working with TWN in 2018 and ran the first summer intensive for Sk̄w̄x̄w̄ú7mesh Sníchim that year. **Jenna N. Hassan** joined the organization in 2019 and **Reighen Grineage** joined in early 2021. They have both worked closely with the Sk̄w̄x̄w̄ú7mesh programs since beginning their work with WAYK. During the Stewardship year, WAYK also held contracts and workshops with other communities. Jenna and Reighen participated nearly full-time with the Stewardship, while Evan and Susanna divided their time between various communities.

Most of the Stewardship participants were assessed at various times using Oral Proficiency Interviews (OPI) modified from ACTFL. They were given unofficial ratings according to the ACTFL proficiency guidelines. At the beginning of the Stewardship, all participants who were assessed placed at one of the following levels: Intermediate-Low (IL), Intermediate-Mid (IM), or Intermediate-High (IH). The two most proficient speakers, Charlene and Cheńáxwtn, had not been assessed, as no one with more advanced proficiency than them had trained in the assessment practices used in the Stewardship

Data Analysis

Sense-making, or data analysis, for this project did not occur in a linear fashion. Due to the nature of the data collection cycle and my approach to interpreting the data, analysis occurred in iterative stages from the outset of the study. All interviews were conducted virtually using Zoom's videoconferencing software. The interviews were automatically transcribed by the

software and these transcriptions were then reviewed and corrected either by me or a research assistant (as approved in the ethics processes). Instances where participants spoke in their Indigenous languages were noted, but translations were only included if I recognized the words and/or they could be easily found online. After the transcriptions were completed, each participant was provided a copy to review. Participants were encouraged to offer clarifications or request omissions. Ultimately, only a few minor changes were requested. Throughout my time with the Stewardship, I also kept digital field notes in Microsoft Word using the observation guide found in Appendix E. Both the transcriptions and field notes were uploaded into NVivo which I used to conduct thematic content analysis (Creswell, 2014), seeking common topics, themes, and patterns.

Following a constant comparison approach (Charmaz, 2006), as the interviews and field notes were coded, these codes were continually compared to earlier ones, allowing an inductive process of theme generation (Tie et al., 2019). Though not strictly following a reflexive thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2019), the process was a reflexive one in which “the researcher plays an active role in interpreting codes and themes, and identifying which are relevant” (Byrne, 2022, p. 1397). Byrne (2022) explains that, when taking this approach, meaningfulness of themes is not based solely on the recurrence of the theme, but also on its relevance to the research questions and the degree of importance ascribed to it by the participants: “the researcher acknowledges the importance of recurrence, but appreciates meaning and meaningfulness as the central criteria in the coding process” (p. 1395). Byrne (2022) also identifies two types of codes: semantic codes which take participants words verbatim and simply describe the content that was shared, and latent codes which extend beyond the descriptive level and seek to interpret the underlying meanings, assumptions, and ideologies that

inform what the participant has shared explicitly. My analysis included both semantic and latent coding without prioritizing one or the other.

Although initially separated by the two participant groups in NVivo, I found significant similarities between the two groups' responses. Participants' backgrounds, interests, learning strategies, and reflections on advanced language learning included many overlapping and intersecting features, leading me to realize that it was more meaningful to analyze and present them together as a single group. Therefore, throughout this dissertation, the findings are presented from the group as a whole. However, when certain strategies, approaches, and program features were unique to certain individuals or subsets within a group, I identified them as such.

As the analysis process unfolded, I began to cluster codes together in groups which I continuously updated and reorganized as new information came in from subsequent interviews. Through this clustering process, I was able to generate several potential themes and sub-themes. I continued to reflect on these and add to them throughout the data analysis process, eventually grouping the themes into three major categories: (1) learning strategies, (2) support factors, and (3) guiding principles. The strategies, which were interpreted primarily through semantic coding, included a wide range of ideas for advanced Indigenous language learning which were grouped into several sub-categories described in Chapter 4. The support factors and guiding principles, generated from a mix of semantic and latent coding, are detailed in Chapter 5. Participant quotes selected to illustrate themes in this dissertation were edited to remove repeated words and filler words. They were then shared with participants for their review, and in some cases, participants requested minor changes to adjust flow or clarify meaning.

Human Research Ethics

This study required and received approval by the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Board as it involved interviews, observations, and close collaboration with human participants (Appendix B). As described earlier in the methods section, the research also sought and received approval from the Snichim Foundation, the Tsleil-Waututh Nation, and the Squamish Nation to conduct research with their members.

Chapter 3: The Skwxwú7mesh Immersion Programs

This chapter provides a detailed description of the Skwxwú7mesh immersion programs. It is coauthored with members of the Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship: Myia Antone (Welwáltenaat), Chenáxwtn (Swú7wu Billy), Charlene George (S7atsáliya), Evan Gardner, and Reighen Grineage. This chapter content comes from the experiences of the authors who have been involved in the programs for many years, details shared in the interviews with Nicki, observations by Nicki during her time with the Stewardship, and reflexive conversations between the authors as they co-wrote this chapter. We are also planning to repurpose this chapter for an article manuscript to publish in a venue that will be accessible to the wider ILR community.

The Skwxwú7mesh immersion programs are unique in several ways. There are many who have expressed interest in understanding exactly what happens within them and some of the factors that have made them successful. Charlene George (S7atsáliya) included details about the programs in her master's thesis (George, 2024) and exploring the WAYK website can give insights into the teaching methods, curriculum development practices, and community building strategies used in the programs (<https://whereareyourkeys.org/>). However, this chapter is the first to provide a detailed description of the history, activities, routines, and teaching methods used in the Skwxwú7mesh immersion programs.

We begin by describing how the first Certificate program was created and the organizations that have helped to sustain and grow the programs over the years. We then move into a detailed description of the daily activities and teaching methods used in the Certificate program, followed by a reflection on the broader approach to Indigenous language programming that has contributed to the success of the program. We then describe six activities that have been effective in promoting more advanced Skwxwú7mesh language learning in the Diploma program

and the Stewardship. We conclude with a brief discussion of some of the challenges facing the programs, and reflections on future directions for this language community.

Creating and Sustaining an Adult Immersion Program

Throughout the past several decades, many young Skwxwú7mesh people have been exposed to Skwxwú7mesh sníchim in school. Some went on to participate in college programs or Mentor-Apprentice programs (MAP). One young Skwxwú7mesh stélmexw named Khelsilem participated in MAP twice, once with Vanessa Campbell (Iyál) and Dr. Peter Jacobs (T'naḡwtn), but he found that there were no young people who he could converse and practice with. He had been training with WAYK and offered language nights and workshops using WAYK techniques (details of this method are described later in this chapter). However, visiting other Indigenous communities that had been successful in creating speakers, he came to understand that the only way to build a community of speakers would be through offering full-time immersion programming for young adults who could become the teachers for future generations (Fishman, 1991; Green & Maracle, 2018; McIvor, 2015; O'Regan, 2016; Twitchell, 2018).

Determined to create an adult immersion program, Khelsilem first created a non-profit organization that could fundraise and support the effort called Kwi Awt Stelmexw which was later rebranded as the Sníchim Foundation (SFS). SFS ran community language planning workshops, developed language learning resources, and hosted fundraising events with the goal to support a community-based immersion program. In early 2016, SFS connected with Simon Fraser University (SFU) to discuss the possibility of running the program through SFU's First Nations Language Proficiency Certificate program. An agreement was quickly reached, and SFS was able to bring together a cohort of 16 students to participate in the first ever full-time adult immersion program for Skwxwú7mesh sníchim offered at SFU's downtown Vancouver campus.

Since 2016, five cohorts have graduated from the SFU Certificate program, and a second-year Diploma program was created and has graduated two cohorts. The Certificate program involves 900-1000 hours of immersive language learning, and the Diploma program includes an additional 1000 hours. In 2018, the programs were able to move off campus and into community, running for a time out of the Squamish Nation's community centre and later moving to a house offered by the Tsleil-Waututh Nation. Teachers in these programs have included Khelsilem, Dr. Peter Jacobs (T'naxwtn), Vanessa Campbell (Iyál), Cheñáxwtn (Swú7wu Billy), Charlene George (S7atsáliya), Victoria Fraser (Metúliya), and Norman Guerrero Jr. (Setálten). Cheñáxwtn and Charlene worked as teaching assistants for the second Certificate cohort and have been consistently involved as the main teachers since then. Several other graduates, including most of the Stewardship participants, have worked as teaching assistants for the programs or in other support roles with SFS. Salia Joseph (St'axí7alut) is a program graduate who has worked as the Executive Director of SFS since 2017.

In addition to the Certificate and Diploma programs, teachers and teaching assistants have participated in several summer intensive programs focussing on curriculum development and, in 2021, they were able to run the Stewardship to further advance their own proficiency. Some participants have gone on to complete master's degrees in linguistics, to work as language teachers in other programs, or to work with the language in other capacities.

Institutional Partners

Full-time immersion programming is a serious commitment for both students and teachers. It cannot be emphasized enough how hard all of the participants in these programs have had to work to learn their language and share it with one another. The method used in the program requires all participants to collaborate as co-teachers during the program, and graduates

of each cohort have gone on to work as teachers or teaching assistants in subsequent years. It is because of the participants' willingness to engage, and to continue working together despite barriers and hardships along the way, that the programs have remained strong. In addition, there are several institutions that have supported the programs and helped to sustain them over time.

The Sníchim Foundation (SFS) was created to support Skwxwú7mesh immersion programming. The organization is the main coordinator of the programs and ensures their independence and flexibility. Raising money through grants and donations, SFS ensures that the programs can continue regardless of other institutional supports available at any given time. This has included finding and securing classroom space for the programs, and providing top-up funding for teachers, teaching assistants, and students to ensure they are all supported to participate in the programs full time. Importantly, while SFU pays for each teacher and teaching assistant to run their assigned classes, SFS pays the staff to participate in the additional classes that make up the program to ensure that everyone is present full time.

Simon Fraser University (SFU) has provided the framework for the immersion programs to run as accredited university programs. Full-time accreditation enables participants to secure student bursaries and living allowances from their Nations or the federal government. Students graduate their first year with a Certificate in Indigenous Language Proficiency and their second year with a Diploma in Indigenous Language Proficiency. With these accreditations, students can go on to participate in the Indigenous Languages and Linguistics Graduate Program at SFU or apply the credits towards bachelors' programs in other fields with a minor in Indigenous language. SFU provides administrative support throughout the year, and pays two teachers for two courses per term, and two teaching assistants for one course per term.

Tsleil-Waututh Nation (TWN) neighbours the Squamish Nation and the two have a long history of intermarriage and bilingualism with Sḵw̱x̱wú7mesh sníchim and hən̓q̓əmin̓əm, the language of the sə́lilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) people. Many young sə́lilwətał have participated in the immersion programs, and in 2018 TWN decided to formally support Sḵw̱x̱wú7mesh sníchim revitalization efforts. Some TWN staff members have been allowed to work in the Sḵw̱x̱wú7mesh programs as part of their jobs, and TWN contracted WAYK to support the programs for several years. They also provided a house, known as The Yellow House, on TWN land for the programs to be able to operate in community from 2019-2024.

The Squamish Nation has provided education funding to their members to participate in the Sḵw̱x̱wú7mesh immersion programs, covering their tuition and a basic living stipend to support their full-time participation. The Nation also provided space in their main community center for the program's classes for the fall 2018 term, as well as for recruitment and other events hosted by the programs over the years.

Where Are Your Keys (WAYK) first became involved with Sḵw̱x̱wú7mesh Sníchim through Khelsilem who had reached out to the organization for support in the late 2000s. WAYK had developed techniques for language acquisition that were proving to be highly effective in contexts with few first language speakers and limited resources. The WAYK approach involves community-building strategies that help create a collaborative learning environment, and communicative, game-like lessons that quickly move from simple to more complex language. The lessons are supported by various techniques, including the use of physical objects and hand signs⁵. The next section describes how the Sḵw̱x̱wú7mesh immersion programs use WAYK.

⁵ The hand signs are either taken directly from American Sign Language or Signed Exact English (Rendel et al., 2018), modified from one of these languages, or created by the Indigenous community as they engage with WAYK. The use of hand signs facilitates comprehension and allows participants to communicate their needs without breaking out of oral immersion.

A full description of the method is found in Gardner and Ciotti (2018) and additional examples from the Skwxwú7mesh programs are found in George (2024). Khelsilem was trained in the method by its creator, Evan Gardner, and invited Evan and his partner Susanna to Skwxwú7mesh territory for training, community workshops, and other events over the years. Both Khelsilem and WAYK were later hired by TWN to help with their language programming.

Khelsilem was the main teacher for the first two Certificate cohorts, and he taught Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim using WAYK techniques. In early 2018, he left the role then taken up by two teaching assistants, Charlene George (S7atsáliya) and Cheńáxwtn (Swú7wu Billy), who continued as the main teachers in the programs. In the fall of that year, WAYK staff joined the team for the third cohort of the Certificate program, providing pedagogical and administrative support. Contracted by TWN, staff from WAYK have been able to participate with the Skwxwú7mesh immersion programs for Certificate cohorts 3, 4, and 5; the second cohort of the Diploma program; and the Stewardship year. They have also helped run summer intensive programs focused on curriculum development and planning between cohorts.

The WAYK staff help ensure that participants rotate through various roles, and that everyone gets opportunities to train in the method, receive and run language lessons, and participate in curriculum development. They also actively participate as learners and teachers in the programs they work with. Over the years, WAYK has also supported other Indigenous communities in their language revitalization efforts and has facilitated connection and collaboration between those communities and the Skwxwú7mesh programs.

Supporting Rapid Language Acquisition: Methods that Work

The Skwxwú7mesh immersion programs typically run for eight months of the year. The first cohorts ran from September-April, while later cohorts ran from May-December to

accommodate cultural responsibilities that many participants hold during Skwxwú7mesh winter ceremonies. During the first-year Certificate program, most students go from having little or no understanding of the language to between Novice-High and Intermediate-Low according to the ACTFL scale (ACTFL, 2012). In the second-year Diploma program, most students reach between Intermediate-Low to Intermediate-High proficiency levels. How is this accomplished? In this section, we attempt to answer this question. The immersion programs are complex, constantly evolving to meet the needs of diverse participants, and it would be impossible to fully describe all program activities. However, we will describe a typical day in the first-year Certificate program, the main activities, and how language lessons run. This is followed by a discussion of four key overarching elements that keep the programs strong.

A Typical Day in the Skwxwú7mesh Certificate Program

The Certificate program participants meet four days per week in the program space⁶. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the program moved online and has operated through a hybrid model ever since. The major milestones and main activities for the program are determined by the staff ahead of time and mapped out using a project-management software program called Miro. Then, every Friday throughout the program, the schedule for the following week's activities is planned and shown physically on a large schedule wall in the main room of the program space. Each participant has a set of sticky notes of a particular colour that is designated to them. These are laid out on the schedule wall showing where they will be and what they will

⁶ The programs operated out of a classroom at SFU's downtown campus until spring 2018, and then at the Squamish Nation's Chief Joe Mathias Centre until February 2019 when TWN offered a house on their land for use by the programs. The small residential house, which came to be known as the 'Yellow House', included a large communal area with chairs and small tables set up for the main program activities; two smaller rooms used for curriculum planning and breakout activities; a kitchen; two bathrooms; and a large outdoor space used for program activities (weather permitting). The Yellow House was ideal for an immersion program as it was a dedicated space where daily activities could be conducted, including cooking and cleaning together, and it had ample space for breaking into smaller groups. The programs operated at the Yellow House until 2024, and post-study moved to a space in Capilano Mall in North Vancouver.

be doing at any given time throughout the week. There are some whole group activities and several smaller group activities that participants rotate throughout the day or week. Participants also rotate through daily jobs such as the *Leader* who gets activities started, the *Scribe* who takes notes, or the *Newbie Catcher* who helps fill in anyone new to an activity.

Figure 1

Example of the Skwxwú7mesh Certificate Calendar Wall



For the first few weeks of the Certificate program, English is used to describe expectations, activities, and language learning techniques. The first several language lessons also do not use Skwxwú7mesh sníchim. Instead, WAYK has received permission to teach using another Indigenous language, Unangam Tunuu (Aleut). The reason for this is to allow students to focus solely on learning the techniques that will be used in the program without an emotional attachment to the language or pronunciation. After the participants have a base understanding of the program structure and learning techniques, the switch is made to Skwxwú7mesh sníchim.

Around six weeks in, the program is run entirely in immersion.⁷ A typical day in the Certificate program would include the following activities:

Morning meeting: To start the day, the teachers and teaching assistants gather for a check-in meeting. Also known as the daily stand-up meeting, WAYK adopted this practice from what are known as “agile” team strategies used in the software development industry (McHugh et al., 2012). Each participant shares how they are feeling, any important news, and their goals for the day. Everyone collaborates to determine a few group goals for the day.

Morning question: When the students arrive, the day starts with a brief check-in with each student and a question of the day. The questions are planned by the teaching staff ahead of time and align with the curriculum. One participant starts by asking the question in Słwǫwú7mesh to a peer who responds and then asks another peer. This continues until everyone has had a chance to ask and answer the question. As the students become more proficient in the language, the questions get more complex and can include follow-up questions and some dialogue with each respondent.

Technique of the day: One assigned participant chooses a WAYK technique to describe to the group. This may be a technique that is new for most of the group, or a review of a well-known technique. Many WAYK techniques include an associated hand sign in ASL, or another sign determined by the group. The assigned participant demonstrates the hand sign and explains the technique and how it is used. Others may ask questions or add clarifications about the technique. The assigned participant then leads the group in a round of “throwing techniques”. During this time, everyone in the group shows various hand signs, and participants take turns

⁷ English continues to be used for Technique of the Day, Plus/Deltas, and Ted Talks. The morning meeting and stand-down are typically conducted in a mix of both languages. These activities are further described later in this chapter.

calling out the names of the associated techniques. Afterwards, participants ask for, and receive, clarification on any technique signs they saw that they didn't recognize.

Immersion sprints: Participants divide into pairs or small groups for immersion conversations. The length of these conversations depends on the time available before starting other activities but is typically 15-20 minutes. At the beginning of the program, new students are paired with teachers or other more experienced speakers who guide the conversation and may even lead the newer students through basic language lessons. As students become more proficient, this becomes a time for free conversation in the language on any topics of interest.

Split cells: The main morning and afternoon activities consist of language lessons and lesson planning. Participants are divided into smaller groups, what WAYK calls “splitting the cell”,⁸ and work together for 1-2 hours. Participants rotate through different activities throughout the day and the week. The following list explains common split cell activities (only a few of these happen each day):⁹

- **Lesson prep cell:** a small group prepares to teach an upcoming lesson, refreshing their memory of how the lesson is run and assigning teaching roles.
- **Lesson teaching cell:** a small group delivers a previously prepared lesson to a group of students who have not yet been through the lesson.
- **Review cell:** a small group reviews previously taught lessons for students who were absent or would like additional practice.
- **Hunting cell:** a small group works to elicit specific language from more proficient speakers during an immersion session.

⁸ “Splitting the cell” is a reference from biology: the cell is one unit, but it can be split into even smaller units.

⁹ This list is adapted from <https://snichimfoundation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/A-Day-In-The-Life-Yellow-House.pdf>

- **Lesson scribing cell:** a small group takes the language gleaned from a previous hunting session and refines it into a lesson, and/or edits existing lessons based on input from teaching sessions.
- **Immersion walk:** a small group go for a walk together and explore the language on the land while staying in immersion.
- **Coffee/tea talk:** a small group makes a pot of coffee or a cup of tea by directing one another in specific tasks.
- **Cooking cell:** a small group prepares a meal for the larger group in immersion. See George (2024) for a rich description of cooking activities in the program.

Split cell activities typically occur twice per day: after the morning routine and after ‘list time’ (described below). Both staff and students rotate through these activities, and take on different roles within each, throughout the course of the program.

List time: After lunch, the group gathers to demonstrate and ask questions about language structures they are working on, using a WAYK technique called *Prove It*¹⁰. One participant shares a list of words or phrases that relate to one another, explains the context in which they will use the words, and then “proves it” by demonstrating the use of the words in context and in a full sentence. Peers provide feedback and sometimes take turns “proving” the same words in different contexts. List time is typically followed by another round of ‘split cell’ activities, before ending the day with DISH, plus/deltas, and the stand-down meeting (each described below).

¹⁰ Throughout this paper, WAYK techniques are displayed in italics. George (2024) provides a list of common WAYK techniques used in the Skwú7mesh immersion programs. A full list WAYK techniques can be found at <https://whereareyourkeys.org/technique-glossary/>

Daily Immersion Skwxwú7mesh Hunts (DISH): At the end of the day, everyone participates in DISH. During this time, participants complete household chores together in immersion. Often students are paired with more proficient speakers for these activities so that they can practice aspects of the language that they are working on, as well as the language related to the task. A job wheel is used to rotate participants through the various tasks throughout the week which include cleaning the kitchen, taking out garbage, washing the floors, etc. The language used during these activities is language that students can also use at home outside of class time.

Plus/deltas:¹¹ The group comes back together at the end of the day for a round of plus/deltas conducted primarily in English. This is a time to reflect on the day, sharing what went well and what they would have changed. Participants share their feedback about the day's lessons and other activities. This feedback is used to continuously improve the program.

Stand-down meeting: At the end of the day, the staff meet to review their goals from the morning meeting and note to what extent they were able to complete them. Any important information for the next day is shared with the group.

Breaks: Throughout the day, there are several breaks. Typically, there is a 10-15 minute break between each main activity and a one-hour lunch break. At different times during the day, the WAYK technique *Full Check* may be implemented to check on everyone's energy levels. If people are feeling too "full", a break will be taken to give everyone time to decompress. The technique *Mind Meadow* is also used where instead of taking a physical break, the group will unwind with a fun or funny question that inspires the group to think about something entirely

¹¹ WAYK learned of this practice while attending workshops with a community leadership training organization called Healthy Native Communities Fellowship (Rae et al., 2016)

unrelated to the language work. This brief exercise provides reprieve from more mentally draining activities, giving the participants a break and, often, a sense of refreshment.

Retrospectives: Another practice adopted from agile software team strategies (McHugh et al., 2012) is a half day meeting to reflect on the program approximately every four months. Primarily conducted in English, the team does a round of plus/deltas to discuss what is going well and what they would like to change. They then create a list of action items with assigned participants for each task. The programs are committed to continual improvement, and to making changes to suit the needs of a particular group. Everyone is involved in determining what needs to change, and everyone takes responsibility for making the changes happen.

