

A GUIDE TO

LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION

PROMISING EDUCATION PRACTICES
FOR CONSIDERATION BY FIRST NATIONS SCHOOLS



fnesc



FNSA



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A Guide to Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices for Consideration by First Nations Schools

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	i
Introduction	1
Purpose of this resource	3
Community Language Mobilization	5
2.1 What is community language mobilization and why is it important?	5
2.2 What are some considerations and challenges related to community mobilization?	7
Land-Based Learning and Teaching	13
3.1 What is land-based learning and why is it important?	13
3.2 What are some considerations and challenges related to land-based learning?	14
3.3 What can help promote land-based learning?	16
Learning from Elders	21
4.1 Why is it important to invite Elders to participate in school-based language learning?	21
4.2 What are some considerations related to Elder involvement in school-based language programs?	22
4.3 What are some suggestions for involving Elders in your language programs?	24
Integrating Technology into Language Teaching and Learning	29
5.1 What are language technologies and how can they be effectively integrated into teaching?	29
5.2 What are some considerations and challenges related to integrating technology into language teaching?	31
5.3 What are some examples of effective language education technologies?	33
5.4 Assessing the use of technologies	34
Early Childhood – K4 and K5 Programming	37
6.1 Why is early childhood an important domain for language revitalization?	37
6.2 What language learning options are there in early education?	37
6.3 What are some considerations or challenges for K4 and K5 language programs?	38
6.4 What are some promising practices to consider in designing an early language program?	39

Adult Education	41
7.1 Why is adult education an important domain for language revitalization?	41
7.2 What types of language learning options are there for adult learners?	42
7.3 What are some considerations and challenges related to adult education?	43
7.4 What are some promising practices to consider in designing adult education programs?	44
7.5 What are some examples of successful adult education programs?	45
Transitioning to Language Immersion	47
8.1 What is language immersion and what does it mean to transition to immersion?	47
8.2 What are some considerations or challenges related to transitioning to language immersion?	48
8.3 What are some successful strategies for transitioning to immersion?	49
Collaborating For Success	53
9.1 Working With Linguists	55
9.2 How can linguists support First Nations language teaching and learning?	56
9.3 What are some considerations and challenges related to collaborating with linguists?	56
9.4 What are some examples of collaboration between linguists and language teachers?	58
9.4.1 Questionnaire for Linguists	58
Succession Planning	61
10.1 What is succession planning and why is it important?	61
10.2 What are some considerations or challenges related to succession planning?	62
10.3 What are some promising practices to consider in succession planning?	65
Conclusions	67
APPENDIX: Acknowledgements – Biographies	69
Bibliography	75

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The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNEsc) is committed to supporting First Nations in their efforts to improve the success of all First Nations students in BC. FNEsc facilitates collaborative services related to advocacy, research, professional development, program administration, and information sharing. See www.fnesec.ca



The First Nations Schools Association (FNsa) represents First Nations controlled schools in BC and has a mandate to support those schools in creating effective, nurturing, and linguistically and culturally appropriate education environments that provide students with a positive foundation in all academic areas. More information is available at www.fnsa.ca.

INTRODUCTION

“One of our Elders said, ‘KELÁT, NETE SCÁCEL SE CS JELÁNEW TTE STELITKEL CS
ĆOČES TTE SKÁL LTE. One day, we will hear our children speaking our language
again.’ It’s happening now, which is pretty amazing.”

SXEDT̥ELISIYE Renee Sampson

“Language revitalization is an initiative to restore our connection to the land, to the
language, to our people.”

Peetah Bastien

First Nations across Canada are striving to revitalize their languages and language fluency in their communities. First Nations languages and cultures are central to First Nations’ distinctive laws, traditions, and ways of life. First Nations’ connections to their lands are embedded in their languages.

One of the most important points made by the Elders was that language, culture, spiritual values and our sense of identity are inseparable concepts. Elder Shirley Williams stated this emphatically as follows: “Language and culture cannot be separate from each other – if they are, the language only becomes a tool, a thing ... Our language and culture are our identity and tell us who we are, where we came from and where we are going.”

Towards a New Beginning. A Foundational Report for a Strategy to Revitalize First Nation, Inuit and Métis Languages and Cultures. Report to the Minister of Canadian Heritage by the Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures. 2005. www.afn.ca.

