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Indigenous language persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic: Individual and community efforts keep our languages strong.

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INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES PERSISTENCE

DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC:

Individual and community efforts keep our languages strong

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Shifts in ILR Work

Practitioners saw the way forward was to shift and adapt language work to ensure community health and safety.

- Significant drop in school-based activities (50% to 14%)
- Drop in community-based activities (51% to 21%)
- Home-based activities remained stable (52% to 49%)
- Largest increase in online learning activities, nearly double (from 37% to 76%)

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New Technologies, New Strategies

Communities reported using new technologies (63%) and developing new strategies (56%) for online learning & teaching during the pandemic. Examples included:

- hosting virtual circle times for children
- sending packages and books to family learning pods
- involving youth in creating online language resources
- live stream adult language classes across vast geographic distances

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Caring for Elders & Youth

- Protecting Elders who were most at risk to the virus, became paramount
- Supporting Elders in new online work ensured ILR continued in a safe way
- Youth also needed support through the ever-changing circumstances of their lives
- While following public health guidelines, people gathered – at times – in safe 'bubbles' or pods

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Returning to the Land

- The pandemic brought unexpected opportunities for some to (re)turn to land-based language work outside
- Some gathered while socially-distancing outdoors
- Turning to the land and our languages for those in urban areas, brought grounding and joy during a time of missing loved ones and homelands
- Land-based learning provided calmness in a time of great fear

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Promotion of Indigenous Languages Online & Within Communities

Social media was used for sharing language, such as:

- Word of the day
- Words and phrases to describe COVID-19 and related terms like "social distancing" & "mask"
- Virtual scavenger hunts and talent shows
- Hashtag campaigns
#2020IndigenousLanguageChallenge
- Game nights: Virtual Bingo, Wheel of Fortune, Jeopardy

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Creating & Sharing Language Resources as an Alternative Activity

- 59% of participants reported shifting to both creating and distributing resources online
- Communities "dusted off" existing resources that may have been forgotten or were underused, and digitized them for language learner's use
- Shared stories, hymns, lessons, video files, word lists/phrases and labelled images

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Some Challenges Communities Faced

- Lack of reliable Internet
- Difficult to learn and teach in virtual spaces
- Difficult to gauge the impact of online content shared
- Training to use the technology & software, while apart
- Online does not totally substitute for face-to-face learning, some language work cannot be replicated in a virtual environment
- Sense of loss, so much of the beauty of language learning is with Elders & in-person language work

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Reflecting: (Re-)envisioning Language Education & Pedagogy

- What implications might effect language revival work for years to come?
- What did we learn that is worth holding onto? (Many communities expressed the value in taking time to plan and further focus on resource dev.)
- What strategies can be adjusted for an online format [one-on-one work with Elders, learning on the land, work involving relationship building]?

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Looking Forward

By continuing the work during a global pandemic, our languages offered comfort and encouragement. Our languages hold the grief and the joy we carry as we persist all that is lost and gained during this time.

Like beadwork, an art form that master beaders remind us – the language will outlive us all.

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Indigenous Language Work Persisted During the C-19 Pandemic

Achónna'chi (Chikashshanompa) "Keep going"
 ᑎᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦ ᑎᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦ (nehiyawewin)
 "All of you persevere"
 lonkwahkátste (Kanien'kóha) "We are resilient"
 Ha'na'na (Kwakwaka) "Keep doing what you are doing"

How language revitalization practitioners, learners, teachers and Elders shifted strategies during the C-19 pandemic



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