Assessment: At the beginning, middle, and end of the program, each student participates in an Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) adapted from ACTFL. Various staff have participated in assessment training and take turns acting as the lead assessor. An additional teacher or teaching assistant sits in on each interview and takes notes. After the interview, the assessor and note-taker confer to determine the interviewee's proficiency level and identify three grammar points for the student to work on. These go into the "Three Things Document", a shared virtual document, which lists everybody's areas of needed focus. This document is regularly referenced to help determine which lessons to teach, topics for immersion sprints, and other activities.

Other activities: Other activities are peppered throughout the program and may happen instead of typical split cell activities. These include listening activities using S_kw_xwú7mesh stories or other recordings, language games, and field trips for cultural activities.

As may be evident from the above descriptions, the S_kw_xwú7mesh immersion programs rely on high levels of organization. In addition to using Miro for both short- and long-term scheduling, the participants use Google Drive to save and collaborate on many documents. These

include job descriptions, meeting templates, activity descriptions, curriculum documents, lesson tracking sheets, assessment results, goal tracking, and more. These documents are regularly referenced and updated throughout the program. Each cohort benefits from the planning and organization of previous cohorts, and all collaborate in a continuous effort to streamline and improve program resources for future teachers and learners.

A Typical Lesson in the Skwxwú7mesh Immersion Programs

Lessons in the Skwxwú7mesh immersion programs follow the WAYK method. Gardner and Ciotti (2018) provide a detailed explanation of the method, including images of set ups for example lessons. Readers interested in understanding WAYK are encouraged to read that article which we drew upon to draft the description provided here.

A typical WAYK lesson begins with a “set up” using objects, pictures, gestures, or stories. To make the input as comprehensible as possible (Krashen, 1981), WAYK encourages the use of at least three examples in each set up. For example, if the lesson is about colours, the set up might include three pens, three cups, and three boxes with one of each of the same three colours. The teacher lays these out in neat rows on a small table in the middle of the room. They sit at the table with the teaching assistant and two students. The other students gather around this inner circle. The teacher reviews some words that will be used in the lesson and then demonstrates and leads the inner circle through an immersion conversation using these objects. They will typically use the WAYK techniques *ASL*, *Make Me Say Yes*, *Make Me Say No*, *Full Sentences*, and *Send it Around* (see <https://whereareyourkeys.org/technique-glossary/>).

For example, the teacher might start by asking an open-ended question such as “what is this?” while pointing to a red pen. The assistant will sign and say, “that is a pen.” The teacher may then ask a *Make Me Say Yes* question, such as “is this a red pen?” and the assistant will sign

and say “yes, that is a red pen.” They may demonstrate these questions and answers several times and then move on to a *Make Me Say No* question. This series of questions is also found in the Teaching Proficiency Through Reading and Storytelling method in which it is known as “circling” (Ray & Seely, 1998). In the WAYK method, after each question is demonstrated, the teacher makes the sign for *Send it Around*, and participants take turns asking and answering the question in a circle until it comes back to the teacher.

The students in the outer circle sign and/or say the words of each phrase along with the inner circle. Those who have done the lesson before act as *Angels*, signing or saying the words to help those who are still learning. Participants take turns joining the inner circle, and everyone keeps track of how many times they have participated in each lesson. A wall in the program space displays the *Fluency Freeway*, a large chart that shows all the lessons in the curriculum. Throughout the year, participants mark off how many times they take part in each lesson, either as a student or as a teacher.

The complexity of the lessons increases as the students become more proficient. The set up described above could be used to explore such questions as “where is the red pen?”, “who took the red pen?”, “why did you take the red pen?”, etc. Set ups allow for teachers to demonstrate how the language works without using translation or explicit explanation (Gardner & Ciotti, 2018). In fact, while the curriculum increases in grammatical complexity over time, it is driven by communicative needs, and grammar is rarely spoken about explicitly in the programs. Students are trained to use set ups and ask questions to elicit language while remaining in immersion, a technique that WAYK calls *Language Hunting*. Using this technique, participants can seek out aspects of the language they want to learn and may come to understand grammatical patterns implicitly.

In the Certificate program, lessons usually happen twice per day. Students also participate in other language learning activities such as immersion walks, coffee talks, and immersion chores (DISH). In the Diploma program and beyond, additional activities are incorporated to further increase participants' proficiency. These are discussed later in this article. First, we share some reflections on what has made the Skwxwú7mesh immersion programs so successful. Beyond the specific activities, there is a wider approach to language learning that has created a strong foundation to hold all the activities in place. In our reflection, we have identified four pillars of this approach: creating speakers, creating teachers, creating curriculum, and creating community.

Creating Speakers

The main goal of the Skwxwú7mesh programs is to create conversational speakers as fast as possible, and full immersion is considered one of the most promising practices to realize this goal (Green, 2017; Tedick et al., 2011; Twitchell, 2018). While English is used to teach the techniques during the first few weeks, beyond a certain date all activities are conducted in full immersion. A phrase used in the programs is “translation is not an option - it’s a last resort!” All lessons are taught in immersion using set ups and repetition to convey meaning. If a student asks what something means, their peers use other set ups, gestures, objects, or whatever they can to explain the meaning without translation. If translation does need to be used, the teachers follow up with the student afterwards to collaborate on ideas for creating better set ups so that translation won’t be needed again in the future.

An expectation of the immersion programs is that all students will be active participants. While no one is forced to speak, students are encouraged and supported to start participating from day one. An important philosophy that guides the program, and is emphasized throughout,

is that it is ok to make mistakes. Participants are encouraged to use the technique *Mumble*, saying words and phrases without worrying about perfection. Another phrase used often in the programs is “close enough is good enough for now”. Charlene George (S7atsáliya) explained, “we don’t want our learners to ever feel as though they’re not good enough. Perfection is not necessary when we are so few. We just would like more people to talk to!” (personal communication, May 24, 2024).

WAYK techniques help support a full immersion environment. The use of sign language allows for teachers to manage the classroom and students to express their needs through signs, rather than speaking in English. The lessons are also tailored to the proficiency level of the participants. Often, there are multiple lessons happening at the same time wherein students at different learning stages, with varying levels of experience with certain aspects of the language, can participate accordingly. While a 2:1 teacher to student ratio would be ideal to maximize immersion possibilities, most often the programs have a 1:3 ratio with one teacher for every three students. Some WAYK immersion techniques are specifically aimed at supporting new learners. For example, *Newbies Last* in which the person with the least experience takes their turn last so that they hear the language multiple times before being asked to produce it, or *Angel* where a more experienced learner signs or says the words to guide a newer learner. The lessons are also fun, conducted in a relaxed manner with the aim to help participants feel comfortable and reduce anxiety about mistakes.

Other aspects of the programs that support immersion are routine and repetition. The consistent daily routine ensures that participants can understand what is happening at any given time of day, even if they don’t understand all the words that are being used. Repetition is used within the lessons, but also in other aspects of the program. For example, the WAYK technique

Same Conversation encourages discussing the same topics over and over. Participants are asked to be mindful of their peers' interests, and to ask them similar questions about those interests (for example, during immersion sprints). By repeating similar phrases, whether in lessons or in free conversations, and slowly adding in complexity over time, all participants are supported to remain in immersion as they improve their language skills. These techniques, used within an environment that focuses on oral language, contribute to the primary goal of creating speakers.

Creating Teachers

Another core philosophy in the immersion programs is the importance of having as many teachers as possible. The WAYK method supports students to become teachers right away as each lesson is set up so that once a learner completes a task, they immediately lead others through the task. WAYK calls this *The Churn*, moving all participants through various roles within the lessons and the program. This helps to avoid creating what WAYK calls *Baby Birds* who expect to be fed language rather than seeking out what they need and helping others to meet their needs. Everyone is expected to actively participate and to learn how to support one another.

Many participants attribute their rapid language acquisition to this model. Danzel Baker (Gausdis) said that “letting students also be the teachers is something that should be brought into the larger teaching world... I learned a lot and had a much easier time than I did elsewhere because of it” and Jade George commented that “teaching was what I think helped me the most”. Breeann Baker also reflected on the benefits of teaching while learning:

Once you teach someone else what you've learned, you're actually reflecting on what you've learned yourself... Encouraging others to become teachers right away is not only beneficial for language revitalization in general, but there's also a huge personal growth aspect.

As many former students as possible are hired on as teaching assistants for new cohorts to ensure a high teacher to student ratio. This allows multiple lessons and activities to run simultaneously. Students can catch each other up on missed lessons, which can free up the teaching assistants to teach new lessons, which can free up the teachers to work on curriculum development for future lessons. Everyone supports one another to help build collective proficiency faster. While students are not required to work as teachers after the program is finished, they are trained so that they could pass on language to anyone at any time in the future. In this way, the responsibility of language revitalization and maintenance is also shared amongst a supportive and capable language community (Gardner & Ciotti, 2018).

Creating Curriculum

Since 2018, those involved in the Skwxwú7mesh immersion programs have been actively working on curriculum development. As with teaching, all participants are expected to contribute to curriculum development in ways suited to their knowledge and abilities. The programs make use of a WAYK-designed curriculum building tool called the *Fluency Freeway* which maps out major learning milestones and the lessons needed to reach each milestone. The *Fluency Freeway* is posted on a wall in the program space and laid out in a shared Microsoft Excel spreadsheet online. Both documents have a space for each participant to mark each time they participate in each lesson. Both documents allow users to see which lessons are available, what state of development those lessons are in, and any gaps that need to be filled with new lessons.

The *Fluency Freeway* can be edited any time, as program participants identify areas that could be enhanced by adding new lessons, and lessons can be edited at any time based on any new feedback that comes each time the lesson is run. Students with no experience in the language might provide such feedback right from the beginning of their program, but their

involvement in curriculum development increases over time as they become more proficient in the language. Curriculum development is collaborative and ongoing throughout each of the programs. There is a more intentional focus on curriculum during specific programs such as the language intensives which run between cohorts, as well as during the Stewardship year.

Figure 2

The Skwxwú7mesh Fluency Freeway as of June 2024.



Charlene's master's thesis (George, 2024) shows images of some of the lesson documents used in the program. Each lesson is broken down into several parts that each include:

- **Lists:** groups of words that are needed for the lesson. The teacher runs through lists before each part of the lesson to help students review and prepare.
- **Teaching notes:** any instructions for the teacher to help them run the lesson.
- **Stage directions:** notes about any items needed, how these should be arranged, where people should be seated, etc.
- **Techniques:** a list of WAYK or other techniques that will be used in the lesson

- **Scripts:** the exact phrases that will be modeled and passed around during the lesson.

These are broken down into small interactions for each part of the lesson which build on each previous part.

Lesson creation is a multistage process involving specific steps. Whenever possible, the same group of 3-4 participants takes the lesson from start to finish in the development process. Progress is tracked on a shared spreadsheet which includes the names of the people involved at each stage. This way, future program participants know who to ask if there are inconsistencies or other questions about the lesson. Working and tracking in this way was also adapted from agile software team strategies (McHugh et al., 2012). The lesson development stages are:

1. **Hunt:** a person or group works to elicit language from a speaker to determine a potential script for the lesson.
2. **Scribe:** a first draft of the lesson is written.
3. **Group test:** the lesson is tested with a group of learners.
4. **First edit:** The lesson is edited based on feedback from all those participating in the lesson (in some cases steps 3 and 4 are repeated multiple times before moving on).
5. **Speaker test:** The lesson is run with a more proficient speaker.
6. **Second edit:** The lesson is edited based on feedback from the speaker.
7. **Spell check:** A proficient speaker checks the written lesson, correcting spelling or grammar as needed.
8. **Final edit:** The lesson team does a final run-through and edit.
9. **Assign to the Fluency Freeway:** A spot for the lesson is found on the *Fluency Freeway*, ensuring its appropriate alignment in the scope and sequence of the entire curriculum.

All participants will work on each of these stages at different times during their program. Their work is always in collaboration with other learners and teachers, and often conversations about the language arise as they work together. Many participants have commented that working on curriculum provides unique language learning opportunities. Myia Antone (Welwáltenaat) shared:

Creating lessons and creating a curriculum in Skwxwú7mesh helps my language so much... all of a sudden, we're seeing all these holes in our language. It's so easy to overlook them but by creating all of the activities that we're doing and really thinking through them, it's been really helpful for my language learning also.

Breeann Baker shared that editing language lessons allowed her “to look at language in a different way, dissecting language and finding out root words, and how those connect to other words”. She commented “for me that brought my fluency level up in a different area”.

Participants have also shared that working together on the curriculum helps to build a shared sense of responsibility. They know that the lessons they create or improve are beneficial for their peers now, but they are also setting up a foundation for future cohorts and any other learners in the years to come.

Creating Community

The level of collaboration that happens in all aspects of the program creates a strong sense of community among participants. This is intentional, as community building is essential to successful language revitalization; the future of the language cannot rest on just one person's shoulders (Manatowa-Bailey, 2024). Those involved in the Skwxwú7mesh programs recognize that not only do they need to create a positive environment to support current learners, but that the work of language revitalization needs to be distributed among all participants so that there

are many who can carry it on into the future. That is why from the beginning all participants are expected to learn to teach each other and to contribute actively to improving the program. From daily jobs to running lessons to participating in group reflection sessions, everyone rotates through, and participates in, all aspects of the program. This helps to create a feeling of shared ownership, accountability, and being in it together. Most are happy to dedicate themselves in this way to the language, as they recognize what is at stake. Danzel Baker (Gausdis) explains:

It takes a core group of people, basically full-time as well as off the clock in their regular life, working together to raise their fluency up... It's a group thing. It's something that takes a lot of time. That's the bread and butter of it, really. You need people who are willing to dedicate large amounts of their time and life to this.

While the expectation for participation is high, so too is the comradery amongst everyone involved. To ensure such high levels of engagement, there is a deliberate focus on creating a safe and welcoming learning environment (Senior, 2001). The play-based methodology and forgiving attitude of program leaders further contributes to a positive learning and working experience. Myia Antone (Welwátenaat) reflected on the importance of the sense of safety this creates: "My language programs have been really some of the only educational spaces where I one hundred percent believe that my instructors care about me, and I think that really supports a safe learning environment and encourages a lot more learning". Myia is one of many who started as a student and has been working with the programs ever since. There is a strong bond between the core group involved. They share common goals and levels of dedication, as well as a shared sense of humour and lots of laughter.

Pushing Past the Intermediate Plateau

By spring 2021, over 50 students had graduated from the Certificate programs, and many had gone on to participate in the Diploma program. The first iteration of the Diploma program was taught by Dr. Peter Jacobs (T'naxwtn) and Vanessa Campbell (Iyál). The second was taught by previous program graduates and was offered online through videoconferencing, as it was during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-2021. This second iteration was taught by Charlene George (S7atsáliya) and Chenáxwtn (Swú7wu Billy), along with several teaching assistants, using WAYK and many of the activities described above for the Certificate program. The techniques and activities were adapted for both online delivery and the increased proficiency level of the students. Most graduates of the Diploma finished their program at levels ranging from Intermediate-Low to Intermediate-High according to the ACTFL proficiency guidelines.

From July 2021 – April 2022, rather than running a Certificate or Diploma cohort, the core group of teachers and teaching assistants participated in the Sḵwxwú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship. The primary goal of the Stewardship year was to work together to increase everyone's proficiency, aiming for advanced proficiency levels. The group did not have a traditional teacher or access to first language speakers. Instead, they collaborated to develop mutually beneficial language learning activities. They divided their time between these activities, planning for future Certificate cohorts, and training in assessment methods. In reflecting on what worked well during the Stewardship year, participants spoke of their mutual support, grounded in respect and reciprocity, and their commitment to carrying on the strong community values of previous programs. These reflections are expanded upon in Chapters 4 and 5.

To support their proficiency development, the Stewardship included many of the same activities used in the other programs, adapting and expanding on successful practices from the

Certificate and Diploma programs. Here, we share five activities that participants found to be particularly helpful in supporting advanced Skwxwú7mesh language learning: listening activities; Skwxwú7mesh Ted Talks; peer-supported skill testing; assessment as learning; and hobby talks and passion projects. The group also tried out new strategy ideas brought in through the collaborative research project with Nicki which are discussed in her published article (see Chapter 4).

Listening Activities

In a context with no first language speakers, Skwxwú7mesh learners rely on recordings of past speakers as models for pronunciation and prosody. As the immersion programs have evolved over the years, listening to recordings of legends and other stories has been incorporated into the curriculum. Listening activities were included at all programming levels, increasing in length and complexity as the participants' proficiency increased. Listening to recordings of Skwxwú7mesh Elders increased in the Stewardship year, and many Stewardship participants would choose to listen to recordings during personal time to keep themselves immersed in the language as much as possible. They spoke of continuously finding new words, phrases, ways of speaking, and cultural teachings through listening to recordings.

A specific listening activity that the Stewardship participants found helpful was collaborative transcription and text analysis. Transcription can be an effective activity to support language learning (Brant, 2024; Whitman, 2018), and the potential benefits are expanded by working on transcriptions collaboratively with other learners (Cowie, 2018; Hermes & Engman, 2017). The Stewardship would listen to a legend together, assigning each participant a certain part of the legend to transcribe. They would then review the transcribed sentences and work in pairs to break down the text into individual words and phrases. Finally, they would all work

together in immersion to explain or elicit explanations of the words and phrases using the *Prove It* technique.

Skw̓xwú7mesh Ted Talks

While the certificate program focussed on immersion learning, the Diploma and Stewardship years allowed some English to explain complex grammar topics. These explanations would be given by a teacher in the form of a short lecture and were called “Ted Talks”. These talks were informed by previous classes and mentorship sessions with teachers such as Vanessa Campbell (Iyál) and Dr. Peter Jacobs (T’naḡwtn), and the Grammatical Sketch of Skw̓xwú7mesh provided in Squamish Nation Dictionary Project (2011). The Ted Talks have been recorded so that learners can watch or rewatch at any time. The Stewardship group would rewatch the recordings on their own or together as a group and discuss them after. They would also request and receive Ted Talks on topics of interest. They spoke about how these lessons helped them to understand aspects of the language in a way that they would not have understood at earlier proficiency levels.

Research shows that some explicit instruction in the dominant language within an immersion environment can be beneficial to learners (Cook, 2016; Ellis, 2008; Larsen-Freeman & Tedick, 2016), and adults in particular benefit from explicit forms of instruction (DeKeyser, 2012, 2018). Ted Talks helped some Stewardship participants push past roadblocks they were facing in their learning. Gordon George shared “with Ted Talks, breaking up the words and stuff like that, that’s really been helping me lately as we try to get a little bit more fluent and break those barriers of where we’re plateauing.” Others spoke about learning new things during Ted Talks and then working on those things intentionally.

Peer-Supported Skill Testing

While peer-teaching has been explored in other language learning contexts (e.g., Brandford-Watts, 2011; Vieira Vasconcelos, 2023), the peer-supported skill testing that happens during ‘list time’ is a unique practice that has been highly effective in the Skwxwú7mesh programs. During the Stewardship, the participants would meet most days after lunch for list time. During this time, a participant would share a list of related words or phrases that they were working on, explain the context in which they would use the words, and then give full sentence examples following the *Prove It* technique. Discussion would ensue about the words, and often participants would take turns proving the same words in different contexts. For the Stewardship group, the entire conversation including the set ups and the feedback would happen in Skwxwú7mesh sníchim.¹² Sometimes the group would pick a theme for list time, and other times they would have each other open their notebooks to a random page and choose a list from that page. This practice helped to keep each other accountable and ensured that a wide variety of structures and topics were being practiced.

The *Prove It* technique helps participants develop both metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness, both of which are considered essential to advanced language learning (Green, 2017). It helps learners develop an understanding of language structures and functions, as well as an ability to assess their own capacities and needs in language learning. As the learners’ proficiency increases and they can speak about the language *in* the language, the opportunities for further expanding linguistic and cognitive awareness increases as well. Nicholas George added that

¹² As in other aspects of their programming, the Skwxwú7mesh participants use simple grammar terms such as past/present, first person/second person, etc. to discuss the language. Occasionally more complex English terms are used that they have learned from mentors such as Vanessa Campbell (Iyál) and Dr. Peter Jacobs (T’naḵwtn) or from the Squamish Nation Dictionary Project (2011). More typically, a conversation in Skwxwú7mesh sníchim during list time would go something like this: “Is this how you would say that?” “Hm, I think you need to say it like this.” “Oh, even if I’m saying it with this word?” “Yes, if you’re saying it with that word, then say it like this.”

participants benefited from hearing what other people were working on: “Sometimes when I just listen to other people’s [lists] and then I try to think of my own examples... their examples might not be something I usually practice very often, so that’s really good”. In this way, list time and the *Prove It* technique have the potential to contribute exponentially to language learning. Learners are encouraged to actively reflect on their learning, expose each other to a wide range of topics and structures, and support one another to continuously expand the limits of their knowledge.

Assessment as Learning

One focus area during the Stewardship year was increasing competence in assessment practices. The Sḵw̱w̱ú7mesh programs use Oral Proficiency Interviews (OPI) to assess participants’ learning. These have been adapted from ACTFL to align with Sḵw̱w̱ú7mesh proficiency markers for grammar and prosody¹³. Teaching assistants in the programs have been increasingly involved in assessment to develop skills in this area. One of the Stewardship participants had been trained by ACTFL and led the Stewardship group in assessment exercises and practice sessions¹⁴. They reviewed the ACTFL proficiency guidelines, practiced assigning ratings to Sḵw̱w̱ú7mesh language samples, and ran practice OPI in both Sḵw̱w̱ú7mesh and English. The participants found that these sessions not only helped them to learn about assessment but also provided unexpected opportunities for language learning as it allowed them to reflect more deeply on language structures.

¹³ Since Sḵw̱w̱ú7mesh grammar is very different from English grammar, the main changes have been around the kinds of structures that can be expected at different proficiency levels. One example is that storytelling is expected earlier for Sḵw̱w̱ú7mesh sníchim since the past tense required for storytelling is considered easier to learn in Sḵw̱w̱ú7mesh than English, and because of the important role of storytelling in Sḵw̱w̱ú7mesh culture.

¹⁴ In March 2023, several of the main participants also received official OPI training from ACTFL as a step towards certification as OPI testers. Others participated in a 5-day ACTFL workshop at SFU in August 2024.