Our language connects us to our land. It connects us to the source of our knowledge. Language is not a tool; it is our identity.

**Feedback from a 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices**

As set out in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems, and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons. First Nations inherent rights to language are constitutionally pro-

tected, and are recognized by the Government of Canada in the federal Indigenous Languages Act, S.C. 2019, c.23.

We are the First Peoples — our languages and cultures are the first languages and cultures of this country and must be accorded that status at every level of government, in the community and in our homes.

Towards a New Beginning. A Foundational Report for a Strategy to Revitalize First Nation, Inuit and Métis Languages and Cultures.
Report to the Minister of Canadian Heritage by the Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures. 2005. www.afn.ca.

The *BC Tripartite Education Agreement: Supporting First Nation Student Success* (BCTEA), signed in July 2018 by the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC), the Province of BC and Canada, and witnessed by the First Nations Schools Association (FNSA), acknowledges that the revitalization, preservation and maintenance of First Nations languages is integral to the well-being of First Nations people. As stated in BCTEA, First Nations have long maintained the following principles:

- a) First Nation students, at all levels of education, must have access to educational opportunities that:
 - i. ensure that they are confident in their self-identity, their families, their communities and traditional values, languages and cultures;
 - ii. give them the skills they need to thrive in contemporary society, including 21st century technological skills; and
 - iii. prepare them to access any opportunities they choose for higher learning, employment and life choices.

Research shows that language learning is a strong contributor to the educational achievement of all learners. Research has shown that students who are in language education programs often attain higher rates of educational success in all areas of education. In part, this is because of the positive impacts that language learning has on neurological development. And in part, this is because students reaching high levels of proficiency in their languages may have more self-confidence, a greater sense of identity, and a stronger connection to their communities and cultures – all vital components of school success.

“If a young child can learn more than one language, their cognitive abilities are just advanced from all the neurons that are sparking in their brain; it just helps them. They have a higher success rate of surviving out there in the world.”

Jessica Arnouse

According to the First Peoples Cultural Council's 2022 *Report on the Status of BC's First Nations Languages* (www.fpcc.ca), information submitted by First Nations confirmed that there are 17,103 language learners in BC (12.2% of the population that responded), an increase of 3,106 learners since 2018. In the area of early learning, 2,417 children learn their language in 157 early childhood facilities (language nests, Head Start programs and other centres). The number of language nests **more than tripled** since the FPCC's last report. 1,634 adults participate in a language learning program, including full-time adult immersion pro-

grams. There were only two full-time adult learning programs in 2018, but the 2022 report indicates that there are now eight immersion programs in seven different languages. There has also been an increase of 1,964 learners aged 20–64 since 2018.

The value of language and culture learning opportunities is reflected in the work of First Nation schools, which emphasize and promote First Nations cultures and languages. Most First Nation schools in BC offer some type of distinct language and culture classes, and all of the schools are making efforts to integrate language and culture learning throughout the curriculum. According to data collected by FNEC, in 2021/2022 131 First Nation schools implemented some type of language programming and over 6,800 First Nation school students received language and culture instruction. In the 2021/2022 school year, First Nation schools offered a total of 505 hours of language instruction per week, plus a total of 641 hours of cultural instruction per week. Some First Nation schools have reached, or are seeking to reach, the level of language immersion settings.

“I hope I live long enough to see these kids that are in our immersion school as they graduate and as they fill important roles around the community with language. The seeds are starting to get sown out there.”

Tye Swallow

Purpose of this resource

This resource is intended to supplement other FNEC resources on language revitalization, including McIvor’s (2015) *Reviving Your Language Through Education: B.C. First Nations Language Education Planning Workbook* and Ignace’s (2016) *First Nations Language Curriculum Building Guide*. Those resources describe more comprehensive approaches to planning and curriculum development.

The objective of this resource is to provide an overview of some initiatives First Nation schools representatives, in collaboration with Elders, Knowledge Keepers, language speakers, language champions, advisors, and other community partners, may consider to support language revitalization.

The information presented is informed by four sources:

- i. research related to First Nations language revitalization;
- ii. interviews with language champions from across Canada;
- iii. input from a Focus Group of leaders and First Nation school representatives who reviewed a draft of this resource in February 2023; and
- iv. a review of workplans and final reports submitted by First Nation schools in order to access First Nations Language and Culture Program grants from FNEC and FNSA, as well as follow-up discussions with schools to learn more about relevant activities being implemented by First Nation schools.