A more deliberate way in which the group used assessment to support language learning was by reviewing specific feedback to interviewees following their OPI. As described earlier, grammar points that each participant needed to work on were recorded in the “Three Things Document”. The Stewardship participants regularly reviewed these goals to determine activities and help keep each other accountable. Jade George (Smnalh-tnaat) reflected on how this practice helped raise awareness and focus on specific language goals:

I think the OPIs and just being very aware of where we are in our learning is really helpful. Because if you don't know what you need to fix, then you can't fix it. It's the same with canoe pulling and training. Every day we get on the beach, our coach tells us what we need to fix, and it helps us get better. I think of language learning the same way: we have to be aware, be humble, of where we're at so we can get better.

These unique assessment practices demonstrate how assessment can be used for more than evaluating what has already been learned. The Western and Northern Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education (2006) refers to three forms of assessment: assessment *of* learning, assessment *for* learning, and assessment *as* learning. The identification of language learning goals by the Skwxwú7mesh learners is an example of assessment *for* learning. Their experience of learning language while working on assessment practices is an example of assessment *as* learning.

Hobby Talks & Passion Projects

The Skwxwú7mesh learners have found that they learn faster when they are focussed on language that is relevant to their lives and that they find interesting on a personal level. One activity that they developed to tap into this was “hobby talks”. For this activity, participants would research the language they needed to be able to talk about a hobby or activity that they

enjoy doing outside of class time. This research would often include hunting (eliciting) language from more advanced speakers. Once they felt prepared, they would do a short presentation to the class about their hobby. This helped both the presenter and the other participants by expanding their vocabulary and continuously introducing new topics and ideas.

Expanding further, following the Stewardship year, the group began to incorporate larger “passion projects”. For these projects, each participant chooses a topic or activity that they are interested in, researches all the language that they can around that topic or activity, and develops a project to contribute to the group. Examples of passion project topics have included plant language, weaving language, Skwxwú7mesh legends, and creating Skwxwú7mesh subtitles for class videos and TV shows. Myia Antone (Welwátenaat) has created posters with vocabulary and instructions for harvesting prawns and other sea animals. These were shared ahead of a day trip that Myia organized for the group to go out on the water to trap and harvest together. They were able to remain in the language as they worked together to collect and prepare the animals.

Like hobby talks, passion projects benefit all participants. The researcher is given time to work on language that they are particularly interested in, and they also share with the group. In many cases, they create resources that benefit both their peers and future learners. The passion projects allow participants flexibility and autonomy to expand their knowledge in ways that are meaningful to them while continuing to contribute to the collective learning of the group.

The Future of Skwxwú7mesh Language Learning

Since the creation of the first Skwxwú7mesh immersion program in 2016, the number of conversational speakers of Skwxwú7mesh sníchim has increased by over 500%. Graduates of the Skwxwú7mesh immersion programs have gone on to work as language teachers in a variety of programs, to work with the Squamish Nation including on the Paháyikwup Language

Commission, and to open the Ta Tsíptspi7lh̄kn Language Nest. Some are now raising their children with Sk̄wx̄wú7mesh sníchim as their first language. The dedication and success of the immersion program participants has led to a noticeable increase in awareness of, and access to, Sk̄wx̄wú7mesh sníchim in the community. Indeed, this story of Sk̄wx̄wú7mesh sníchim revitalization is remarkable, and this chapter paints a picture of what has worked well to support this effort. Yet, it has taken the community almost 10 years to reach this point and, although over 70 students have graduated from the Certificate program to date, only a small group has progressed to advanced language proficiency levels. We conclude this chapter with a brief reflection on some of the challenges that the Sk̄wx̄wú7mesh immersion programs have faced, and the supports needed to ensure success moving forward.

In addition to the difficulty of running a language program in a context with no first language speakers and very few curricular resources, the Sk̄wx̄wú7mesh immersion programs have faced several challenges over the years. At times there have been tensions between individuals or between the different organizations involved in supporting the programs. These kinds of disputes are not uncommon in ILR endeavours, and there is increased scholarship dedicated to exploring interpersonal tensions in our field (e.g., Davis, 2016; Manatowa-Bailey, 2024; Meek, 2014). We have also identified three major challenge areas that have slowed the potential progress of the Sk̄wx̄wú7mesh immersion programs to date, and which are likely common challenge areas in other ILR initiatives: space, funding, and recruitment.

First, the programs have struggled to find a consistent space that is appropriate for their activities. The ideal kind of space would have multiple rooms, a kitchen, and an outdoor area to allow for a wide variety of activities in different group configurations throughout the day. The Yellow House that TWN provided for several years was great as it had all of these features and

was a comfortable setting for engaging in diverse activities. However, in 2024 TWN opted to repurpose the space. When not in the Yellow House, the program has operated out of less ideal spaces such as classrooms at SFU and in the Squamish Nation's community centre. At the time of writing, they were working in a single-room space in Capilano Mall. Throughout the years, significant time has detracted from programming trying to find, and then set up, new spaces.

The second major issue facing the programs has been funding. Financial support comes from several sources, and the programs are only able to operate because of the major administrative load that SFS takes on to work with all the different funding sources. These include liaising with SFU regarding teacher salaries, working with the Squamish Nation and TWN to ensure student funding and living allowances, helping students apply for loans and bursaries, and applying for national and provincial grants to cover other program costs. The funding is never fully secure, and it is never enough to provide a sense of long-term stability.

The final major challenge is recruitment. In part because of the fluctuating funding, but also because of individuals' personal and professional endeavours, it has been difficult to recruit for each new cohort. SFS hosts several recruitment events and relies heavily on each team member calling on their personal networks within the community to encourage participation. Although each attempt has been successful in securing a large enough cohort to run the program, only one or two people from each year stay on to be part of the core group of teachers and teaching assistants moving forward. The lack of secure funding has meant that SFS is limited in how many people it can support financially to be involved full time beyond their years as students. The core group, in turn, faces heavy workloads between teaching, curriculum development, student support, recruitment, etc., which has led to severe burnout at times.

Despite these challenges, the core group is hopeful and committed to continuing the work for the language. Cheńáxwtn (Swú7wu Billy) often shares a story about three key moments in his language journey so far. Before beginning the Certificate program, he had never thought he would go back to school or be able to speak his language. Then, one day several months into the Certificate program, he realized that he was speaking Skwǵwú7mesh sníchim with his peers! The following year he was teaching the language and one day he walked into the room to find his students talking amongst themselves in the language – he had taught Skwǵwú7mesh sníchim to others! A few years later, he walked into the program space after having been on cultural leave for several months and students that he had never met before started speaking to him in the language – he had taught others to teach others to speak Skwǵwú7mesh sníchim! He calls those speakers his language grandbabies.

The sense of pride that Cheńáxwtn feels is shared among the language community, as it is no small feat what has been accomplished. And yet, it has taken almost 10 years for the Skwǵwú7mesh immersion programs to create a small group of advanced speakers who can take on leadership roles in language planning and programming in the community. We wonder how much more could have been achieved with a consistent space, dedicated funding, and a larger team. No program will ever be without its challenges, but these supports may be some of the keys to securing a thriving future for Skwǵwú7mesh sníchim. Regardless, the team is determined to continue their work “because of the love, care, and responsibility we have for the language...we will always continue this work because we have a responsibility to bring it back, use it every day, and teach it to the community” (Myia Antone [Welwáitenaat]).

Chapter 4: “Don’t Just Collect Words”: Strategies for Advanced Indigenous Language Learning

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Introduction

As Indigenous communities work tirelessly to ensure their languages reach or maintain a place of strength, there is great need to support adult learners to achieve advanced levels of language proficiency. As first language speakers age and pass away, communities increasingly depend on highly proficient adults to carry the language forward to future generations (Fishman, 1991; Hinton, 2011; Wilson, 2018). Yet, very few studies explore strategies for advanced Indigenous language learning in either the field of Indigenous language revitalization (ILR) or applied linguistics (AL). While there has been increasing attention to advanced learners in AL (see Malovrh & Benati, 2018), the focus has primarily been on explaining what learners can do at the advanced level rather than on strategies or supports to help learners achieve these levels. In addition, studies in AL generally focus on languages with many speakers, and the insights from these studies are not always applicable to Indigenous language learning.

This paper presents the results of a study with learners of Indigenous languages who had either achieved or were working towards advanced oral language proficiency. The study defined advanced proficiency according to the guidelines developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) which are commonly referenced in ILR. According to

ACTFL, learners at the advanced level can speak in multiple tenses, produce speech at the paragraph level, discuss a wide variety of topics, manage unexpected communication situations, and be understood by first language speakers (ACTFL, 2012). The study included eight individual additional language speakers¹⁵ of various Indigenous languages across Canada who had already reached advanced oral proficiency, and a group of 12 Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh sníchim (Squamish language) learners working collaboratively to reach advanced levels.

This paper begins with a brief overview of the literature and study methods, before turning to focus on strategies for advanced adult Indigenous language learning. By “strategies”, I refer to the specific language learning activities that participants engaged in to advance their proficiency. The strategies are clustered into six broad categories: classes and other group activities; individual study; collaboration with other learners and speakers; learning through assessment; work in the language; and language at home. Each of these are described along with example activities for each.

This study reveals innovative approaches Indigenous people are taking to learn their languages, often in contexts with limited resources or supports. In most cases, participants had no formal training in language education and their knowledge came through experience, trial and error, self-directed education, or peer support¹⁶. ILR practitioners could benefit from greater access to existing knowledge in AL to help guide decision-making in their efforts, as well as new research on ILR methods to maximize their effectiveness and efficiency (Hinton, 2011; McIvor,

¹⁵ While the term “second language” is often used to refer to any language other than the first, I opt for the broader term “additional language”. There have been calls for at least two decades to move away from the term “second language” in AL as the language may be the learners’ third, fourth, etc. (e.g., Block, 2003). I also question the appropriateness of the numerical terms for languages in ILR contexts where learners may not consider the colonial language that they grew up speaking to be the “first” or most important.

¹⁶ The Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh learners were trained by the Where Are Your Keys learning organization, described later in the paper. However, all members of this group actively worked together to develop, test, and modify effective strategies.

2020). At the same time, the field of AL could benefit from incorporating input from ILR contexts which may reinforce or refute what is currently understood in the field (McIvor, 2020). ILR scholars have called for closer collaboration between the two fields and explored potential areas of mutual interest (Benson, in press; Daniels & Sterzuk, 2022; McIvor, 2020). This study provides empirical evidence to further advance this conversation.

The Unique Context of Indigenous Language Learning

Indigenous language learning is different from learning major world languages. Most Indigenous languages are endangered due to violent colonial policies and practices that sought to eradicate Indigenous peoples and cultures (Pine & Turin, 2017). ILR is often part of a wider cultural reclamation effort, and the motivations of Indigenous language learners are often deeply connected to identity, culture, and sovereign rights (Hermes et al., 2015; Leonard, 2017; McCarty, 2012). Some unique challenges in ILR include “few fluent speakers available to teach the languages, the passing of elder speakers who hold specialized cultural and grammatical knowledge, limited availability of language resources, and social-emotional barriers resulting from colonization and assimilation policies and practice” (Rosborough & Rorick, 2017, p. 12). McIvor (2020) adds that many Indigenous language teachers are language learners themselves. Yet, there is a lack of resources to support them, including teaching materials, curricula, media resources, academic research, or mentors. Without these resources, communities turn to what Hinton (2011) calls “bootstrap” strategies, adapting or creating new methods to support their efforts.

Approaches to Advanced Adult Indigenous Language Education

Despite the challenges, Indigenous communities have worked diligently to support ILR. Recognizing the need for highly proficient adult speakers who can carry the language forward

(Fishman, 1991; Jenni et al., 2017), communities have developed programs to support adult learners. Options for adult Indigenous language learners include language classes (e.g., Gordon, 2009; Wilson, 2018), language camps (e.g., Alexie et al., 2009; Daniels et al., 2022), part-time or full-time immersion programs (e.g., Green & Maracle, 2018; Johnson, 2017; Olthuis et al., 2013), and Mentor-Apprentice Programs¹⁷ in which a first language speaker is paired with one or more learners to engage in regular immersion sessions (Hinton et al., 2018). Many adult Indigenous language learners have also turned to self-directed education to improve their proficiency (Foxcroft, 2016; Johnson, 2012; Underwood, 2017).

Even with this range of options, few of these efforts focus on advanced proficiency. Furthermore, the available literature on advanced Indigenous language learning rarely describes specific strategies used by language learners at these levels. One exception is the work of Tehotakerá:tonh Jeremy Green whose guide to teaching Haudenosaunee languages includes specific activities based on his research on advancing through all stages of language proficiency (Green, 2017, 2018). Another exception is the work of Matiu Tai Rātima whose research documents strategies used by advanced learners of te reo Māori (Rātima, 2013; Rātima & Papesch, 2014). The present study aims to expand awareness and discussion on effective strategies for advanced Indigenous language learning.

Methods

This study was developed in collaboration with members of the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship (hereafter Stewardship). Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh sníchim (the Squamish language) is a Coast Salish language that originates in a territory that now includes Vancouver, BC where I grew up¹⁸. I have been working alongside this language community since 2015. At that time, there were

¹⁷ Also called Master-Apprentice Programs.

¹⁸ See Benson and Khelsilem (2021) for a description of Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh sníchim history and revitalization efforts.

only seven remaining first language speakers of Sk̓w̓x̓w̓ú7mesh sníchim, and the last of those speakers passed away in 2020. Most of the Stewardship members had completed full-time adult immersion programs for their language and had been working as Sk̓w̓x̓w̓ú7mesh language teachers. All were deeply committed to creating a thriving community of Sk̓w̓x̓w̓ú7mesh language speakers. In 2021, they paused their teaching to focus on their own language proficiency development, endeavouring to reach advanced levels. Following a community-based approach to research (Bischoff & Jany, 2018; Czaykowska-Higgins, 2009), I worked closely with the Stewardship group to co-design a study to support their efforts.

Theoretical Framing

My research is framed within an Indigenist research paradigm (Wilson, 2007). It is based on the premise that although I am not Indigenous, I can utilize my skills in meaningful ways to benefit Indigenous peoples. To do this well, the work must be grounded in relationship and responsive to the needs and goals of the communities I work with (Riddell et al., 2017; Wilson, 2008). This study was developed collaboratively with members of the Sk̓w̓x̓w̓ú7mesh language community and guided by them throughout. I did not impose or test theories with participants, but rather came to interactions with curiosity and the belief that participants are the experts of their own experiences and contexts.

My own view of learning is holistic, recognizing language learning as a complex, dynamic process, influenced by a wide range of internal and external factors (Ellis, 2008; Hornberger, 2002; Larsen-Freeman, 2018). The Douglas Fir Group (2016) proposes an ecological model for understanding language learning that views individuals, communities, institutions, and ideologies as interacting continuously and as inseparable from one another. This model is consistent with many Indigenous worldviews that are holistic and relational, emphasizing the impossibility of

separating the physical, intellectual, spiritual, and environmental (Absolon, 2011; Meyer, 2014; Wilson, 2008). Throughout my research, I turned to the ecological model as a reminder of the complexity of language learning and sought to attend to this complexity in my analysis.

Research Questions

The primary goal of this study was to explore how Indigenous language learners can successfully progress their proficiency from intermediate to advanced levels, including in cases where there are few or no first language speakers. The research was guided by three questions:

1. Which strategies from the literature on additional language learning could be applied in the case of Indigenous language learning in contexts with few or no first language speakers?
2. Which strategies have been used by advanced additional language speakers of Indigenous languages across Canada to reach their current proficiency levels?
3. Which language learning strategies work well for a grassroots group of advanced language learners in a context with no first language speakers?

Procedures

The project involved three main components. The first was a literature review on strategies for advanced language learning. The second involved semi-structured interviews with eight advanced additional language speakers of Indigenous languages across Canada. The purpose of the literature review and interviews with advanced additional language speakers was to understand approaches to advanced language learning broadly while drawing out ideas for strategies that could work for the Stewardship participants. The advanced additional language speakers were recruited through a relational process, based on existing relationships and through recommendations from other trusted members of the ILR community. I aimed for diversity in

terms of gender, age, language family, and experiences, but sought to interview those who had learned in contexts with at least some similarities to the context of the Stewardship. For example, while the Kanien'kéha speakers come from a context with many more speakers than Skw̥wú7mesh sníchim, one of them had participated in a full-time adult immersion program and the other had been working as a language teacher and curriculum developer. I contacted the participants via email, and interviews were conducted virtually using videoconference software. These interviews ranged from 45-80 minutes each.

The third component of the research involved observation and collaborative activities with the Stewardship. Between December 2021 and May 2022, I conducted several weeks of virtual observations. During this time, I hosted three meetings in which I brought ideas from the literature and individual advanced additional language speaker interviews to the group, and we discussed which strategies were working well. I also conducted interviews with 12 of the 15 participants at the beginning of our time together, and ten of the participants at the end¹⁹. The interviews were semi-structured and varied significantly in length due to participant's responses. The first interviews ranged from 25-75 minutes each, and the second interviews were between 15-45 minutes each.

Participants

None of the individual advanced additional language speakers nor the Stewardship participants had been raised in the language. Four of the Stewardship participants were not Indigenous. Three of the advanced additional language speakers had parents who were first language speakers, and for all other Indigenous participants the last generation of speakers in

¹⁹ Three members of the Stewardship were no longer participating when my research began so they were not interviewed. I was also unable to conduct a second interview with two others due to scheduling challenges.

their families were their grandparents or great-grandparents. Some participants had attended language exposure classes in school, but none began to learn in earnest until young adulthood.

Advanced Additional Language Speakers. The following advanced additional language speakers participated in the study. They are listed alphabetically by first name with their languages in parentheses.²⁰

- Aaron Fay (nēhiyawēwin/ Plains Cree)
- Cameron Adams (ininīmowin/Swampy Cree)
- Jaskwaan Amanda Bedard (Xaad Kíl/Haida)
- Kahrhó:wane Cory McComber (Kanien'kéha/Onkwehonwehnéha/ Mohawk)
- Karonhiióstha Shea Sky (Kanien'kéha/Onkwehonwehnéha/ Mohawk)
- Kathryn Michel (Secwepemctsin)
- PENÁĆ David Underwood (SENĆOŦEN/Saanich)
- Vanessa Campbell (Iyál) (Skwxwú7mesh sníchim/Squamish)

Most of these speakers had participated in formal language programs such as classes, immersion programs, or Mentor-Apprentice Programs. Kahrhó:wane and Vanessa Campbell (Iyál) had not learned through formal programs but had opportunities to learn through work as teaching assistants with first language speakers. All of these participants had engaged in years of self-study and five had worked or were working as language teachers. I asked the advanced additional language speakers to self-assess their proficiency levels according to the American

²⁰ Names are written as requested by each participant. I also sent participants the spelling of their language names in the Indigenous language and English for confirmation. They provided their preferred spellings and confirmed whether they would like the name to appear in both languages or only the Indigenous language.

Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages Proficiency Guidelines²¹ (ACTFL, 2012) and all but one agreed²². Their self-assessments ranged from Intermediate-High to Superior.

Skw̓w̓w̓7mesh Sníchim Stewardship. In 2016, the Sníchim Foundation (then called Kwi Awt Stelmexw) created the first full-time adult immersion program for the Skw̓w̓w̓7mesh language in partnership with Simon Fraser University. Most of the Stewardship participants were graduates of this Certificate program, as well as a second-year, part-time Diploma program. Most also went on to work as teachers or teaching assistants in these initiatives which welcomed new cohorts of students each year. The programs were supported financially by the Sníchim Foundation, the Squamish Nation, and the Tsleil-Waututh Nation. The Where Are Your Keys (WAYK) learning organization had also been closely involved in these initiatives. Their staff provided ongoing pedagogical training and logistical support while also participating in language learning²³. Each summer WAYK would facilitate a “Summer Language Intensive” in which the teachers and interested graduates would continue working on proficiency development while preparing curricula for the next program cohort. In 2021, the group decided not to run a new cohort and to instead spend 10 months working on pushing their proficiency up to advanced levels. They were supported to do so by their employers, either the Sníchim Foundation, the Tsleil-Waututh Nation, or WAYK. They called themselves the Skw̓w̓w̓7mesh Sníchim

²¹ The ACTFL proficiency guidelines are commonly referenced in ILR and have been used to assess learners in the Skw̓w̓w̓7mesh immersion programs since their inception.

²² The participant who did not self-assess felt that existing assessment practices were generally harmful in ILR contexts, consistently rating the number of speakers and their proficiency levels low on scales developed by non-Indigenous outsiders and contributing to deficit-oriented understandings of Indigenous languages and cultures. [April 2025 addition: The participant has since changed their mind based on their subsequent experience with OPI training, with Indigenous worldview considerations].

²³ WAYK is an immersion-based approach for rapid language acquisition that involves hands-on, game-like lessons and collaborative activities for both language learning and community building. See Gardner and Ciotti (2018) for a fuller description of the approach.

Stewardship and they met from July 2021 to May 2022, primarily virtually using videoconference software. The following list of members' names appear as each requested:

- Breeann Baker
- Brent Nahanee (Kwetsimet)
- Charlene George (S7atsáliya)
- Cheńáxwtn (Swú7wu Billy)
- Evan Gardner
- Gordon George
- Jade George (Smnalh-tnaat)
- Jenna N. Hassan
- Myia Antone (Welwátenaat)
- Nicholas George
- Reighen Grineage
- Sarah Jeffrey
- Susanna Ciotti
- Victoria Swahámiya Gabriel²⁴
- Xats'alanexw (Victor Harry)

Teachers in the Sḵwḵwú7mesh programs, with support from WAYK, had created and continuously refined a modified ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview to assess learners' proficiency levels. Most Stewardship participants began their time together with proficiency

²⁴ For various reasons, Brent, Sarah, and Victoria were no longer participating regularly with the Stewardship when my research with the group began so I was unable to observe or interview them.

ratings ranging from Intermediate-Low to Intermediate-High, while two who have not been assessed were likely Advanced already.

Analytical Procedures

All interviews were recorded and auto transcribed using Zoom videoconferencing software. The auto transcriptions were then checked and corrected by either me or a hired research assistant. When participants spoke in their Indigenous languages, this was noted but not translated except in the case of words that I recognized or was able to find easily online. Each participant received a copy of their transcript to review, add clarification, or request omissions. Only a few requested minor changes. I kept digital field notes (Microsoft Word) throughout my time with the Stewardship. Transcriptions and field notes were uploaded to the data analysis software NVivo which I used to complete thematic content analysis of the information collected (Creswell, 2014). This analysis was conducted in stages, using a constant comparison approach (Charmaz, 2006). As the interviews and notes were coded, these codes were then compared to earlier codes to allow themes to be analyzed inductively (Tie et al., 2019). Participant quotes selected to exemplify themes in this paper were edited to remove repeated words and filler words. They were then shared with participants who in some cases requested additional minor changes for flow or to clarify meaning.

Findings: Strategies for Advanced Indigenous Language Learning

With this study, I set out to identify language learning strategies that helped Indigenous language learners reach advanced proficiency levels. Participants also spoke of non-pedagogical support factors that they relied on throughout their learning journeys, such as motivation, peer support, safe learning spaces, funding, and time for language learning. They also shared attitudes towards language learning that helped them maintain their efforts towards advanced proficiency,

such as “go all in,” “create routine,” “keep it relevant,” and “it’s ok to make mistakes”. Hardan (2013) describes terms used for these kinds of attitudes including “metacognitive strategies” or “affective strategies”. I have come to understand them as the participants’ guiding principles. The support factors and guiding principles are important to acknowledge because without these, learners may not be successful regardless of their strategies (Wong & Nunan, 2011). By “strategies” here and throughout, I mean specific activities for language learning. Discussion of the support factors and guiding principles is woven throughout the remainder of this paper which focusses on strategies.

The study included a review of the literature on advanced language learning with the goal to identify strategies that could work for the Stewardship participants. As previously noted, much of the literature on advanced language learning focuses on what learners can do at advanced proficiency levels rather than on the strategies they have used to reach these levels. Where strategies are described in the AL literature, many would not actually be possible in Indigenous contexts. For example, immersion or exchange experiences in places where the target language is the dominant language (e.g., Hyltenstam et al., 2018). The ILR literature also points to immersion with fluent first language speakers as one of the best strategies for advanced language learning (Green, 2017; Rātima & Papesch, 2014), but there are no remaining first language speakers of Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh sn̓íchim. Activities that rely on accessing media in the target language, such as books or films, would also be impossible as such media do not exist. Other types of text-based activities, such as the cloze activities or sentence completion tasks suggested by Richards (2008), would be possible but would first need to be created by the language learners themselves. Some of the strategies that I suggested from the literature that could work for the Stewardship included pre-listening activities when working with audio resources;

interactive tasks to focus on specific grammar forms such as find the difference activities and circle drills; vocabulary tracking; and story recording. Throughout this paper, I link to the relevant literature when discussing these and other strategies described by the participants.

The remainder of this section presents strategies used by either the individual advanced additional language speakers, the Stewardship participants, or both, offering a variety of ideas of what has worked for Indigenous language learners in different contexts. Through my analysis, I was able to group the strategies into the following six thematic categories: classes and other organized group activities; individual study; collaboration with other learners and speakers; learning through assessment; work in the language; and language at home.

Classes and Other Organized Group Activities

In some cases, participants had opportunities to attend language classes or other organized group activities for advanced Indigenous language learning. Karonhiiósthá had completed a two-year, full-time immersion program for Kanien'kéha, graduating with advanced proficiency. Kahrhó:wane and Aaron Fay had opportunities to participate in advanced language classes. Cameron Adams and PENÁĆ were able to participate in advanced Mentor-Apprentice Programs. In cases where there were no formal programs for advanced learning, participants created opportunities for themselves. The Stewardship was an example of this. Karonhiiósthá also co-founded Ionkwahronkha'onhátie', a non-profit organization that ran programs to support advanced learners of Kanien'kéha.

Participants noted ways in which language teaching needed to be different for advanced learners. Notably, while most felt that immersion and other input-based approaches were ideal at earlier levels, they found that incorporating some explicit grammar teaching was useful at the

advanced level, including times when these aspects of the language were taught using English.

Kathy Michel explained:

I think it's important to have some explicit teaching now... when it was done to begin with, it was unfolded to us like a big grammar book and that was too much. But now... a smattering of somebody showing you how it works as you need it really helps.

Similarly, several of the Stewardship participants spoke about the usefulness of what they called Skw̓wú7mesh “Ted Talks,” brief lectures in English about specific grammar topics. The effectiveness of including some explicit grammar teaching for adult learners has been discussed in both AL and ILR (e.g., Cook, 2016; DeKeyser, 2018; Johnson, 2017; Rātima, 2013), and is explored further in the discussion section.

Individual Study

Whether or not they had opportunities to participate in organized group activities, all participants undertook individual study. They emphasized the importance of taking responsibility for their learning, creating study routines, and the power of repetition. Most used notetaking to keep track of what they were learning, or wanted to learn, and reviewed these notes frequently. Here, I will elaborate further on three techniques that emerged for individual study: reading and listening; transcription and translation; and self-talk. I also describe a self-directed story-recording activity.

Reading and Listening. Without access to a community of speakers, many Indigenous language learners must rely on audio and text sources for language input. These kinds of resources can be particularly valuable to advanced learners who do not have access to classes or proficient conversation partners. Participants spoke about finding ways to surround themselves with language however they could, often relying on recordings. Many communities have

recordings of Elders telling stories and legends or describing life and customs. Some have access to other audio resources such as radio shows or podcasts. Whatever the source, Aaron Fay reminds us that “at any level, daily listening is really important”.

Some participants shared that hearing first language speakers and trying to imitate them was helpful. PENÁĆ explained that recordings of first language speakers provide “a model for us to go forward with language, a standard”. Gordon George reflected on how listening to recorded stories and legends made learning easier for him since he had grown up hearing his father and others teaching through stories. He also spoke about the importance of hearing the same recordings many times, “really listening to what’s going on with the language and the speech and the sentence structure”.

While there are mixed opinions about the role of written resources in revitalizing Indigenous languages that were primarily oral languages before colonization (Comeau, 2018), participants spoke of written resources as important sources of language input. They read stories and legends, linguistic documentation, dictionaries, and grammar books. Some noted how the latter were particularly useful at the advanced level. While reading about grammar rules may have felt overwhelming or confusing earlier, at the advanced level they helped learners to clarify questions, identify patterns, and note exceptions.

Whether working with text or audio, learners reported the importance of using these materials in an active way to extend their learning. As Karonhiióstha put it, “don't just collect words, actually use them”. She spoke about writing out word definitions in the language, testing herself with different tenses and pronouns, or trying words out with speakers. The Stewardship developed group learning activities to accompany reading and listening materials. For example,

they worked together to divide written texts into phrases, identify phrases that they did not know, and exchange knowledge on those language pieces.

Transcription and Translation. Two activities that involve actively engaging with language materials are transcription and translation. Aaron Fay noticed that “the learners who are more advanced, the ones who are advancing quickly... they use transcription as a part of their regular learning process”. He and others enjoyed listening to recordings of first language speakers to learn from their cultural teachings while also focusing on language learning. Potential benefits of doing transcription include improving listening skills, writing skills, pronunciation, and prosody (Brant, 2024). It provides opportunities for learners to analyze how language is used by first language speakers, hear new words, and identify areas to work on. It can also help create resources for future learners²⁵.

Similarly, translation work can be useful in expanding one’s thinking about and *in* the language. Breeann Baker was translating children’s books. She would attempt her own translations and then work with more advanced speakers to review and adjust them. She discussed how this exercise helped her to learn new language, and to recognize important differences between English and Skwxwú7mesh sníchim:

It's been pushing my fluency into a different area. I'm realizing with translation how saying a word or sentence in one language can have a different meaning in another language... and how even though it can be descriptive in one, it could be shortened in another. It doesn't necessarily mean it's any less language because the length has changed, it's just become more specific to the way of the language itself.

²⁵ See Hermes & Engman (2017) for a discussion on innovative approaches to, and benefits of, transcription by Indigenous language learners.

Self-Talk. The most cited practice for individual study amongst participants was thinking and talking to themselves in the language. While it may be common for learners to think about language, participants reported thinking and talking to themselves *in* the language as a deliberate practice. With limited opportunities to engage with other advanced speakers, self-talk became an important option for participants: “if you’re not using your language every day, at least try to talk to yourself... the more you talk, the more you get better” (Xats’alanexw [Victor Harry]).

Some participants would narrate in their minds what they were doing or what was going on around them. Others would practice specific language forms. PENÁĆ was a big advocate for self-talk practices (see Underwood, 2017), and he described how his self-talk progressed as his language became more advanced:

In more recent times, it’s turned into “well now that I’ve said it in the first person, how would I say that in the third person?” So, thinking grammatically about it, alternating those modes of conversation, playing with those different voices.

Chenáxwtn (Swu7wu Billy) described thinking about more advanced language when preparing to speak in ceremony. He noticed that this practice helped not only with language structures, but also shifted his thinking to a Sḵwḵwú7mesh perspective: “That’s really where we’re at... when we’re talking as fluently as we can, it’s not so much ‘is this correct?’, it’s more ‘is this Sḵwḵwú7mesh, the way we’re speaking?’”

Some participants were working on deliberately changing their internal dialogue to the language. Gordon George found himself wondering if what he was saying sounded Sḵwḵwú7mesh and determined that he had to make the change to his internal thoughts to adequately answer that question:

I found myself saying that more and thought “well, how does it sound Skwxwú7mesh? What do you have to do to yourself, in your mind, to make it sound Skwxwú7mesh?” And my first thought was, “well, you have to think in Skwxwú7mesh.” So that’s why I wanted to make that change to that internal thought or voice, because that’s the only way it can sound Skwxwú7mesh in my opinion... it’s thinking in your language that you’re learning rather than thinking in English.

Kahrhó:wane had also consciously made the choice to switch his internal dialogue to Kanien’kéha and explained: “it takes a little work, but it’s like anything: once it becomes routine, then you don’t have to think about doing it anymore”.

Story Recording. Here, I want to highlight a specific study activity that worked well for participants. Aaron Fay found a story recording activity online (see Madison, 2021) and described it to me. I brought the idea to the Stewardship who found it useful and enjoyable. The first step in this activity is the learner records themselves telling a story for five minutes. Ideally, it is a true story about their life. Any words or phrases that they do not know, they say in their first language. They then listen to the recording and identify the words and phrases they had trouble with. They write these down, find the translations, and study them. They then record the same story again and repeat the cycle of recording, identifying trouble words, and studying those words, until they can recite the story with ease.

Stories play an important role in Indigenous education (Archibald, 2008), and other Indigenous language learners have written about incorporating storytelling to enhance their learning (e.g., Claxton, 2020; Daniels, 2016). This story-recording activity provides individual learners an option to practice speaking, or output, which is an essential ingredient for successful language learning (Brown & Larson-Hall, 2012; Green, 2017; Wong & Nunan, 2011). It provides

opportunities for noticing what one needs to work on, self-correcting, and building up language relevant to one's life:

I've been practicing doing a storytelling activity on how to process crab and prawn. I started going off seeing all the gaps and holes and then I was actually able to hunt²⁶ it all from Swú7wu and Vic a couple weeks ago and now I can tell the whole story in Skw7mesh or explain it all. So, I really like that activity. I think storytelling where I'm at in my language journey is the most important thing to be practicing - connecting those longer sentences and connecting thoughts. (Myia Antone [Welwáitenaat])

Myia sought input from others to build on her story. This activity could also be used as a group activity by sharing recordings and collaborating with others to identify and work on corrections.

Collaboration with Other Learners and Speakers

All participants relied on others to support their learning. Some were able to visit with first language speakers, but most depended on support from other advanced additional language speakers. Whether they received regular mentorship from more advanced speakers, collaborated informally with friends, or were able to organize groups like the Stewardship, they spoke to the power of peer-supported learning:

What's helped me the most is the collaborative efforts that are happening... Being able to hunt language from one another, I have found a lot of holes in my own proficiency and have found things that I hadn't considered or thought about that people are digging into individually and have a lot of knowledge on. So, being able to spread that knowledge out evenly amongst each other without having to put too much pressure on one individual has been so beneficial. (Reighen Grineage)

²⁶ "Hunt" is a WAYK term for "elicit."

Evan Gardner, the creator of WAYK, was adamant that “adult language learners need a community” and he shared how many WAYK techniques were just as much about community building as they were about language learning. Formal or informal, big or small, having a support network can bolster language learning, as peers can learn from one another and help keep each other accountable. Working together consistently, learners can also build trust and feelings of safety which can lead to risk-taking that can accelerate language learning (Foxcroft, 2016; Gardner & Ciotti, 2018; Johnson, 2017).

Study Together. Participants discussed study activities that they would do together with others, including collaborating on verb conjugation databases; testing each other’s vocabulary; trying out new phrases; or transcribing audio and working through new language ideas. Karonhiióstha spoke to several of these activities, as well as ideas for more communicative activities: “me and my friends would create a pile of topics depending on what we were learning at the time, and then we would pull one and try to talk about it for five minutes”. Others played language games described further in the section on hands-on learning.

One innovative practice for collaborative study that I witnessed was a WAYK technique used by the Stewardship called “prove it”. Each day after lunch, the group would gather for “list time” when they would share words they were working on. These were sometimes vocabulary words, but often more complex grammatical pieces such as tense examples or suffixes. After presenting their list, the participant would create a “set up” by providing contextual information to clarify how they were trying to use the language pieces. Finally, they would “prove it”, giving sentence examples using the words. Their peers would then provide corrections and feedback and would often take turns “proving” the same words in different contexts. The entire discussion

would happen in *Skw̄w̄w̄7mesh sníchim*. Jenna Hassan spoke to how the activity had been beneficial:

There's been a shift from having to create a physical tangible scenario to explain the context... to being able to explain the context in the language, say this language that you want, and then ask in the language "is that right or does it work differently?" Being able to have a meta-conversation and say "okay, how is this word or this piece of language different from this piece of language?" and talk as a group about it has been really interesting to see. I think that has been a huge reason that we've gotten more proficient over the last while.

On some days, the participants would ask each other to open their personal notebooks²⁷ to a random page and present a list from that page. This practice was a form of mutual accountability, encouraging peers to review their notes, while also ensuring exposure to a variety of language structures, topics, and contexts.

Speak as Much as Possible. One of the most important aspects of collaborating with others is the opportunities it provides for speaking and interacting (Gass & Mackey, 2006; Wong & Nunan, 2011). As Aaron Fay pointed out, "if we want to speak the language, we have to speak the language". While activities like story recording can help learners practice output on their own, it cannot replace conversational practice. Almost all participants emphasized the importance of interacting with as many different speakers and in as many contexts as possible.

Some found that speaking helped them retain language better than other kinds of practice:

"Writing it down doesn't really help unless you're saying it... as much as you write it down, your

²⁷ The WAYK team provides learners with what they call "hunting books", small notebooks with sections for tracking different aspects of language learning (see Giffen, 2018). Most Stewardship members used these or other notebooks to record aspects of language they were working on.

brain is not really going to hold on to that” (Gordon George). Vanessa Campbell (Iyál) noticed a jump in her proficiency when she had an opportunity to spend time with other speakers on a regular basis:

What happened there is we spent more time just trying to talk to each other, not working on curriculum or any agenda, but just trying to talk to each other... about anything, and that really changed our individual use of the language.

Speaking and conversing provide learners with opportunities for noticing language they need to work on. When we hear language, we may only pay attention to essential pieces of information rather than the grammatical forms being used (Brown & Larson-Hall, 2012; Schmidt, 2001). When we speak, however, is when we need the correct forms, and we have opportunities to notice the forms of which we are unsure. Charlene George (S7atsáliya) observed:

When we were in person... the first half of the morning would be a big immersion sprint²⁸. That’s a huge way to find holes in your pockets. What am I having a hard time actually conversing about? This is the essential thing that we’re trying to do here is create conversational speakers. So, when you’re there in person having a natural conversation, what are you unable to express? What are you unable to say?

One of the guiding principles that participants emphasized was not being afraid to make mistakes. They advocated for using all opportunities to test out language and the importance of taking risks. Kathryn Michel would try out new forms with first language speakers:

I would challenge myself to start using them, to see if the way I’m using them is correct.

So, I kind of do some informal testing with my mother, with different people... and I

²⁸ An “immersion sprint” is a WAYK term for a time set aside for conversing in the language on any topic/s of interest.

think it's the only way I was actually going to push through to get from an intermediate level to more an advanced level.

Cameron Adams described ordering at his local café in the language even though he knew the cashier wasn't a speaker: "Speak it everywhere you go!"

Create Space for Immersion. Ideally, learners can be immersed in the language (Green, 2017; McIvor, 2015; Tedick et al., 2011). In the absence of communities of speakers, however, participants emphasized the importance of creating immersion spaces. The Skwxwú7mesh Certificate and Diploma programs, as with other adult Indigenous language immersion programs, were created with this intention. First hosted at Simon Fraser University, the Skwxwú7mesh programs were eventually able to move into a house on Tsleil-Waututh Nation land which also created a physical *place* for immersion. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the programs had to move online but participants were diligent about maintaining immersion in this virtual environment. The Stewardship participants continued with this commitment, designating specific immersion times and activities in their daily schedule.

Others not able to participate in full-time language learning found creative ways to create immersion spaces and places. Kathryn Michel had organized immersion lunches for learners together with first language speakers and Jaskwaan had organized language camps where learners are on the land immersed in the language together. She had recently organized a camp where intermediate speakers planned learning activities to lead with more novice students:

It worked out really well. With all of the preparation we did beforehand and everyone taking responsibility for certain activities to be carried out in the language, the responsibility of enacting language learning was not just resting on a few people's shoulders.

Hands-on Learning. Through the programs Karonhiióstha co-organized, she discovered that hands-on activities conducted in the language worked well for advanced learners. They organized everything from bowling nights to hide-tanning workshops. She noted the importance of having opportunities for using language in different contexts. Cheńáxwtn (Swú7wu Billy) had made a similar discovery for advanced Skwxwú7mesh learning:

Before [I thought] we're going to intensely learn the things like storytelling, comparing and contrasting, and all these things that you learn from the Oral Proficiency Interviews²⁹ to look out for in advanced language skills. But, in the end, it feels like it's more about having fun... speak as much as you can and try to set up contexts where you're doing these things naturally.

Many participants emphasized focussing on language relevant to their lives. In addition to hands-on language lessons, the WAYK method used by the Skwxwú7mesh learners involves activities such as immersion walks, coffee time, cooking, and cleaning together. Many participants said they learned the most during these times because the context was memorable, the needs were real, and the language could be extended into their daily lives: “it has to be a part of your everyday life to really stay with you” (Nicholas George). Others also noted the power of hands-on, enjoyable activities. PENÁĆ liked playing cards in the language, Jade George (Smnalh-tnaat) enjoyed creative writing and singing, and Myia Antone (Welwáitenaat) felt her language thrived when she was harvesting or engaged in other land-based activities.

Others spoke specifically to creating room for fun because “if you're having fun and enjoying your language learning, you learn faster” (Cheńáxwtn [Swú7wu Billy]). Some games can be specifically designed to reinforce or expand language learning. The Stewardship

²⁹ Here Cheńáxwtn is referring to the Oral Proficiency Interviews developed by ACTFL to assess language proficiency levels.

occasionally played Twenty Questions and other guessing games. I brought them additional ideas like Find the Differences activities and Circle Drills (Brown & Larson-Hall, 2012). Reighen Grineage said “those were really helpful in stretching our language brains in ways that were fresh and new, and made things a little more exciting”.

Learning through Assessment

Teachers in the Skwxwú7mesh immersion programs had adapted Oral Proficiency Interviews (OPI) from ACTFL to assess learning. Over the years, teaching assistants would sit in on the interviews, track aspects of language use, and collaborate with the assessor to provide a proficiency rating. Recently, the assessors also began including a list of three things that learners could work on to get them to the next level. These items were added to a shared document they called the “Three Things Document” which noted the language pieces each participant was working on. The Stewardship participants regularly reviewed this document and noted how helpful it was to keep themselves and others accountable:

The Three Things Document has been really good to know what other people are working on and what I need to work on, and how to steer the conversation in a way that makes one of us use those things and help us grow a little bit more. (Nicholas George)

In addition, the Stewardship was committed to increasing everyone’s capacity for engaging with assessment. Jenna Hassan was trained by ACTFL and led practice sessions for the group that included education about how to understand and assess proficiency levels, reviewing previous OPI, and practice running OPI with one another and invited guests. She noted:

The growth I’ve seen in people's proficiency since doing Oral Proficiency Interviews and creating the Three Things Document, I think has been really helpful... the process of doing them and being able to learn how to identify the holes in our pockets... what are

some of the error patterns that I hear that I can think about, and that you can think about, and that we can work on together to help each other get more proficient? I think that has been really a huge part of the more intermediate-advanced growth in people's language skills.

Several participants noted how helpful these sessions were, not only to learn about assessment, but as opportunities for reflecting on their own language capabilities and needs.

Work in the Language

Participants' language learning excelled when they had opportunities to use the language outside of typical learning environments, including through work opportunities. Cameron Adams worked with a translator to develop an app for his language: "this really helped my language learning journey because lots of times I would hear the audio of the phrase multiple times as I was editing... and I got to hear pronunciations, how they differed". Jaskwaan, who was working as a language teacher and in the language office for her Nation, commented "I know that keeps improving my language, being able to just be immersed in it and thinking in it all day".

Most of the participants had taught or were currently teaching the language. Echoing other accounts of successful ILR practitioners (e.g., Johnson, 2017; Rātima, 2013), they described this role as key in their own learning journeys. They spoke of always needing to keep one step ahead of their students, and how teaching became a motivator for language study. PENÁĆ commented that it was "sink or swim" when he first started teaching. Relatedly, Kathryn Michel shared:

It's really forced me to become more accountable for my language learning to have to teach it. I think a lot of times I sidestepped having to personally teach it and I think that I probably would be a lot further in my language if I didn't run away from that... anyone

serious about language, turn around and teach it as quickly as you can, even if you're like me and don't consider yourself to be a teacher. If not you, who then?

The WAYK method also involves having learners lead others through lessons as soon as they can, and the Stewardship participants emphasized about how powerful that model was:

Once you teach someone else what you've learned, you're actually reflecting on what you've learned yourself... Encouraging others to become teachers right away is not only beneficial for language revitalization in general, but there's also a huge personal growth aspect. (Breeann Baker)

Teaching is often paired with curriculum development, and participants found that creating language materials enhanced their learning. The Stewardship spent much time reviewing and creating lessons for the Certificate program. As they reviewed together, questions arose about spelling, grammar, and other language pieces, and often the group would take an impromptu dive into a given aspect of the language. Susanna Ciotti reflected “we will go back and talk about something that theoretically we all already know how to do and almost every time we do that, I learn something new from that conversation”. I wrote in my notes: “learning to create lessons while learning language at the same time – learning *through* curriculum development”.

Language at Home

Another important area to expand language use is at home (Bommelyn & Tuttle, 2018; Hinton, 2013). As previously discussed, participants advocated for focusing on language relevant to one's life and finding ways to incorporate language into daily activities. Many emphasized the benefits of using the language with friends and family. The most influential motivation in this regard was raising children in the language. PENÁĆ said that committing to raising his daughter

in the language was “the biggest solidifier, the catalyst for a lot of that change” (see also Underwood, 2017). Kahrhó:wane concurred: “children are naturally curious, and they ask a lot of questions, so it really forced me to use what I had and to remember the things that I was reading and listening to.” Cheñáxwtn (Swú7wu Billy) spoke at length about the benefits of raising his children in the language:

I feel like one of the fastest ways to get fluent is to have kids... because it's so different... when I'm trying to talk to my kids when they've made a mistake and I'm trying to help them through the mistake and trying to support and encourage them, some of that language is really hard to think of. Sometimes I'm absolutely stumped.... There's just so much stuff that doesn't come up in other conversations, other than with family. So that's helped so much... I speak to them every day and it literally forces me to improve on my language.

Cheñáxwtn and others noted that some of these benefits could be derived from speaking with other young learners, even if one does not have children of their own.

Discussion

The need to create advanced Indigenous language speakers is urgent. This study revealed unique strategies used by adult Indigenous language learners in their efforts to become advanced speakers in contexts with limited resources, supports, or first language speakers. As calls increase for greater collaboration between the fields of AL and ILR (Daniels & Sterzuk, 2022; McIvor, 2020), studies such as this one provide rich information that can be analyzed to the mutual benefit of both fields. Here, I discuss some topics of contribution, including areas of overlap that may expand understandings and possible ways forward for practitioners in both AL and ILR.

Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Directed Learning

Participants in the study were self-motivated, driven by their passion for the language, its connection to their identities, and a sense of responsibility to its future. AL scholars have written about intrinsic or integrative forms of motivation and how these influence learners' choices (Noels et al., 2000; Norton, 2013). Rātima (2013) and McIvor (2020) have explained that conceptualizations of motivation in AL do not fully account for Indigenous contexts in which learners are driven by a connection and responsibility to their own community rather than an external one, yet it is clear that intrinsic forms of motivation contribute to successful language learning. Winke (2022) explains:

When language learning coincides with personal identity construction, a person changes from a mere learner of the language to an owner and rightful user of the language. A person who feels that way can experience a powerful desire to practice and learn. This is because continued improvement reinforces the person's linguistic identity. (para. 11)

Norton (2013) refers to deliberate action taken to support one's learning as "investment."

Whether engaged in self-study, self-talk, or collaborating with other learners, the study participants' intrinsic motivation(s) drove them to continuously invest in their own learning.

Metacognitive and Metalinguistic Awareness

The participants' investment in language learning and the kinds of activities they engaged in to reach their language goals evidence metacognitive awareness. Green (2017) defines metacognitive awareness as "understanding, taking responsibility for, planning and evaluating one's own learning process" (p. 52) and argues that it is essential in advancing Indigenous language learning. Research in AL concurs, demonstrating the importance of metacognitive awareness and related strategies for successful language learning (Byrnes, 2012; Hardan, 2013).

The learners in this study actively worked to identify aspects of the language that they needed to improve on, and deliberately planned and engaged in activities to advance these aspects.

Such planning also requires a level of metalinguistic awareness, which Green (2017) defines as “the process of developing an understanding of how a language is structured or functions” (p. 52). Many of the activities described in this paper demonstrate the participants’ metalinguistic awareness, such as the “prove it” activity that the Skwxwú7mesh learners used to work on aspects of the language together or self-talk activities in which the learner deliberately alternates grammar patterns. Kahrhó:wane reflected on the process of increasing metalinguistic awareness, suggesting that as one advances in language proficiency, they move from knowing what to say, to how to choose words, to why those choices are made:

If you know how to get there, that's where your language is really going to expand because if you know how, it means you can be thinking beyond just phrases and words. You're starting to think in the spirit of that language.... [and] if you can think of the why in your language... you're likely to be a master speaker.

Other participants described the role of noticing and of explicit instruction in the development of metalinguistic awareness. Here I elaborate on each of these.

Noticing

Throughout the study, participants spoke either explicitly or implicitly about the role of “noticing” in language learning. They shared several activities that provided opportunities for noticing pieces of language they needed to work on such as speaking as much as possible, and output-based activities like the story recording activity and OPI. They also noticed increasing abilities to identify patterns in audio, print materials, and others’ speech. Brown and Larson-Hall (2012) explain:

Input becomes intake and learning occurs... when we pay attention to input and have the subjective experience of “noticing” it (Schmidt, 1983, 1995, 2001). Psychologists agree that attention is basic to learning. We must attend to something in order for it to reach our long-term memory. Otherwise, the stimuli stay in short-term memory for a few seconds and then disappear. (p. 61)

Language learners do not just notice words and forms, they also interpret these words and forms through what they have already learned; they are “examples of the linguistic system” (p. 61). As knowledge about the linguistic system increases with increased language proficiency, so too do opportunities for integrating noticed language. Jaskwaan referred to this when discussing the role of listening to stories in the language:

As a beginner, it is important to just to hear how the language sounds in a narrative and, as you move along in your language journey, as you're further along the road, you're able to pick out complex aspects of language as a result.

Explicit Instruction and Feedback

Immersion is considered one of the most promising options for ILR (Green, 2017; McIvor, 2015; Tedick et al., 2011), and many practitioners advocate for input-based approaches that do not teach grammar explicitly. However, research in both AL and ILR shows that strategic attention to grammar forms can benefit learners and that adults benefit from explicit instruction and feedback at all proficiency levels (Brown & Larson-Hall, 2012; DeKeyser, 2018; Green, 2017; Johnson, 2017; Rātima, 2013). This study demonstrates the usefulness of including some explicit grammar study for adult Indigenous language learners. Kathryn Michel used grammar texts to work through sentence examples, Karonhiióstha developed study techniques to work on verb conjugations, and the Stewardship listened to lectures on grammar rules. The “prove it”

technique is an example of incorporating form-focussed learning within an immersion environment. These examples may be useful in providing others with options for explicit learning opportunities at the advanced level.

Language Use

This study highlights the important role of language use in advancing language proficiency. None of the participants had learned through input alone; they stressed the importance of speaking as much as possible. This finding aligns with the Input-Interaction-Output model (Gass & Mackey, 2006), and to other AL studies such as Wong and Nunan (2011) who found that “active use of the target language, with a strong emphasis on practice in naturalistic situations, was the most important factor in the development of proficiency” (p. 148). In ILR, Green (2017) found the same: “language use is the single most important factor for any individual seeking to become a speaker” (p. 45). Green explains that “language use necessitates learning, and that what is learned is of use for the purposes of real, meaningful and purposeful communication with other speakers or learners” (p. 45). Participants in this study demonstrated innovative ways to create opportunities for output in cases with few speakers, including creating immersive spaces with other learners and self-talk.

Relevance

One of the most salient findings in the study was the importance of focussing on language that was relevant to the learners’ lives. Whether they were practicing storytelling about personal memories, tending to their children’s needs, or engaging in hands-on activities, participants learning excelled when it centred on content they found enjoyable and useful. Indigenous scholars have called for culturally relevant materials and approaches to teaching (e.g., Battiste, 2013; Daniels et al., 2022; McIvor, 2015). In AL, Byrnes (2012) remarks “it seems

that advanced L2 abilities are possible in instructed settings when instruction presents content that is worth learning and, in turn, requires learners to create content worth thinking and communicating about” (p. 515). This also appears to be true for self-directed adult Indigenous language learning.

Participants noted that at the advanced level, they were working more on understanding how and why to use language in different contexts than on learning new words or structures: “you have the puzzle pieces, now it’s taking them and trying to fit them together” (Cheńáχwtń [Swú7wu Billy]). They shared innovative examples of creating or replicating different contexts for language use, and of practicing pragmatic aspects of the language. While there is a wide body of research on teaching and learning pragmatics in AL (e.g., Barron et al., 2017; Ishihara & Cohen, 2022), this is an area that has not been well-researched in ILR where examples of pragmatic language use have rarely been documented and cannot be easily accessed through media or other sources (DeCaire, 2023). Some communities with first language speakers are now working on recording projects to document everyday speech and casual conversations to ensure this language can be more easily shared with learners (Brant, 2024; Hermes & Engman, 2017). In communities with few or no first language speakers, questions remain about how teachers and learners can create diverse contexts to authentically practice pragmatic aspects of the language. For communities with shifting linguistic and cultural practices, limited resources, unique histories, and diverse goals, it will be important to carefully consider what is possible, appropriate, relevant, and useful.

Conclusion

The participants in this study have shown incredible dedication and innovation in their journeys to become advanced Indigenous language speakers who can carry their language

forward to future generations. This paper highlighted advanced language learning strategies used in contexts with limited access to resources, supports, or a community of speakers. It showcased creative approaches to individual study, collaboration with other learners, assessment practices, and language use at work and home. These strategies were examined to identify possible areas of contribution and expansion between the fields of AL and ILR. These understandings will be further enhanced through an examination of the support factors and guiding principles that participants relied on, and connections between these and learning strategy choices (see [Chapter 5](#)). As others seek to determine how to support advanced language learning, studies such as this one provide empirical evidence for promising practices and allow practitioners to assess how these may be replicated or adapted to their contexts.

Chapter 5: Support Factors and Guiding Principles for Advanced Indigenous Language Learning

In this chapter, I elaborate on the support factors and guiding principles that positively contributed to participants' efforts towards reaching advanced proficiency. As previously described, while my research intention was focussed on identifying specific language learning activities, all participants described non-pedagogical support factors that were in place throughout their learning journeys. They also spoke of their attitudes and approaches to learning that helped them maintain their efforts towards advanced proficiency which I came to understand as their 'guiding principles'. In some cases, participants spoke explicitly about the supports and guiding principles. In other cases, I interpreted these through latent coding during the data analysis process (Byrne, 2022) or witnessed during my time with the Stewardship. I noticed much overlap between the support factors and guiding principles shared by the individual advanced speakers and those I heard and witnessed with the Stewardship group. The findings are therefore presented from the whole group, with quotes selected from individual participants to represent each theme. Likewise, while each support factor, guiding principle, and learning strategy is presented in separate sections throughout this dissertation, they are all interrelated. Each represents a dynamic and multifaceted aspect of language learning that connects and intersects with each of the others (Douglas Fir Group, 2016).

Support Factors

Through the analysis process described above, I identified seven support factors that have helped participants in their language work: *Passion, Responsibility, Investment, Accountability, Peer Support, Time, and Safety*. Some of these supports helped the participants to get started in their language learning journeys, and many have continued to sustain the participants in their

ongoing efforts towards and through advanced proficiency levels. Each of the support factors is described below with quotes from participants to exemplify each theme.

Passion

Many participants spoke about their passion for the language, a spark that ignited at a certain point in their lives and continued to push them through their language learning journeys. For many, the language was deeply connected to their Indigenous identity and culture. Jaskwaan shared that language revitalization was tied to her sense of social justice. PENÁĆ spoke about how his love for the language kept him motivated and said “I’d have to endorse just being obsessed with the language. It helps to be obsessed.” Charlene George (S7atsáliya) reflected that “there’s those people out there who are just truly passionate and committed to it and it’s their calling.” She emphasized the need to heed that call, and to remain passionate to weather the inevitable ups and downs of language learning:

I think to be a successful speaker of our language you have to believe that you belong to it, you deserve it. You have to believe in the spirit of the language, and the ancestors who pushed through everything to save it for us. That’s the thing, this revitalization work is spiritual. You’ve been called to this work, trust that this pathway is meant for you.

Cameron Adams similarly explained that “when you’re passionate about something, it makes it easier despite the bumps that you’ll have in the journey. Because it’s less likely you’ll get bumped off anything if you have a passion behind you.” McIvor (2015) has previously identified the importance of sustained learner motivation in the face of the many struggles and sacrifices faced by adult Indigenous language learners. McIvor (2015) also shares ways that learners might overcome some of the barriers, including “taking personal responsibility, making the time, creating a speaking community and bringing the language into their world” (p. 47). These

overlap with findings in this study including support factors such as *responsibility*, *time*, and *peer support*, and the guiding principle *keep it relevant*.

Responsibility

Participants expressed feelings of responsibility around language learning. For some, they felt it was their obligation as an Indigenous person. Kahrhó:wane said “I’m a Mohawk, I should speak Mohawk. I say that I am a Mohawk, so it's my responsibility to learn”. Others spoke about feelings of responsibility to their ancestors and to future generations for carrying the language forward. Kathryn Michel and Jaskwaan both began their language learning journeys because of the responsibility they felt as mothers to raise their children with the language, and Kahrhó:wane added “if you're saying you're going to learn, what you're doing is taking responsibility for the life of your language”. Breeann Baker explained that she understood a shared sense of responsibility to the future of the language to be part of the reason for the Stewardship’s success:

The best thing for me personally has been finding and grouping with people who have the same outlook and the same idea and the same heart of just wanting to revitalize the language, not only for themselves... for something a lot larger. It's for those who kept the language alive for us today, and for those who will continue on keeping the language alive to come.

Participants also took responsibility for their own learning. All spoke of individual actions they took to learn their language, rather than depending on classes or other external helps. O'Regan (2016) emphasizes the importance of this kind of deliberate action for ILR. Some participants also noted that taking on this responsibility helped accelerate their language learning. In my observations of the Stewardship group, I often noted the team’s work ethic, and how they were taking ownership over their own learning while also supporting their peers and

future learners. Jenna Hassan reflected on the importance of fostering this sense of responsibility across the immersion programs: “[there’s a] sense of ownership over what’s going on and more people taking a direct role into what’s going on. I think that also has an impact on how invested they are in what’s happening and how engaged they are”.

Investment

While passion and a sense of responsibility may contribute to one’s motivation for language learning, of utmost importance are the actions that learners then take to reach their goals. Bonny Norton (2013) refers to this action as “investment”. Norton argues that although a person may be motivated to learn a language, they may not feel committed to the language practices in each learning environment. It is important for learners to find the language practices that work for them. For learners of Indigenous languages with few resources or speakers, this may require investing significant time and energy into creating resources, activities, and spaces to support their learning (McIvor, 2015).

All participants had dedicated years of their lives to learning their language. Some had quit their jobs to focus on language learning. Many had worked on creating language learning materials, or activities like transcribing and translating to invest in their own language learning as well as for future learners. They created programs, like the Ionkwahronkha'onhátie' initiative that Karonhiióstha co-developed to support advanced Kanien'kéha proficiency or the Stewardship for Sk̄w̄x̄wú7mesh sníchim, to hold space for language immersion. They all committed many hours to working on language learning outside of their regular jobs or in language learning programs. Jade George (Smnalh-tnaat) reflected:

It takes more than just speaking here in the program. I think you have to take it further; you have to really invest your extra time into it to become advanced. And that's what I've

seen from the speakers who are in the program that are more advanced. They're putting extra into it. Even if it's just going home and listening to recordings and transcribing or taking time to understand things.

Accountability

Participants spoke about the importance of holding themselves accountable, and their personal commitment to working on the language every day. PENÁĆ shared that one of his own guiding principles is “in the absence of resources, I have to be a good resource.” He explained:

People are going to count on me in what I'm doing, and so if I can't be accountable and able to provide the resources that are available, either because I don't know where they are or they don't exist, I should train myself enough to be able to be somebody who can answer those questions.

Other participants also emphasized their sense of accountability to one another, and to their families. Six participants reported that having children was the inspiration for their language learning; they felt a deep sense of responsibility for ensuring their children had the opportunity to become speakers. PENÁĆ shared about his commitment to raising his daughter in the language:

I think that was one of the big things that has pushed me to better myself in the language. It's always held me accountable. And it didn't take me long to realize that of course I'd have to build up my proficiency... If I'm going to do this, I have to be able to speak to her, so my proficiency has to grow.

Others discussed the power of mutual accountability, working together with other learners to develop and check in on language learning goals. Karonhiióstha ran a 10-week summer program for advanced Kanien'kéha proficiency. She spoke of the central role of goal setting and regular check-ins: “It helps to get checked on, to just ask ‘what did you do this

week?’ and sharing any new words that we learned or something we realized... having that time and space to make sure that you’re actually progressing”. The Stewardship set daily individual and group goals and held monthly “retrospectives” to reflect on what was or was not working well. They kept track of their own and others’ language learning goals, using shared documents for following language learning progress which they checked in on frequently.

Peer Support

Mutual accountability is only possible within the context of supportive relationships. All participants emphasized the importance of having support people in their lives during their language learning journeys, including family members, teachers, or mentors. At the advanced level many highlighted the importance of relationships with peers, echoing what has been shared by other ILR practitioners about their experiences (e.g., Foxcroft, 2016; Johnson, 2012; Stacey, 2024; Underwood, 2017). Cameron Adams attributed his success partly to the support networks he found on social media where he was able to post in groups for nēhinawēwin learning and get feedback from others. Aaron Fay talked about conversation groups that helped to advance his speaking abilities, and about advanced nēhiyawēwin-speaking friends that he relied on for mentorship. He emphasized that “language learning doesn’t happen in a vacuum” and that “we must be in community and in relationship with each other in order to properly revitalize a language.”

The Stewardship was an extraordinary example of peer support. They worked together on all aspects of their work including scheduling, weekly job rotations, curriculum development, assessments, and more. As Nicholas George reflected, “it takes a group of individuals around you, people that are like-minded and have similar goals to really accomplish a lot.” Importantly, the group collaborated in their language learning efforts, mutually supporting one another to

increase their collective language proficiency. Karonhiiósta's experience with Ionkwahronkha'onhátie' was similar, and she eloquently expressed the need for peer support in language learning: "having a network of support, whether it's big or small, public or private. Everyone is different but you need to make a network of support because if you don't have that, it's easy to just fall back into English."

Time

All participants in the study had dedicated years of their lives to their language, and most emphasized that having the time to focus on language learning was essential for their proficiency development. Indigenous languages require thousands of hours of study for learners to reach high levels of proficiency (Ignace, 2016; Johnson, 2017; Twitchell, 2018; Wilson, 2018). For Kanien'kéha, for example, it is estimated that learners need 1800 hours of immersion instruction to reach an advanced level and up to 3600 hours to move through the advanced level to superior language proficiency (Green, 2017). With many competing priorities and responsibilities, the reality is that many adult Indigenous language learners simply do not have sufficient time to dedicate to proficiency development (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006; McIvor, 2015). In addition, intermediate level speakers often get called on to teach the language to others, leaving them without the time or energy to work on their own language learning. Susanna Ciotti commented on this phenomenon:

That's tough for anyone who's in that position of trying to get past intermediate and into advanced, because a lot of times intermediate is when everyone's like: Okay, you're fluent now come do X, Y, and Z for us. Come teach this class, and come run this camp, and come make these posters.

Kathryn Michel added “it's tough to actually have language as your job... because you need a break from your job, and the break from your job almost always isn't in the language because you're just exhausted.” Specific, targeted, and ongoing support is needed to allow adult Indigenous language teachers and learners to reach to and through advanced proficiency levels (Brant, 2024; Stacey, 2024). As Aaron Fay reflected: “It’s a lifelong journey, reclaiming a language. It’s not just an event; it’s not just a class.”

Safety

A safe learning environment is one where students feel comfortable, respected, and supported (Senior, 2001; Twitchell, 2018). Such feelings of safety are essential for effective language learning, as one must feel comfortable practicing new language without fear of ridicule in the case of mistakes. Manatowa-Bailey (2024) explains that “safety emanates from the human nervous system, and it impacts cognition, stress levels, and a host of psychobiological processes, including one’s capacity to learn” (p. 19). While impossible to account for all possible factors that can impact an individual’s sense of safety, participants reflected that their learning often excelled when they felt at ease in their learning spaces and with their learning partners.

The Skwxwú7mesh immersion programs have been deliberate in their efforts to create a safe and positive learning experience for all who come through their programs. The WAYK method, with its play-based approach and focus on building community, has played a key role in achieving this goal. The comfort level of the Stewardship participants was clear, with many expressing that the sense of safety, mutual respect, and comfort enhanced their learning experience. Breeann Baker shared that the team had “this really great connection with one another and it feels very welcoming and open and homey. When you're with each other, you feel like you’re with your friends and family, you don't feel like they're your coworkers.” Charlene

George (S7atsáliya) similarly said “this group always felt like a safety net and I think that's important... to have a work environment where you feel respected, and you feel seen, and you feel heard, and you're happy to come in.”

Guiding Principles

Through the data analysis process, I began to see a third category of themes. These were not external supports nor were they specific learning techniques; they were ideas about different approaches and attitudes one should bring to their learning. The six themes that I identified as the most meaningful in this group were *Go All In*; *Create Routine*; *Find What Works for You*; *Keep it Relevant*; *Make Mistakes*; and *Persevere*. Hardan (2013) describes terms used for these kinds of attitudes including “metacognitive strategies” or “affective strategies,” but, after some time, I began to see them as “guiding principles” as foundational concepts that help orient learners throughout their entire learning experience. In the interviews with individual advanced speakers and the Stewardship members, participants sometimes named these ideas explicitly. They often shared them when I asked what advice they would have for other Indigenous language learners working on reaching advanced proficiency. In other cases, participants didn't speak explicitly to these principles, but I interpreted them through the stories they were telling, or I witnessed them in action during my time with the Stewardship. The six guiding principles are described below with quotes from participants to exemplify each theme.

Go all in

“I dropped everything, and every moment of every day was language” – Aaron Fay

“Put that language before anything” – Cameron Adams

“Do your best all the time” – Chenáxwtn (Swú7wu Billy)

These are just a few of the quotes from participants about the importance of committing oneself completely to language learning. Almost all participants had at some point spent several months or years dedicated to full-time study. Those who were not able to do so spent as much of their free time as possible on language learning. They all emphasized the importance of prioritizing, and spending as many hours as possible in, the language: “the more time that you can spend thinking in or talking in a language, the more advanced [you’ll become], or the faster you’ll become more advanced” (Myia Antone [Welwáłtenaat]).

In the absence of learning resources, Indigenous language learners must be willing to go above and beyond to create their own language learning supports and opportunities. The first Skwxwú7mesh Certificate program was created in a context of very few learning resources and no previously developed curriculum. The first cohort of students had to commit a year to language learning without knowing what to expect. Charlene George (S7atsáliya) partially attributed their success to daring to take that risk: “All of us being willing to jump in and not question ‘are you actually prepared? Are you actually ready?’ You know, all of us just doing it... if we hadn’t done that, then we wouldn’t be where we are now.” Karonhiióstha suggested “push yourself in any way that you can and try anything,” and Cameron Adams emphasized the need for “constant practice in different settings and different ways.”

Create Routine

Participants set aside specific times for working on language learning. Whether they were able to join language programs or worked on language learning in the evenings, they created regular space for language learning in their lives. Many also reported finding ways to involve language during some of their routine activities. When Cheńáxwtn (Swú7wu Billy) was a student, he rode the bus to class with a classmate and they would speak to each other in

S̱kw̱wú7mesh sníchim. Nicholas Geroge and Gordon George would speak to each other in the language while working out at the gym. Vanessa Campbell (Iyál) emphasized the importance of building these kinds of habits:

If you have contact with other people who are speakers or learners, set up some kind of... routine, a way that you always use the language in almost an automatic way. If I see [names of students], I will always greet them in our language and start a conversation in our language. Don't miss any opportunity to use the language.

The S̱kw̱wú7mesh immersion programs involved detailed scheduling and routine, influenced and supported by WAYK. Evan Gardner explained that WAYK was built around maximizing the potential for language learning, including carefully planning how learners and teachers use each minute of their time. The Stewardship participants stressed the importance of having a schedule and routine so they knew what to expect and could maximize their time together.

Find What Works for You

There are many approaches to language learning, and each learner will find some work better for them than others. Several participants described figuring out which methods worked for them through trial and error. Cameron Adams said, "I've used everything in a blended approach" and Karonhiióstha said, "at any given time, I'm working on five different projects or trying to study in five different ways". Jaskwaan noted that when it comes to successful language learning, "there's not one answer, there's multiple answers," and Aaron Fay concurred: "everybody's journey is going to be a little bit different." While participants shared many ideas for specific strategies that worked for them, all recognized that there is no one size fits all when it comes to language learning (Chew et al., 2023; Hinton, 2011; Kumaravadivelu, 2006; McIvor, 2015; Mellow, 2002).

Some participants emphasized the need to be proactive when it comes to finding the right strategies. Kathryn Michel described working with Elders and guiding them to teach in the ways that were going to be most beneficial to her and fellow learners:

Even if they were not happy with what they had to do and change their ways of how to teach us, in the end all of them were really happy with the results. So, I think if it's happening at a snail's pace and you're not learning, then change what you're doing because we don't have time... you have to be proactive and you have to know what works for you, and work to get what works for you.

Xats'alanexw (Victor Harry) explained that participants in the Skwxwú7mesh programs were “constantly trying new things all the time to see what works and what doesn't work”. Chenáxwtw (Swú7wu Billy) also spoke about the importance of not getting stuck thinking that there is only one way to do things:

The way we're learning language is awesome and it's really fast and we're doing something right, but we can always do better. I feel like that's something that's helping us with our program is trying to never feel comfortable and saying we've finally found the one way to do it because there's no such thing.

Keep it Relevant

Reflecting on both their past and present language-learning experiences, many participants spoke about the importance of focussing on language that was relevant to their lives. They felt they learned best when they were engaged in enjoyable activities or meaningful conversations, and most emphasized the importance of focussing on language that they could use outside of the learning environment. Vanessa Campbell (Iyál) enjoyed walking with her mentor, informally talking about plants and the world around them. She reflected that when she was

teaching, she encouraged her students to direct the learning by sharing what topics and language they were interested in learning. Kahrhó:wane added that “what a language immersion program specifically for adults should be doing is... giving them real, everyday language that they’re going to be using, things that they talk about at home”. Nicholas George called that “lifestyle language”, the language needed to meet one’s daily needs, and emphasized “it has to be a part of your everyday life to really stay with you”.

The WAYK methodology used by the Stewardship group is built around everyday language. It begins with hands-on lessons with common objects, such as pens or cups, which increase in grammatical complexity over time. Chenáxwtn (Swú7wu Billy) explained the importance of setting up the lessons with physical objects:

The context is unmistakable. It helps a lot of the language stick in my head easier than if you’re just writing something on the board... you’re not just memorizing, trying to think about what the board said, but you’re rather memorizing the context that you’re having the conversation in.

These contexts extended beyond formal language lessons to other activities included in WAYK programs such as immersion walks, coffee time, cooking, and cleaning together. Many of the Stewardship participants shared that they learned the most during these times because the context was memorable, the needs were real, and the language could be extended into their daily lives. Karonhiióstha spoke similarly about discoveries with the Ionkwahronkha'onhátie' group. They found that engaging in hands-on activities pushed them to expand their language use in ways that would not have been possible in a traditional learning setting. Meeting primarily online during the COVID-19 pandemic made many of these kinds of activities more difficult, but both the

individual advanced additional language speakers and the Stewardship continued to focus their language on topics relevant to their lives.

Finding language that you use often and language you're interested in I have realized inspires me to speak more language which helps me get to a more advanced level but also encourages me to use that language a lot more. And then too when I'm speaking language more often, I find myself using those more advanced grammar pieces... so I think by following language you're interested in and language you want to use every day, it makes more space for that advanced language to come through. (Myia Antone [Welwáitenaat])

Make Mistakes

ĆOCES ĆENs TOLNEW is a motto that PENÁĆ and his fellow SENĆOFEN learners have adopted. It means “use what you know” and it came from one of their Elders who was encouraging a learner to speak using whatever language she could. Many participants emphasized the importance of speaking as much as possible without worrying about perfection because “everything’s a learning process, even your mistakes” (Jaskwaan). Participants felt that making mistakes was necessary for successful language learning and advancement. Kahrhó:wane said:

That’s one of the things that learners really have to come to terms with is you’re going to make a million mistakes. And you should want to make a million mistakes, because if you’re not making mistakes, you’re not doing anything... if you’re making mistakes, you’re trying.

He noted that he always made a point to speak in Kanien’kéha when he saw other speakers, even if he knew the language that he was using was wrong or it felt embarrassing. Getting corrections from speakers whenever possible helped propel his learning.

While making mistakes is a natural and essential element of language learning (Mackey, 2006; Silva et al., 2018), accepting this can be very challenging for some learners. Learners may feel shy, inhibited, or ashamed about mistakes (Jenni et al., 2017; Poyonova et al., 2025). Aaron Fay articulated this challenge for Indigenous language learners when discussing the benefits of trying out a variety of learning strategies:

There are aspects of that that are challenging though, because there's a significant amount of vulnerability that comes with speaking in a language that you're trying to reclaim that's tied to colonization and all these other things that's a part of your identity and it's tied to shame... so that method might not work for everyone because it really requires putting yourself out there.

For learners to overcome some of these challenges, they must feel safe in the learning environment (Foxcroft, 2016; Manatowa-Bailey, 2024; Poyonova et al., 2025; Senior, 2001). Receiving corrective feedback is another essential element of language learning (Ellis, 2009; Mackey, 2006) but learners may only be receptive to such feedback in an environment where they feel respected and supported. Within the safe learning environment that they created, the Stewardship focussed on feedback, identifying and correcting language pieces that participants were having trouble with. The group worked together to identify their own challenge areas as well as those of their peers, and to set up opportunities to practice the language that each participant needed to continue to advance their proficiency. It is within this context that Jade George (Smnalh-tnaat) spoke to the importance of taking risks and accepting corrections:

Don't be afraid to take criticism and don't be afraid to admit that you have things you need to work on, because if you go into the language and you think you're perfect and you have nothing to work on, you're not going to grow... You're never going to be the

best unless you focus on your flaws and try to work on them. And, you know, pride may be the worst thing to have if you're a language learner. You have to be humble and accept that you're going to get a lot of things wrong.

Persevere

Reaching advanced proficiency in an Indigenous language requires a lot of time and dedication. As previously described, learners who have reached these levels have spent years of their lives committed to language learning – but it wasn't always easy. Participants described difficult moments in their learning journeys, barriers that they faced, and plateaus that at times felt insurmountable. Yet, like other ILR practitioners around the world (Chew et al., 2022; Davis, 2017) they persevered. Their commitment and dedication despite the obstacles stood out through the stories they shared. Cameron Adams said, “all I've been doing is keeping passionate about my language learning journey” and Karonhiióstha said, “all I can do is keep trying”. Kathryn Michel emphasized the value of hard work and working through the hard stuff: “I think you've got to go into the places that are going to hurt... it's painful and it's incredibly tough in some areas that you're going to get into with language learning. But it's worthwhile.” Similarly, Kahrhó:wane reminded learners that the return on investment in language learning isn't immediate:

It's like work, you only get paid at the end of the week... You're not gonna get paid for this week's learning this week. You're gonna get paid this week for last week's learning. So, you're always a little bit behind. But you know it's coming, and the pay is something valuable, more than monetary value.

Aaron Fay also spoke of the importance of rest, and allowing oneself to take breaks during the language learning journey: “We need to take those breaks and then I think we need to go back

and reflect and look at those things that we did before and pick up the pieces that we maybe dropped along the way”. He noted the frustration one can feel when they are not progressing as fast as they would like, but emphasized the nēhiyawēwin word *âhkamêyimo* which means “don’t give up.” He exclaimed, “be relentless in your in your right to reclaim your language!”

Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter highlight the role of support factors and guiding principles in the journey towards advanced Indigenous language proficiency. While my initial focus was on identifying effective language learning strategies, the narratives and experiences shared by the participants revealed a broader, more holistic picture of language learning. The journey to advanced proficiency is not solely defined by structured learning activities but is influenced by the presence of strong support systems and constructive orientations towards learning that can sustain motivation and engagement. The support factors—passion, responsibility, investment, accountability, peer support, time, and safety—help maintain a solid foundation upon which language learning can take place. The guiding principles—go all in, create routine, find what works for you, keep it relevant, make mistakes, and persevere—serve as essential mindsets that shape the learners' approaches to language learning. The supports and guiding principles were shared by both the individual advanced speakers and the Stewardship members, demonstrating their applicability across different learning contexts. Importantly, the findings indicate that the support factors, guiding principles, and learning strategies do not exist in isolation. Instead, they form an interconnected framework that can contribute to the overall success of advanced Indigenous language learning.

Chapter 6: Wá7us Ta Sníchim Chet Photobook

This chapter describes the development of a photobook that was made for the Sḱwḱwú7mesh community. The photobook, codesigned with Sara Jeffrey, is a creative output designed to honour the community's efforts while presenting the study's findings in an engaging and accessible format. This chapter briefly describes how the idea for the photobook came about and the steps involved in its creation. It also includes several images from the photobook pages.

From the beginning of this research project, members of the Stewardship and I discussed the need for accessible ways to share the research results that would benefit the Sḱwḱwú7mesh language community directly. We explored the idea of infographics, guidebooks, or a website, but decided to defer the conversation until after my time with the group. During our closing circle, I prepared a presentation with preliminary findings for the Stewardship which included quotes from our interviews together. One participant commented on the strength and beauty of the quotes and wondered if we could put some of them together in a quotebook, perhaps with photos as well. Everyone expressed enthusiasm and support for this idea. I quickly got to work and was able to secure supportive funding from the NETOLNEW Research Partnership (www.netolnew.ca) for this project. We organized a photoshoot with photographer Zia Joseph on Sḱwḱwú7mesh territory and hired Calvin Charlie-Dawson to provide art for the project. Sara Jeffrey from the Sníchim Foundation offered to do graphic design, and I worked closely with her to produce the 57-page, 8.5 x 11-inch photobook using the software Canva.

The introductory pages of the photobook explain the background of the Stewardship and the study and provide an overview of the book. We write:

This book is a celebration. It showcases the work of the Stewardship and their dedication to learning and strengthening Sḱwḱwú7mesh sníchim. The hope is to share a tangible and

visible representation of this commitment with Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh families, communities, and others for generations to come. (p. 9)

The book then presents findings from the study specific to the Stewardship. Each section begins with a theme in bold, a brief description of the theme, and quotes from participants to exemplify the theme alongside, or superimposed on, photos of the participants. The themes include support factors such as *Community*, *Responsibility*, and *Safety*; specific strategies such as *Learning through Teaching* and *Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Ted Talks*; and guiding principles such as *Have Fun*, *Go All In*, and *Make Mistakes*. Most of these themes, and several of the quotes, have been shared elsewhere throughout this dissertation.

I had the photobooks printed through a shop in Victoria. I selected a company that specialized in book printing and had competitive pricing. I worked with their staff to prepare the book for printing through several rounds of edits to ensure all photos and graphics were aligned and met the appropriate quality requirements. A print proof and an additional digital proof were created before finalizing the book for printing. The first round of 50 books was printed in June 2023.

When the photobooks were ready, I arranged a time to visit the Yellow House on Tsleil-Waututh Nation land where the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh immersion team was currently meeting. It had been a year since the Stewardship had ended and it was an informal but very heartwarming visit. Seven of the Stewardship members were there, along with newer participants in the immersion programs. We gathered after lunch, and I was able to briefly share about the creation of the photobook and reveal it to the group for the first time. I presented a small gift for Sarah Jeffrey to offer thanks for all the work that she had put into the design process with me and handed each Stewardship member two copies of the photobook – one to keep and one to share with another

community member. The group also talked about a few key people and places in the community that they wanted to receive copies, and they used sticky notes to mark where the books would be going. We then took a few celebratory pictures together with copies of the photobook outside on the patio. SFS and WAYK each requested additional copies for wider distribution, and we did a second print of 100 copies (which allowed for a few small corrections) that I delivered to the Yellow House several months later.

Link to digital photobook: <https://tinyurl.com/skwxwu7mesh-photobook>

Below are images of selected pages from the photobook to provide the reader with a visual representation. The cover page is followed by two 2-page spreads that exemplify the layout throughout most of the photobook: a key theme with a brief description, and quotes either next to or superimposed on images of the participants. The themes of *Community* and *Learning through Teaching* were selected as they are core features of the Stewardship. In addition, these pages include at least one photo of all the Indigenous participants present at the photoshoot, and display quotes that are not included in other parts of the dissertation.

Figure 3

Wá7us Ta Sníchim Chet Photobook Cover



Wá7us Ta Sníchim Chet


Carrying the Language Forward

The Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship

July 2021 - April 2022

Figure 4

Wá7us Ta Sníchim Chet Photobook: Community

 **Community** 



The Skwxwú7mesh immersion programs were created with the goal to create a language community, and it is this growing community of speakers that have kept the programs strong. The programs implement community organization strategies to ensure smooth operations, but much of their strength comes from their shared goals, welcoming attitude, and commitment to collaborative language learning. Strong personal relationships had developed between participants over the years and were foundational for the creation and success of the Stewardship.

11




Figure 5

Wá7us Ta Sníchim Chet Photobook: Participant Quote

It takes a lot of dedication, but it also takes a group of individuals around you or people that are like-minded and have similar goals to really accomplish a lot of stuff, because you can only get so far on your own... You can, but it's going to be a lot harder and it's going to take way longer to do by yourself, and it's always okay to have help.

– Nicholas George

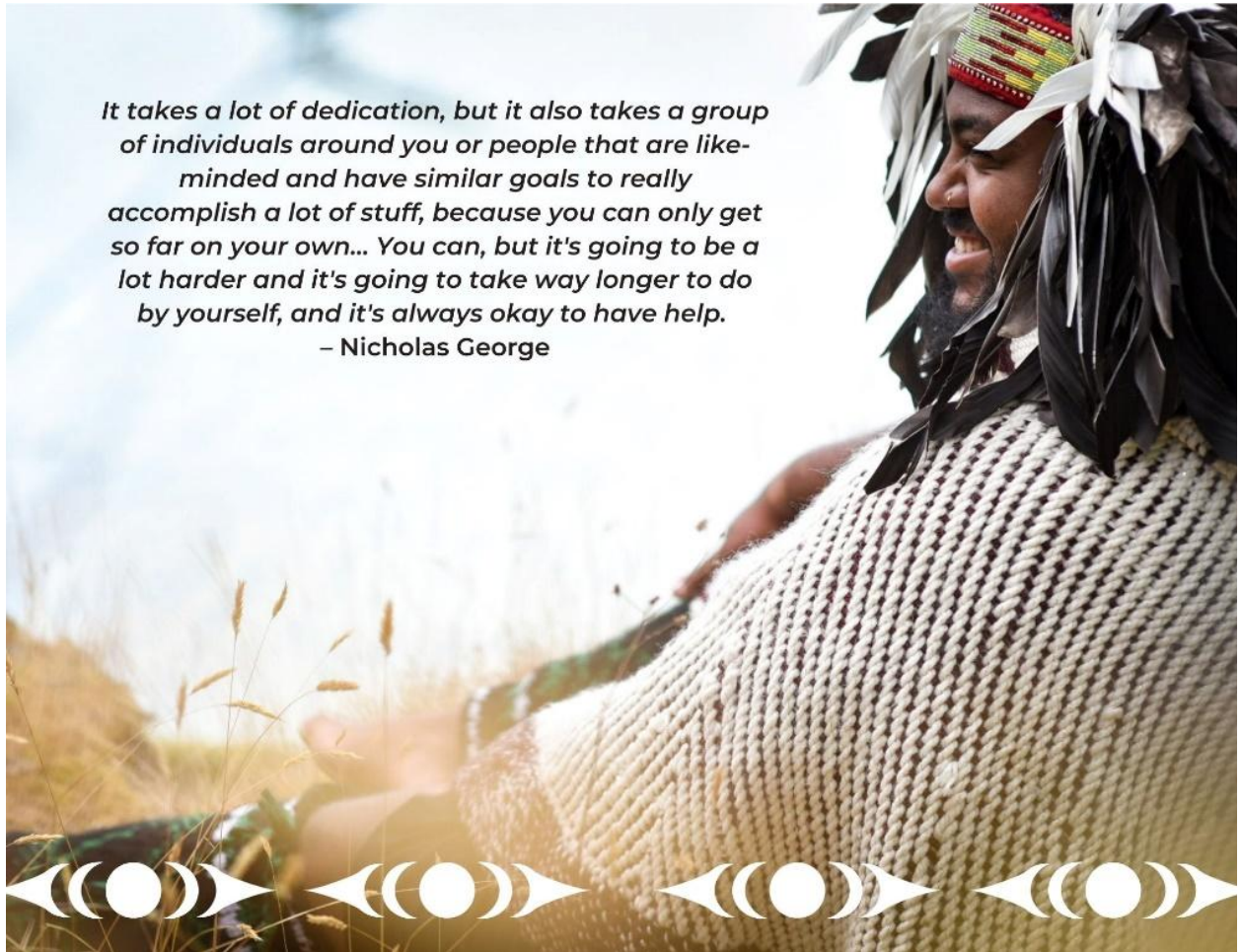




Figure 6

Wá7us Ta Sníchim Chet Photobook: Learning through Teaching



Learning Through Teaching



The WAYK method emphasizes the importance of learners becoming teachers as fast as possible. Each lesson is set up so that once a learner completes a task, they immediately lead others through the task. It is a highly participatory format in which all students help each other learn the language together. WAYK also encourages programs to hire as many teaching assistants as possible to ensure a high teacher to student ratio. This allows multiple lessons to run simultaneously and helps build collective proficiency faster. All of the Stewardship participants had learned through this method, and almost all had participated as teachers, teaching assistants, or other support roles in the immersion programs. They were also preparing to help run the upcoming iteration of the Certificate program.

The model that we use is you should be able to - in immersion - teach others the aspects of the language that you understand as soon as you're able to understand it, you know, to keep the pyramid scheme of language learning going - best kind of pyramid scheme I think! - Jenna N. Hassan

When I had to get thrown in there and teach, I didn't have a choice, I just had to, which was good... Teaching was what I think helped me the most. - Jade George (Smnalh-tnaat)

Teaching helped me because it's given me that confidence to speak more. - Gordon George

Once you teach someone else what you've learned, you're actually reflecting on what you've learned yourself, as well as pushing yourself into new positions... So, I think not only is it pushing others to become teachers that's beneficial for language revitalization in general, but I think it's also a huge personal growth aspect. - Breeann Baker

30




Figure 7

Wá7us Ta Sníchim Chet Photobook: Participant Quote



Chapter 7: Conclusion

In her 2003 chapter titled “How to Teach when the Teacher Isn’t Fluent”, Leanne Hinton reflected on the fact that Indigenous languages were increasingly being taught by young adults who were also language learners, not yet fluent themselves. She remarked that “we can do no less than honor and support those with the drive and the bravery to take on this task” (p. 79). More than two decades later, not only is it common for Indigenous languages to be taught by non-fluent teachers, but many of these teacher-learners are left with no remaining first language speakers to rely on for mentorship. To honour and support these learners, this dissertation explored strategies for advanced Indigenous language learning in contexts with few fluent first language speakers. Developed collaboratively with members of the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship, the primary goal of the study was to support these teacher-learners in their efforts to reach advanced language proficiency. Through participatory activities with the Stewardship, and interviews with individual advanced speakers of other Indigenous languages, the study identified innovative and effective strategies for advanced Indigenous language learning, as well as key support factors and guiding principles for adult Indigenous language learners.

Summary of Key Findings

The study participants have shown remarkable commitment and creativity in their efforts to reach advanced proficiency in their Indigenous languages. Their stories highlight the holistic and dynamic nature of language learning; the ingenuity and flexibility required for language learners working in low-resource environments; and the necessary interplay between individual initiative and community-based approaches for Indigenous language learning. The study revealed important support factors and guiding principles that sustained participants in their learning, as well as specific strategies they used to work on advanced proficiency development:

Support Factors

- **Passion:** Language is deeply connected to identity and culture; passion sustains learners through challenges.
- **Responsibility:** Obligation to ancestors, future generations, community, and self; taking ownership of learning accelerates progress.
- **Investment:** Committing significant time, energy, and resources; creating materials and immersive spaces.
- **Accountability:** Commitment to daily practice; mutual accountability among peers; responsibility to family and community.
- **Peer Support:** Building supportive relationships; collaborative efforts to support mutual learning.
- **Time:** Dedication of thousands of hours to achieve advanced proficiency; lifelong commitment.
- **Safety:** A supportive, respectful, and comfortable learning environment supports and enhances learning.

Guiding Principles

- **Go All In:** Fully immerse and prioritize language learning.
- **Create Routine:** Establish regular and consistent study and practice times.
- **Find What Works:** Use trial and error to identify effective methods and be proactive in adapting strategies.
- **Keep It Relevant:** Focus on language that is meaningful and usable in daily life.
- **Make Mistakes:** Embrace errors as learning opportunities and seek corrections.
- **Persevere:** Maintain commitment and dedication despite barriers and plateaus.

Strategies

- **Classes and Organized Activities:** Formal and grassroots programs with a specific focus on advanced proficiency.
- **Individual Study:**
 - Reading and listening actively and deliberately to focus on comprehension and specific challenge areas.
 - Transcription and translation to improve comprehension, expand vocabulary, and focus on prosody.
 - Self-talk to practice output, reinforce structures, and to shift to thinking in the target language.
 - Self-recording to identify gaps, improve narrative skills, and focus on personally relevant language.
- **Collaboration with Others:**
 - Studying together for mutual support, including peer-supported skill testing with the *Prove It* technique
 - Speaking as much as possible to notice gaps and improve fluency.
 - Creating immersion spaces through formal or informal settings.
- **Learning Through Assessment:** Using Oral Proficiency Interviews to identify focus areas; Collaborative tracking and feedback on learning goals.
- **Work in the Language:** Language-related work to expand opportunities for language input; Teaching and curriculum development to deepen understanding.
- **Language at Home:** Integrating language into all aspects of daily life; Raising children in the language accelerates proficiency.

These support factors, guiding principles, and learning strategies are interconnected, overlapping with and influencing one another. Each participant drew on their unique supports and approaches to implement strategies that aligned with their needs and circumstances. Their stories of language learning highlight the need in ILR for flexibility and adaptability. They also reveal the central role of intentionality; advanced language proficiency development requires deliberate effort, sustained commitment, and alignment between values, goals, and language learning practices.

Study Limitations

The greatest challenge with this study was timing. As described in the Methods section, I was only able to begin participating actively as a researcher with the Stewardship about halfway through their time together. By that point some members' participation had become sporadic due to their responsibilities during Skwxwú7mesh winter ceremonies. There was also a pause in the research activities while liaising with the Squamish Nation to establish our Collaborative Research Agreement. The Stewardship participants and I had originally proposed eight months of collaborative activities, but I was only able to participate actively over the course of four months. We had also proposed biweekly meetings to review and reflect on strategies for advanced language learning but, due to scheduling challenges, we were only able to hold three strategies meetings in total.

These time constraints meant that it was not possible to conduct a systematic analysis on the effectiveness of specific strategies during the Stewardship. Although the observations and participant reporting during our meetings and interviews together provided alternative rich input. It was hoped that the participants could complete OPIs to assess their progress from the beginning to the end of the Stewardship, and while they did do OPIs near the beginning of their

time together, their own time constraints in preparing for the upcoming Certificate program meant that they were unable to conduct post-program OPIs.

In reflecting on the limitations of the study, I have also wondered if the project could have been enhanced through collaboration between the two participant groups. Facilitating meetings between the advanced speakers and the Stewardship could have allowed both groups with opportunities for deeper reflection and mutual assistance. Such meetings were not incorporated due to logistical challenges and the time constraints outlined above.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study has illuminated promising strategies, support factors, and guiding principles as considerations for advanced Indigenous language learning. Further research to explore the effectiveness and adaptability of these strategies with learners in other settings would enhance understandings about the universality or specificity of these approaches. Whether through systematic evaluation of the strategies or additional qualitative explorations, comparative studies between different learners, groups, regions, and languages could help determine their effectiveness in different contexts. Similarly, further exploration and documentation of innovative community-based models for language learning such as the Sḱw̱wú7mesh immersion programs would benefit other ILR practitioners. By providing detailed descriptions of successful practices and approaches in such programs, other communities could evaluate their potential and adapt them for use in their own unique contexts.

Finally, the following themes and topics were noted during the study and warrant further investigation. The following three topics of particular interest have not been widely explored in the existing literature in either ILR or ALL:

- **Learning through assessment practices:** Investigate how assessment practices can be adapted for advanced Indigenous language learners, expanding on collaborative assessment strategies that promote assessment *as* learning and assessment *for* learning.
- **Learning through curriculum development:** Examine how creating curriculum materials can positively impact language acquisition, including research on the benefits of collaborative lesson planning and materials development practices.
- **Pragmatics:** Explore methods for creating authentic language use scenarios in diverse contexts for learners of Indigenous languages with few speakers, resources, or documented examples of practical language use.

Wa Chayap Yuu

My hope is that this study has provided ideas and inspiration for Indigenous language practitioners working towards advanced proficiency development. The findings are not meant to be prescriptive, but to expand awareness and conversation about potential strategies and supports for Indigenous language learning. As Indigenous communities continue to lead efforts to strengthen their languages, my hope is that these strategies can alleviate some pressure for ILR practitioners by providing ideas to use or adapt in their contexts.

ILR is challenging work, and reaching advanced proficiency in a language with very few resources requires high levels of determination, deliberation, and dedication. I conclude as we did in the Wá7us Ta Sníchim Chet Photobook - through the words of Breeann Baker who reminds ILR practitioners to wa chayap yuu (take care):

The best advice I have is to connect with yourself and slow down with yourself.

Something that I realized since starting to learn the language is how different your body,

your mind, your spirit all changes when you start to learn the language and connect with your ancestors. The whole world literally takes a shift and starts to look different through your eyes and you start to see things how they were before colonization. And I think it's very daunting at first and very scary. I remember when I first started to realize and understanding with learning the language what happened to our people. I was angry and emotional and all these things. But at the same time, it's so exhilarating to know that you can speak, and they can understand you on the other side. And I think the best advice I have is just don't forget to connect with yourself in that way. Because, as much as a big pressure it is learning your language that has been lost... it's also such a beautiful thing and there were so many people before you that were praying for people like you to learn one day.

*To all of you who participated in this study, תודה רבה / muchas gracias /
thank you so much for sharing your time and your wisdom with all who read this work.*

Chet kw'enmántumiyap / we are grateful to you for your contributions.

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Appendix A: Approval Letters & Research Agreement

Approval Email from the Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship

From: Chenáxwtn Swó-wo Billy [REDACTED]
Sent: August 26, 2021 3:05 PM
To: Nicki Benson <nickibenson@uvic.ca>
Subject: Skwxwú7mesh Language Stewardship Program - Nicki Benson Research

Hello Nicki, Hope you're well.

Today August 26th, our team here at the Skwxwú7mesh Stewardship program met and talked about our involvement of your research.

We all agreed that we would like to be involved!

That being said, we had a great conversation and came up with some thoughts, concerns and some common requests/requirements that we had to make sure our path to fluency stays true. We agreed to participate if the following conditions of the research are met:

- Not disruptive of our language activities and goal of fluency
- Accessible to communities on all levels (an 18 year old could read it!)
- Helpful in getting this team more fluent: Willing to let us practice our teaching skills and lessons on Nicki
- Is beneficial to "us" as a language speaking community, rather than other researchers

If you agree to the above conditions, we look forward to getting started!

- Chenáxwtn / Swú7wu Billy (Gabriel)

Approval Letter from the Sníchim Foundation (formerly Kwi Awt Stelmexw)



KWI AWT STELMEXW

PO BOX 57145 EAST HASTINGS, VANCOUVER, BC, V5K 5G6. P: 778-987-8809

DATE: October 17, 2021

To: Nicki Benson
University of Victoria
Department of Curriculum & Instruction

Re: Request to conduct research with the Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship Program

Dear Nicki,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Kwi Awt Stelmexw, I am pleased to inform you that the Board has approved your request to engage in research with the Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship Program.

At our meeting on September 28, 2021, the Board reviewed and discussed your research proposal entitled "Exceptional adult Indigenous language learning: From intermediate to advanced language proficiency and beyond". We agreed that this research will be of value to the participants of the Stewardship program as they work on advancing their language proficiency. We know that the participants are looking forward to working with you, and that your research will be of benefit to the wider language community and other language communities as well.

Please keep us informed on the progress and outcomes of the study. We look forward to seeing the results!

All the best,

Susanna Ciotti, Secretary
Board of Directors
Kwi Awt Stelmexw

Approval Letter from Tsleil-Waututh Nation



Tsleil-Waututh Nation səlilwətał



November 24, 2021

Nicki Benson
University of Victoria
Department of Curriculum & Instruction

Permission to Conduct Research - Skwxwú7mesh Snichim Stewardship Program

To whom it may concern,

This letter is to express support for the research project proposed by Nicki Benson titled "Exceptional Adult Indigenous Language Learning: from intermediate to advanced language proficiency and beyond". This research project will be conducted with participants of the Skwxwú7mesh Snichim Stewardship Program, which includes employees and consultants of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation. The research proposal has been reviewed and approved by Angela George, Director of TWN Community Development.

We are happy to support this research, as we know will make an important contribution to our language and community. We look forward to the research results.

Sincerely,



Angela George
Director of Community Development

Collaborative Research Agreement with the Squamish Nation

Project Title: Adult Indigenous language learning: From intermediate to advanced language proficiency and beyond

Date or Approval: This Collaborative Research Agreement is approved this _____ day of _____, 2022.

Approved by:

Purpose of the Document:

This is a collaborative project between the Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation) and the researchers. The Collaborative Research Agreement is envisioned as an adaptable template to help guide researchers and/or post-secondary partners with their thinking around creating respectful and mutually-beneficial research agreements.

Part of the Agreement is to ensure that the Squamish Nation's worldview, values, and culture and language are respected and represented in the research and to identify program and community benefits in the research being undertaken.

Also, it is important that the Agreement and related research aligns with the Nation's Strategic Plan, which contains detailed visions and priorities for the Nation's Values, People, Organization, Lands and Water, and External Relations (see www.squamish.net/strategic-plan/).

Purpose of the Research Project:

To understand how Indigenous language learners can successfully reach advanced levels of proficiency while supporting a group of Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim learners working on their own proficiency development.

Time Frame:

- Fall 2021: Literature review
- December 2, 2021: Ethical approval received from the University of Victoria
- December 2021 – January 2022: Interviews with advanced language speakers begin; interviews with Stewardship participants
- January 2022 - May 2022: Interviews with advanced speakers continue; participation/ observations with Stewardship; bi-weekly reflection meetings
- May 2022: Final interviews with Stewardship participants about their experiences
- Spring-Summer 2022: Data analysis; creation and distribution of infographics
- Fall 2022: Oral presentation of results; creation and release of strategies guide
- Winter 2022/23: Completion of first article manuscript
- Spring 2023: Completion of second article manuscript; submission of portfolio-style dissertation to committee for review.
- Late Summer 2023: Dissertation defense

Statement of the Issue/Problem/Research Question:

1. Statement of Issue/Problem:

Advanced adult Indigenous language speakers are essential for language revitalization. Languages thrive when children are being raised in the language in their homes and have opportunities to speak the language with others in the community, but this is only possible if there is a large cohort of advanced adult speakers to support such an environment. While there is a growing body of research on strategies and methods for Indigenous language revitalization, few studies focus on adult Indigenous language learners, and fewer still on adults working on advanced language proficiency. In particular, there are no studies that the researcher could locate that look at how advanced levels can be reached in cases where there are no first language speakers to rely on for instruction and mentorship.

2. Research Question:

The primary goal of this study is to understand how Indigenous language learners can successfully progress their proficiency from intermediate to advanced levels when they have few or no opportunities to interact with first language speakers. More specifically, the inquiry asks the following three questions:

1. Which strategies from the literature on Additional Language Learning could be applied in the case of Indigenous language learning in contexts with few or no first language speakers?
2. Which strategies have been used by advanced speakers of Indigenous languages across North America to reach their current proficiency levels, and which of these are or could be applied in contexts with few or no first language speakers?
3. Which language learning strategies work well for the participants of the Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship, a grassroots group of advanced language learners in a context with no first language speakers?

Intent/Benefit to Squamish Nation:

The research contemplated by this Agreement is of mutual interest to the researchers and to the Squamish Nation and may derive benefits for both through collaboration and cross-cultural knowledge exchange. The researchers and the Squamish Nation have agreed to enter into this Agreement to set out their rights and obligations with respect to the research project carried out by the researchers in a manner which is mutually respectful, beneficial and acceptable to both Parties.

Language revitalization is a priority for the Skwxwú7mesh people. The Nation's strategic visions include that "the language is used widely and is in a position to be the first language of the community" (Squamish Nation Strategic Plan 2020-2023, page 8). This study directly contributes to this goal by supporting a group of Skwxwú7mesh language learners advance their language proficiency. As the participants of the Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship increase their proficiency, they increase their potential to pass the language on to other community members and to future generations.

The strategies for advancing proficiency that are identified in the study will also be of benefit to other language learners in the future. The researcher intends to create a series of infographics and a strategies guide to be widely distributed amongst Indigenous communities. These will be valuable to learners and teachers of Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim and may also help guide the use of human and financial resources in continuing to strengthen the language in the future.

Method:

This study includes three primary components. Elements of each component will occur simultaneously, rather than in a linear fashion.

1. In-depth review of the literature on advanced language learning
 - Goal: Identify strategies that could be applied in the Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship and similar cases of Indigenous language learning
2. Interviews with up to 10 speakers of Indigenous languages across North America who have already reached advanced proficiency
 - Goal: Identify strategies that Indigenous language learners have successfully used to reach advanced levels which could be applied in the Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship
3. Collaborative activities with the Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship
 - Goal: Provide pedagogical support for the participants; and identify strategies that work for helping them advance their language proficiency.
 - Activities will include:
 - Regular 2 days per week participation/ observation
 - Biweekly meetings in which the researcher shares suggested learning strategies, participants reflect on strategies used to date, and we collaborate to adapt and implement new strategies
 - Individual interviews with participants about their language learning journeys and successful strategies that they have used to date
 - Review of pre- and post- program proficiency testing
 - Concluding interviews with participants about their experiences

Research data will include interview recordings and transcripts; recordings of some of the Stewardship group activities and meetings; and detailed field notes taken throughout all research activities. The researcher will conduct a thematic analysis of these data sources, using a constant comparison approach.

The results of the study will be shared in the following ways: a presentation of the results to the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship; a series of infographics about key findings to share in the wider Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh community; a strategies guide for advanced Indigenous language learning for widespread distribution in the Indigenous language revitalization community; and two articles to be published in relevant academic journals. All of these products will also be put together in a portfolio-style this for the researcher's PhD.

Confidentiality:

Confidential Information means all information of a culturally or community sensitive nature, regardless of its form that has been identified as such and disclosed in confidence by the Squamish Nation to the researchers, except that Confidential Information does not include: (a) information that is received, possessed, or gathered independently by the researchers prior to receipt from the Squamish Nation, other than through prior confidential disclosure by the Squamish Nation; and (b) information that has been, or becomes, published or available to the general public, other than as a result of a disclosure by the researchers in violation of this Agreement.

All Confidential Information provided to the researchers, the Investigator and their research team by the Squamish Nation under this Agreement and the Project will be held by the Receiving Parties, in confidence and will not be disclosed except: (a) with the written consent of an authorized representative of the Squamish Nation; and (b) if required by law. If any of the Receiving Parties become legally obligated to disclose any of the Confidential Information, the Receiving Parties will provide the Squamish Nation with prompt written notice (except where prohibited by applicable law) and use good faith efforts to provide the Squamish Nation an opportunity to seek a protective order or other appropriate remedy to protect the disclosure of the Confidential Information. The Receiving Parties will be permitted to only disclose Confidential Information to their employees, agents, and representatives with a need to know for the purposes of this Agreement or the Project and who are subject to the same duties of confidentiality.

The researchers will obtain verbal consent from each Squamish Nation member who shares Data during this project. The researchers has developed a participant consent form approved by the Squamish Nation.

Disposition of Data and Samples:

As between the Parties, the Squamish Nation retains exclusive ownership of, and the sole right to reproduce any Indigenous Knowledge shared with/or identified by the Investigator and their research team during the Project. The Investigator does not anticipate collecting this type of information as the research primarily involves eliciting participants' personal stories and experiences.

The Squamish Nation grants the researchers the rights to use the Indigenous Knowledge solely for the purposes of carrying out the Project during the time period of five (5) years thereafter, in order to allow for the completion of the research and/or publication of findings arising from the Project.

The researchers shall not infringe the Moral Rights of the Squamish Nation by modifying or adapting the Indigenous Knowledge without the prior written consent of the Squamish Nation and the researchers shall further attribute ownership of the Indigenous Knowledge to the Squamish Nation in all publications thereof.

As this research involves collecting personal data and information from participants, within a period of six (6) months following the completion of the research Project, or early termination, the Investigator will provide each participant with a final copy of their Data . Following a period of five (5) years from the completion of the Project, the Investigator will delete their research copies of the Data.

Dispute Resolution:

In the event that a dispute arises out of, or relates to this research project, both parties agree to adhere to the principles articulated in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and the principles of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP™), and Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) and to ensure those principles are upheld.

In the spirit of reconciliation and the affirmation of Squamish Nation indigenous rights, the parties agree that deference should be shown to the Squamish Nation and commit to upholding the principles of UNDRIP, OCAP and FPIC in any dispute that may arise. Both parties agree to attempt to settle any dispute in good faith. The parties agree to follow any form of indigenous dispute resolution process identified by the Squamish Nation, and any resolution arising from the indigenous dispute resolution process shall be binding upon the parties. If the indigenous dispute resolution process does not successfully resolve the dispute, upon consent of both parties, the parties will then participate in a

mediation administered by an agreed upon neutral party before resorting to arbitration, litigation, or other mutually agreed upon dispute resolution procedure.

Risks and Mitigation:

- 1) How does the Institution provide coverage for researchers/investigators conducting Institution-sanctioned and approved business?

The researcher's activities are covered by the University of Victoria's insurance program, details of which can be found here:

<https://www.uvic.ca/financialplanning/risk/insurance/index.php>

- 2) Identify if there would be coverage for a Squamish Nation staff member or volunteer engaged with conducting Institution-sanctioned and approved business and, if so, please explain.

N/A

Indemnity:

The researchers agree to indemnify the Squamish Nation against and hold the Nation harmless from all costs, claims, judgments, and any other expenses (including legal fees) arising as a result of any damage to the property or physical injury, including death of any of Researcher or Nation employee(s), agent(s) or sub-contractor(s) while on the Nation premises, property or lands during the performance of this project's research.

Funding/Budget:

The researcher has received the following funding support:

2021-2022: University of Victoria, Howard E. Petch Research Scholarships (\$5,000)

2019-2023: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, Joseph Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship (\$35,000/ year)

Cultural Sensitivity Training:

The researcher has been working in the field of Indigenous language revitalization for nine years, including two years working with Kwi Awt Stelmexw, a community organization dedicated to promoting Skwxwú7mesh language and culture. Since 2015, she has been in close contact, and maintained good relationships, with members of the Skwxwú7mesh language community, including participants in the Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship. Through this work and these relationships, she has learned about Skwxwú7mesh history, values, and ways of being. The researcher has also completed

coursework for a doctoral program which included Education Research Methods, Foundations in Indigenous Language Revitalization, and Indigenous Worldviews. Her second doctoral candidacy exam responded to the question: Explain how Indigenous methodologies can/should inform the work of non-Indigenous scholars working with Indigenous communities in Indigenous language revitalization. She has also completed the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans tutorial Course on Research Ethics (TCPS2-CORE).

Equity:

No exercise of a specific right or remedy by any Party precludes it from or prejudices it in exercising another right or pursuing another remedy or maintaining an action to which it may otherwise be entitled either at law or in equity.

Consent:

The participants of the Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship were first introduced to the research proposal in the summer of 2021. At that time, they expressed their interest in participating in the research upon receiving ethical approval from the University of Victoria. Once ethical approval was received, the researcher convened a meeting with the participants to review the proposal again and present the group verbal consent form. This meeting took place on December 16, 2022. The researcher read through the form with the group and answered their questions. She then obtained verbal consent from all participants who were present. Any participants who were not present were contacted individually and either gave consent in writing or verbally on another occasion.

Individual interviews have been conducted with ten of the participants. A verbal consent form for the interview was presented and read through with the participant and their consent was obtained before beginning the interview. This will be the process for future interviews, and it is also the process for interviews with advanced speakers of other languages.

The verbal consent forms explain that participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and provides them with details about how to do so. It also indicates that they will have an opportunity to review the interview transcripts, at which time they will be given another opportunity to indicate their consent for use of their information in the study. The researcher will also check in regularly with the participants of the Stewardship group about their ongoing interest in participating in the study, making it clear that they, individually or as a group, can withdraw from the study at any time.

Empowerment:

The collaborative activities with the Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship support the Squamish Nation members involved to take ownership over their language learning, and to take action to increase their language proficiency. Interviews with these participants also provide space for reflecting positively on their experiences and to make a valuable contribution to their learning group, as well as to future learners of Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim. The results of the study will also provide ideas to support any learner of Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim in the future. Finally, a Skwxwú7mesh graphic designer will be sought to support the development of the infographics and strategies guide.

Data Ownership/Intellectual Property Rights:

As this research involves collecting participants personal data and information, the Squamish Nation members participating in the research retain exclusive ownership of their Data shared with and collected by the researchers during the project under this Agreement. The Squamish Nation grants the researchers the rights to use Data solely for the research and scholarly purposes defined in the Project.

A final copy of each individual member's Data must be provided to that member within six (6) months of the completion of the Project. Following a period of five (5) years from the completion of the Project, the Data must be deleted.

Post-Secondary Institution Approval:

[Collaborative Research Agreements with post-secondary institutions (e.g., colleges, institutes, institutions, and universities) require institutional review and approval. A final copy of this approval must be provided to the Squamish Nation via email prior to the onset of the research.]

This research has been approved by the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics. Protocol Number: 21-0183.

Supporting Documents:

The following documents have been combined into a single PDF attached with the submission of this CRA:

- Letter of Approval from Kwi Awt Stelmexw
- Letter of Approval from Tsleil-Waututh Nation
- Letter of Approval from University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Board
- Group verbal consent form
- Individual verbal consent form
- Researcher CV

Appendix B: Human Research Ethics Certificate



Office of Research Services | Human Research Ethics Board
 Michael Williams Building Rm B202 PO Box 1700 STN CSC Victoria BC V8W 2Y2 Canada
 T 250-472-4545 | F 250-721-8960 | uvic.ca/research | ethics@uvic.ca

Certificate of Approval

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------|
| PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR | Onowa Melvor (Supervisor) | ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER | 21-0183 |
| PRINCIPAL APPLICANT | Nicki Benson PhD student | Expedited review - delegated | |
| UVIC DEPARTMENT | Indigenous Education INED | ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE | 02-Dec-2021 |
| | | APPROVED ON | 02-Dec-2021 |
| | | APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE | 01-Dec-2022 |

PROJECT TITLE Adult Indigenous language learning: From intermediate to advanced language proficiency and beyond

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS
Ewa Czaykowska-Higgins - Committee member, UVIC

DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), University of Victoria

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL
 210826 Stewardship approval email.pdf - 13-Oct-2021
 tops2_core_certificate.pdf - 15-Oct-2021
 KAS Board Letter for Nicki Benson.pdf - 17-Oct-2021
 Sample interview questions.docx - 05-Nov-2021
 Verbal consent form - Group 1 interview - updateNov4.docx - 05-Nov-2021
 Verbal Consent Form - Group 2 interview.docx - 05-Nov-2021
 Verbal Consent Form - Group 2 SSSP.docx - 05-Nov-2021
 Observation guide.docx - 08-Nov-2021

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.

Modifications
To make any changes to the approved research procedures in your study, please submit a "Request for Modification" form. You must receive ethics approval before proceeding with your modified protocol.

Renewals
Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.

Project Closures
When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.

Certification

This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Participants.

Appendix C: Verbal Consent Forms

Verbal Consent Form for Interviews with Advanced Speakers

Project title: Adult Indigenous language learning: From intermediate to advanced language proficiency and beyond

I have written the following script in the way that I will speak to participants: in a conversational tone appropriate given our existing connections and relationships.

ÍY SÇÁCEL, Ha7lh Skwáyel. I am very happy to speak with you today. Thank you for considering sharing your experiences about advanced Indigenous language learning with me. As a token of my appreciation, I have a small gift for you. This gift is yours to keep even if we do not complete this interview, and if you choose not to have your information included in the study in the end.

As you know, I am a PhD student at the University of Victoria and my research is focussed on how Indigenous language learners can progress their proficiency from intermediate to advanced levels and beyond.

My academic supervisor is Dr. Onowa McIvor. I am going to email you a copy of this form [or: will leave a copy of this paper with you] so that you have her contact information if you want to talk to her about my research or if you want to withdraw from the study at any time and would like to talk to her directly.

Dr. Onowa McIvor
Professor, Indigenous Education, University of Victoria
omcivor@uvic.ca | 250-853-3150

My contact information is on this sheet too.

Nicki Benson
PhD candidate, Faculty of Education, University of Victoria
nickibenson@uvic.ca | 604-657-3300

I believe that adult Indigenous language speakers are essential for language revitalization, as they are the ones who can pass the language on to future generations. There is very little research on how adult Indigenous language learners can progress to high levels of proficiency, and I think this research will make an important contribution.

Participation:

I am asking you to participate in this study because you are an advanced speaker of your language. Your participation is voluntary and whether you choose to participate will have no effect on our relationship or your relationship with anyone at the university. You can decline to answer any of the interview questions or withdraw from the study at any time.

Procedures:

There are two parts to this study. The first is interviews with advanced language speakers such as yourself. The second is an action research project with a group of learners of Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim, the Squamish language, who are currently working on moving from intermediate to advanced levels. I plan to share promising strategies from these interviews and from the literature with the Skwxwú7mesh group. I will then collaborate with them to adapt, try out, and reflect on some of those strategies.

I plan for our interview to take between 1 and 2 hours today, depending on how much you'd like to share. I would like to record the interview to be able to transcribe and analyze your sharing later. You will have the opportunity to review and make changes on any parts before I use them. I will be in touch to schedule another meeting for that when the time comes. That meeting should be about an hour too.

Benefits:

I hope you will find our conversations enjoyable, and that they'll provide you with some space to reflect positively on your experiences. I know that what you share will be so valuable for the Skwxwú7mesh group who are working hard to advance their proficiency levels, as well as to other Indigenous language practitioners everywhere who are working to do the same.

Risks:

I can't think of any risks to you associated with participating in this study. If you feel uncomfortable with one of the interview questions, or don't want to answer for whatever reason, just say "skip" and we will move on to the next one.

Withdrawal of participation:

You can also withdraw from the project at any time. You can just let me or Onowa know that you no longer want to participate. In that case, I wouldn't use the information from your interview unless you tell me it is ok to do so.

Continued or on-going consent:

When we meet again to review the data, I will check again to make sure it's ok for me to include the information you have shared with me.

Anonymity and confidentiality:

You have the option to remain anonymous in the sharing of the research results. Of course, since we are talking right now, you can't be anonymous to me. [If applicable: also, because there are so few advanced speakers of your language, it is possible that others from your community

would be able to identify you even if we don't use your name]. But we can use a pseudonym for you in sharing the research results if you would like to remain anonymous.

As you are an inspiring leader and important contributor in Indigenous language revitalization, I would be happy to honour and thank you by sharing your name in the research products. But, it is completely up to you whether you want to be named.

Research results will be used in the following ways:

As mentioned, I plan to share some ideas from the interviews with the Słkwxwú7mesh group throughout my time working with them. I also plan to share the results in the following ways: a series of infographics and a presentation about the Słkwxwú7mesh program that might speak to the strategies we've learned from the interviews; a strategies guide for advanced Indigenous language learning for widespread distribution in the Indigenous language revitalization community; and two articles to be published in relevant academic journals. All these products will also be put together in a portfolio-style thesis for my PhD.

Data storage and disposal:

When this project is done, I will offer you your original interview recordings and transcripts. If you do not want them, I will dispose of them. I will also dispose of any notes I took about the interview and any other information pertaining to this interview.

Questions or concerns:

Do you have any questions at all about what I've said? If you have any questions after we talk today, please give me a call or email. You can also contact Onowa or the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria whose information is also on this form.

*Human Research Ethics Office
University of Victoria
ethics@uvic.ca | (250) 472-4545*

Consent:

OK, now for the consent questions. I will note your answers for my records:

(Researcher to circle yes or no to indicate choice)

Do you consent to participate in this interview? Yes/ No

Audio/video recorded interview:

(Researcher to circle yes or no to indicate choice)

Do you agree to me recording our interview today for use in data analysis? Yes/ No

Confidentiality:

(Researcher to circle “real name” or “pseudonym” to indicate choice)

Would you prefer to be acknowledged by your real name or be anonymous for this project?

Real name / Pseudonym

(Researcher to circle “researcher to choose” or “participant to choose” to indicate choice, and add preferred pseudonym if applicable)

If you prefer to use a pseudonym, do you have one in mind or would you prefer I choose one for you?

Researcher to choose / participant to choose: _____

Verbal Group Consent Form for Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship

Project title: Adult Indigenous language learning: From intermediate to advanced language proficiency and beyond

I have written the following script in the way that I will speak to participants: in a conversational tone appropriate given our existing connections and relationships.

Ha7lh Skwáyel. I am very happy to speak with you today. Thank you for considering participating in this research project. As a token of my appreciation, I have a small gift for each of you that I will be sending your way [or: here is a small gift]. This gift is yours to keep even if we do not complete this study, and if you choose not to have your information included in the study in the end.

As you know, I am a PhD student at the University of Victoria and my research is focussed on how Indigenous language learners can progress their proficiency from intermediate to advanced levels and beyond.

My academic supervisor is Dr. Onowa McIvor. I am going to email you a copy of this form [or: I will leave a copy of this paper with you] so that you have her contact information if you want to talk to her about my research or if you want to withdraw from the study at any time and would like to talk to her directly.

Dr. Onowa McIvor
Professor, Indigenous Education, University of Victoria
omcivor@uvic.ca / 250-853-3150

My contact information is on this sheet too.

Nicki Benson
PhD candidate, Faculty of Education, University of Victoria
nickibenson@uvic.ca / 604-657-3300

I believe that adult Indigenous language speakers are essential for language revitalization, as they are the ones who can pass the language on to future generations. There is very little research on how adult Indigenous language learners can progress to high levels of proficiency, and I think this research will make an important contribution.

Participation:

I am asking you to participate in this study because you are actively working on advancing your proficiency in Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim. Your participation in the study is voluntary and whether you choose to participate will have no effect on our relationship or your relationship with anyone at the university. Individually or collectively, you can choose not to participate in any of the research activities or to withdraw from the study at any time.

Procedures:

There are several activities involved in this study. First, I have done a lot of reading about advanced language learning, and I am starting to interview speakers of other Indigenous languages that have already reached advanced levels. I plan to share promising language learning strategies from the readings and interviews with you, and to work together with you to adapt, try out, and reflect on those strategies. I am hoping that we can incorporate bi-weekly or monthly meetings for this work during the regular hours of the Stewardship Program.

I am also hoping to do an interview with each of you as soon as possible to talk about your language learning journey and the strategies that have worked well for you, as well as a follow-up interview with each of you when the Stewardship Program winds down in the spring. I anticipate these interviews to be about 1 hour each. If you're comfortable with it, I'd also like to look at the results of your oral proficiency interviews from the beginning of the program and compare them to your results at the end of the program. I will ask you each for consent for this when we do the interviews.

Finally, I plan to spend as much time as possible with you between now and the end of the program, observing and participating in regular activities. This will be to understand what strategies you are using and how they are working, but also to be able to share the story of this program with others who are also trying to advance their Indigenous languages. Occasionally, I may ask to record the group activities to be able to review the recordings later during data analysis. If I want to use any of the images or recordings when sharing the research results, I will seek your consent again for that.

Benefits:

I hope you will find our time together enjoyable and helpful. I hope the interviews will provide you with space to reflect positively on your experiences, and that our regular meetings and collaboration will contribute to your proficiency development. The primary goal of this research project is to support you as a group reach your goals of advanced language proficiency. I also know that what we learn will be valuable to other Indigenous language practitioners everywhere who are working to do the same.

Risks:

I can't think of any risks to you associated with participating in this study.

Withdrawal of participation:

If you are not happy with a certain aspect of the study, please let me or Onowa know, and we will make the appropriate adjustments. You can also choose to opt out of any aspect of the study, or to withdraw completely at any time. If you withdraw, I will not use the information I've gathered from you unless you tell me it is ok to do so.

Continued or on-going consent:

During our regular meetings, I will check in periodically to make sure that everything is going well, and that you are still happy to participate in the study. When we meet for our individual interviews, I will also check with each of you to make sure it's ok for me to include your individual information in the study.

Anonymity and confidentiality:

You have the option to remain anonymous in the sharing of the research results. Of course, since we are talking right now, you can't be anonymous to me. Also, other people who know about this program may be able to identify you even if we don't use your names. But we can use a pseudonym for any of you in sharing the research results if you would like to remain anonymous.

As you are an inspiring leaders and important contributors in Sḱw̱x̱wú7mesh language revitalization, I would be happy to honour and thank each of you by sharing your names in the research products. But it is completely up to you whether you want to be named. I will ask you during our individual interviews, or arrange another time to ask you, about whether you want to be named.

Research results will be used in the following ways:

I plan to share the results of this study in the following ways: a presentation of the results for you, KAS, and anyone else you would like to invite; a series of infographics about key findings to share in the wider Sḱw̱x̱wú7mesh language community; a strategies guide for advanced Indigenous language learning for widespread distribution in the Indigenous language revitalization community; and two articles to be published in relevant academic journals. All these products will also be put together in a portfolio-style thesis for my PhD.

Data storage and disposal:

When this project is done, I will offer each of you your original interview recordings and transcripts. If you do not want them, I will dispose of them. I will also dispose of all other notes and information pertaining to this study.

Questions or concerns:

Do you have any questions at all about what I've said? If you have any questions after we talk today, please give me a call or email. You can also contact Onowa or the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria whose information is also on this form.

Human Research Ethics Office
University of Victoria
ethics@uvic.ca | (250) 472-4545

Consent:

In a minute, I am going to ask you for collective consent to do the main research activities which are the regular meetings to review language learning strategies and me regularly observing the activities of the Stewardship Program. I will also ask for consent to contact you for individual interviews, and about recording and future data use. During the individual interviews, I will seek your individual consent to use the interview information, to review your OPIs, and also about using your names or not.

(Researcher to circle yes or no to indicate choice)

Do you consent to participate in the primary activities of this study which are the language learning strategies meetings and regular program observation?

Yes/ No

Do you consent to me contacting each of you to arrange individual interviews?

Yes/ No

Audio/video recorded interview:

(Researcher to circle yes or no to indicate choice)

Do you agree to me periodically recording group activities for use in data analysis?

Yes/ No

Verbal Consent Form for Individual Interviews with Members of the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh

Sníchim Stewardship

Project title: Adult Indigenous language learning: From intermediate to advanced language proficiency and beyond

I have written the following script in the way that I will speak to participants: in a conversational tone appropriate given our existing connections and relationships.

Ha7lh Skwáyel. I am very happy to speak with you today. Thank you for considering doing an interview with me. As you know, this interview is part of the study I am doing with the Stewardship Program on advanced Indigenous language proficiency. I went over the details of the study with the group on [DATE].

I'll remind you that my academic supervisor at the University is Dr. Onowa McIvor. I am going to email you a copy of this form [or: I will leave a copy of this paper with you] so that you have her contact information if you want to talk to her about my research or if you want to withdraw from the study at any time and would like to talk to her directly.

Dr. Onowa McIvor
Professor, Indigenous Education, University of Victoria
omcivor@uvic.ca | 250-853-3150

My contact information is on this sheet too.

Nicki Benson
PhD candidate, Faculty of Education, University of Victoria
nickibenson@uvic.ca | 604-657-3300

Participation:

I am asking you to participate in this interview because you are a participant in the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship Program. Your participation in the study is voluntary and whether you choose to participate will have no effect on our relationship or your relationship with anyone at the university. You can decline to answer any of the interview questions or withdraw from the study at any time.

Procedures:

During this interview, I will ask you questions about your language learning journey, and about the specific language learning strategies and other factors that have contributed positively to your learning so far. I plan for our interview to take about an hour, depending on how much you'd like to share. I would like to record the interview to be able to transcribe and analyze your sharing later. You will have the opportunity to review and make changes on any parts of your interview before I use them in the sharing the results of the research.

I would also like to have a look at your pre- and post- program OPI results. These would not be linked directly to you in sharing the research results. For example, I might say something like “3 participants started at this level and graduated at that level” but I wouldn’t identify who those participants were.

Benefits:

I hope you will find our conversations enjoyable, and that they’ll provide you with some space to reflect positively on your experiences. What you share will be valuable for informing our work together with the group, and I know it will also be valuable for other Indigenous language practitioners everywhere who are also working on advanced language proficiency.

Risks:

I can’t think of any risks to you associated with participating in this study. If you feel uncomfortable with one of the interview questions, or don’t want to answer for whatever reason, just say “skip” and we will move on to the next one.

Withdrawal of participation:

You can also withdraw from the study at any time, even after we complete the interview. You can just let me or Onowa know that you no longer want to participate. In that case, I wouldn’t use the information from your interview unless you tell me it is ok to do so.

Continued or on-going consent:

At the end of the Stewardship Program activities, I’ll be contacting you again for a follow up interview. I will check again then to make sure it’s ok for me to include the information you’ve shared with me.

Anonymity and confidentiality:

You have the option to remain anonymous in the sharing of the research results. Of course, since we are talking right now, you can’t be anonymous to me. Also, other people in the program or who know about this program may be able to identify you even if we don’t use your name. But we can use a pseudonym for any of you in sharing the research results if you would like to remain anonymous.

As you are an inspiring leader and important contributor in Skwxwú7mesh language revitalization, I would be happy to honour and thank you by sharing your name in the research products. But, it is completely up to you whether you want to be named.

Research results will be used in the following ways:

I plan to share the results of this study in the following ways: a presentation of the results for you, KAS, and anyone else you would like to invite; a series of infographics about key findings to share in the wider Skwxwú7mesh language community; a strategies guide for advanced Indigenous language learning for widespread distribution in the Indigenous language

revitalization community; and two articles to be published in relevant academic journals. All these products will also be put together in a portfolio-style thesis for my PhD.

Data storage and disposal:

When this project is done, I will offer you your original interview recordings and transcripts. If you do not want them, I will dispose of them. I will also dispose of any notes I took about the interview and any other information pertaining to this interview.

Questions or concerns:

Do you have any questions at all about what I've said? If you have any questions after we talk today, please give me a call or email. You can also contact Onowa or the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria whose information is also on this form.

Human Research Ethics Office
University of Victoria
ethics@uvic.ca | (250) 472-4545

Consent:

OK, now for the consent questions. I will note your answers for my records:

(Researcher to circle yes or no to indicate choice)

Do you consent to participate in this interview? Yes/ No

Do you agree to me reviewing your pre-program and post-program OPI results? Yes/No

Audio/video recorded interview:

(Researcher to circle yes or no to indicate choice)

Do you agree to me recording our interview today for use in data analysis? Yes/ No

Confidentiality:

(Researcher to circle "real name" or "pseudonym" to indicate choice)

Would you prefer to be acknowledged by your real name or be anonymous for this project?

Real name / Pseudonym

(Researcher to circle "researcher to choose" or "participant to choose" to indicate choice, and add preferred pseudonym if applicable)

If you prefer to use a pseudonym, do you have one in mind or would you prefer I choose one for you?

Researcher to choose / participant to choose: _____

Appendix D: Summarized ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines

Summarized ACTFL Speaking Proficiency Levels*

| ACTFL Level | Features of Speaker Performance |
|---------------------|---|
| Novice | Speech limited to memorized words, phrases, and interactions |
| Novice Low | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce memorized words and phrases such as basic greetings but cannot understand enough to sustain conversation |
| Novice Mid | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate minimally using isolated words and memorized phrases • Can respond to basic questions with short answers |
| Novice High | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes but not consistently maintain simple conversation • Communicate via a combination of learned utterances and spontaneous language in the present |
| Intermediate | Can create with language, ask and answer simple questions on familiar topics, and handle a simple situation or transaction |
| Intermediate Low | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate successfully in a limited number of uncomplicated situations around predictable topics • Able to ask basic questions |
| Intermediate Mid | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate successfully in a variety of uncomplicated situations • Maintain simple conversation and ask a variety of questions • Produce complete sentences or strings of sentences in present tense |
| Intermediate High | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Converse with ease and confidence when dealing with routine tasks and social situations • Narrate and describe in major time frames (past/present/future) using paragraph-length discourse, but not all the time |
| Advanced | Can narrate and describe in past, present, and future time/aspect, and handle a complicated situation or transaction |
| Advanced Low | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handle most informal and some formal conversations around topics of personal and community interest • Narrate and describe in all major time frames using paragraph-length discourse • Contribute to the conversation with accuracy, clarity, and precision • Understood by native speakers unaccustomed to dealing with language learners, though this may require some repetition or restatement |

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| Advanced Mid | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handle a large number of communicative tasks with ease • Narrate and describe in all major time frames using paragraph-length discourse, interweaving narration and description to relate relevant information and give a full account • Can handle linguistic challenges presented by a complication or unexpected turn of events • Understood by native speakers unaccustomed to dealing with language learners |
| Advanced High | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handle communicative tasks with ease and confidence • Narrate fully and describe in detail in all time frames using paragraph-length discourse • Express opinions providing structured arguments to support opinions, and can discuss some abstract or controversial topics • Communicate with fluency and ease of speech, use paraphrasing and other strategies to compensate for any gaps in lexical knowledge |
| Superior | Can support opinions, hypothesize, discuss abstract topics, and handle a linguistically unfamiliar situation |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate with accuracy and fluency on a variety of topics in formal and informal settings • Discuss complex matters in detail including abstract or controversial topics, providing lengthy and coherent narrations with ease, fluency, and accuracy • May make sporadic errors but these do not interfere with communication |

***Adapted from:**

<https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/guidelines/ACTFLProficiencyGuidelines2012.pdf>

<https://oralproficiency.coerll.utexas.edu/oral-proficiency-levels/>

<https://www.cde.state.co.us/standardsandinstruction/profscalew1>

Appendix E: Sample Interview Questions & Observation Guide

Sample Interview Questions for Interviews with Advanced Speakers

1. Tell me about your background with your language.
2. What kinds of language classes or programs have you participated in? Did any of these classes or programs stand out? In what ways?
3. Can you tell me about specific teaching methods or strategies used in those classes or programs that worked well for you?
4. Have you engaged in informal language learning as well? Can you tell me about specific methods or strategies you have used informally that have worked well for you?
5. At what point do you think you moved from an intermediate level to an advanced level in the language? How did you know? Was there anything specific that helped you get to that advanced level?
6. What do you think are some of the factors that have allowed you to reach your proficiency level?
7. What do you do now to maintain your language level?
8. What advice would you offer to other Indigenous language learners trying to get beyond intermediate proficiency to advanced levels?

Sample Interview Questions for Interviews with Members of the Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim

Stewardship

Interview 1

1. Tell me about your background with Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim
2. What kinds of language classes or programs have you participated in? Did any of these classes or programs stand out? In what ways?
3. Have you engaged in informal language learning as well? Can you tell me about specific methods or strategies you have used informally that have worked well for you?
4. At what point do you think you moved from a beginner level to an intermediate level in the language? How did you know? Was there anything specific that helped you get to that intermediate level?
5. How did you come to be part of the Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship Program?
6. What kinds of methods or strategies are working well for you in this program?
7. Besides specific language learning strategies, is there anything you really like that you do in the Stewardship Program or about how the program operates?
8. What are you hoping to achieve during your time with the Stewardship Program?
9. Have you thought about what you might do after the program ends?
10. What are your hopes for your own language learning in the future?

Interview 2

1. What are some general reflections you have of your experience in the Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim Stewardship Program?
2. What are some examples of how your language proficiency has improved over the course of the program? Were there things you couldn't do at the beginning of the program that you can do now?
3. Did you find your progress to be the same, slower, or faster during this program than with other programs in the past?
4. What do you think are some of the methods or activities that most contributed to your language learning? Why do you think these methods or activities worked best?
5. Do you find yourself speaking Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim more now in your daily life than before the program? When? With who?
6. Do you plan to continue working on your language learning? How?

Observation Guide

Date:

Location:

| Time | Number of participants | Activity title | Chronology | Methods/ strategies | Notes & observations |
|-------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
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