This document is structured to describe:

- the importance of some key language revitalization, teaching and learning topics;
- some considerations and challenges associated with implementing activities to address each topic;
- suggestions for effective strategies related to the topics; and
- activities that First Nation schools are implementing to address the teaching and learning topics.

Some of the suggested initiatives may be appropriate for communities and schools that are at earlier stages of planning their language programming. The suggested initiatives may also be adapted for communities and schools that have progressed further on their language revitalization journey. Where possible, a variety of complementary initiatives or projects may be implemented concurrently to address language revitalization in a more holistic way.

It is recognized that each First Nation community and school has different needs and challenges, and there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to language revitalization. Through collaboration and consultations with the broader community, each school language team will determine its own promising practices. All schools and communities are encouraged to adjust these recommendations and ideas to reflect their unique needs.

“There are so many people being creative in utilizing various strategies and technologies. It’s really exciting but it also showcases how we adapt to different situations.”

Dr. Candace Kaleimamoowahinekapu Galla

COMMUNITY LANGUAGE MOBILIZATION

“The main things you need to save your language are community support, a place of learning and speaking, and passionate, committed people. That’s all you need to begin. All we started with was five passionate people, and we said we can do this. We weren’t going to ask for permission.”

SXEDṮELISIYE Renee Sampson

2.1 What is community language mobilization and why is it important?

The term “community mobilization” refers to strategies or initiatives that are intended to increase broad awareness of and involvement in First Nations language programs. Mobilization strategies may involve communicating with parents, other family members, and the broader community about the need for First Nations language revitalization efforts and the value of language learning in schools. Community mobilization also involves providing a wide range of opportunities, so that people are able to engage in various types of language revitalization activities that are right for them.

“This [program] has really been driven by community and that’s the only way that this will work. This allowed us to build a strong partnership – one that really is a partnership.”

Tye Swallow

For language revitalization to succeed, there must be a supportive network of individuals, including community leaders, working together to foster the growth of the language. Community mobilization is a critical step towards building this network. Community mobilization efforts also build a stronger sense of “community ownership” of the language and language learning opportunities.

In the context of First Nations language education, there are several considerations related to community mobilization that are important.

2.1.1 Children learn best when they are supported in their language learning by their families.

Educators and researchers have observed a strong correlation between children’s success in First Nations language learning and the degree of family involvement. When parents and other family members are committed to and involved in their children’s language learning, children gain more insight into their cultures, values, and identities, they create deeper family bonds, and they attain higher levels of proficiency in their language.

It should be noted that this does not mean that families have to know the language themselves in order to provide valuable support to their children. Parents and families are fundamental to children developing self-confidence and a positive self-identity. Parents and families transmit their values and culture to their children, which is key to their overall development and educational success. By simply demonstrating that they support and value their children's learning, families help their children be more successful in school; research shows that when families promote the benefits of education, their children's educational outcomes improve.

It is also important to remember that, while family support and involvement is an asset, it is not imperative; students whose families are not actively engaged in their learning can still be successful, and high expectations should be maintained for all language learners regardless of their backgrounds and circumstances. Even students whose families are not community members can be very engaged and thrive in language classrooms.

- **The First Peoples Cultural Council (FPCC) has sponsored Language For Life: Nourishing Indigenous Languages in the Home, a resource that provides practical tips and strategies for nurturing Indigenous language use at home, including games, tips, activities and steps families can take to support language revitalization. see www.fpcc.ca**

2.1.2 School-based language programs are only one part of a community's language revitalization strategy

While education programs in schools offer focused time for language learning, learners also need opportunities for language use outside of formal educational settings. Language learners need to know that the language is valued by the community and that their language learning can continue beyond the walls of the classroom. As highlighted in the 2023 Focus Group Meeting on Promising Education Practices, "children need a wraparound approach."

When we think about community mobilization, we need to think about all of the domains in the community. Schools can't do it all. For example, we need to support language use in homes. How will that look from a whole community perspective? First Nation school programs cannot be the only programs in the community. Every department should have some role in language revitalization. We need to help build that belief.

**Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices**

Additionally, collective approaches to language revitalization are the most efficient and effective, highlighting the importance of schools collaborating with other community partners to coordinate language teaching and learning efforts.

When language revitalization is planned together, more opportunities are possible, and it is less likely that the same things will be done by different groups of people at the same time.

**Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices**

2.2 What are some considerations and challenges related to community mobilization?

It is important to recognize that community mobilization is an important step towards language revitalization, but not an end goal in itself. Awareness and excitement alone will not achieve the goals of creating new speakers and learners and expanding opportunities for language use. Because community mobilization activities are often simpler to implement than other types of language revitalization initiatives, there is a risk of focusing too much time and resources on community mobilization, which could reduce investments in proficiency development and direct efforts to promote language learning and use. Community mobilization is important, but work cannot stop at that step.

There are also other logistical challenges related to engaging families and other community members in a meaningful way. People are often busy and may struggle to participate extensively in opportunities that are made available to them, such as evening language classes. It can be difficult for some people to contribute large numbers of volunteer hours. Online learning activities may provide a useful tool to allow families and other community members to participate in activities from home, but difficulties related to access to technology and unreliable internet may limit the effectiveness of virtual options.¹

In some communities, there may be complications related to a variety of dialects spoken, and it may be necessary for language champions and community leaders to resolve differing opinions about how the language should be formalized and taught.

Limited numbers of fluent Elders is also a common and pressing concern for the goal of community mobilization. Educators and language champions consistently report that one of the most important challenges for language revitalization is a shortage of people who are available to do the necessary work and an over-reliance on a small group of speakers. In particular, there is a consistent need for more First Nations language teachers, recognizing their unique and invaluable knowledge, skills, and proficiencies. Too many language programs rely on individuals or small teams, and it is critical that younger generations are encouraged to carry on the work.²

¹ See “Integrating Technology into Language Teaching and Learning” on page 29 for more information.
² See “Succession Planning” on page 61 for more information.

2.3 What can help promote community mobilization?

“Grassroots is the only way that this work is going to happen. There’s no way that a top-down approach would have grabbed anything. There would have been no community ownership, no community desire and need.”

Tye Swallow

It is critical to note that different strategies will work in different situations, and an effective community mobilization plan must take into account the unique strengths and challenges of each community.

Generally, however, community mobilization will almost always require sustained attention and effort; it takes creativity and energy to keep people excited and committed over time. The people involved in language revitalization efforts may evolve, as peoples’ availability changes and as people move through different stages of their language learning journeys. In order to reduce fatigue and burn out, it is therefore important to continually look for new people who want to contribute to the work being done.

It is helpful to remember that everyone is in a different place in their learning. It is ok if not everyone is on board at the same time and in the same way. People will do what they can, when they are ready.

Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices

“If you keep the politics out, we’re able to say ‘this is for the language’ so everyone is able to step outside of their own egos and just say this is for something bigger than each of us as individuals. In that way, the work is super powerful and remains creative and emergent and [we] take that space, build and mobilize”

Tye Swallow

We need to consider how to encourage people to see language as a priority and build capacity so people can contribute whatever they can to our efforts.

Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices

“Everything that we do, we always involve youth - even as young as twelve years old, if they’re willing to work. That way, they already have this idea that they are part of a bigger team.”

Kathryn Michel

It is also important to continually try new and different approaches to find what works in a variety of circumstances.

“I feel like now we need to create online options for working parents. There are parents who work graveyard shifts and then we are expecting them to come to a class! It’s unreasonable. We’ve tried a lot of different things and we need to continue to try new things until something works.”

SXEDFELISIYE Renee Sampson

“We tried all kinds of initiatives. A lot of parents worked at the band office or went to school at the local university, so we kind of knew what their schedules were like. We would pick certain times of the year to go on a field trip and recruit some parents to join us. That would also give us the time to get to know them a little bit better.”

Jessica Arnouse

Community mobilization can take many forms, and there are various types of projects and initiatives that can engage families, community members, and community organizations and agencies in language revitalization. The ideas suggested in this section are not exhaustive; they are intended as a starting point for brainstorming your own community mobilization projects. Every community is unique and not all initiatives and frameworks will work for everyone.

If your program is new, if your community is in the early stages of mobilizing for language revitalization, or if your community engagement needs revival, the following community mobilization projects may be useful.

- A community language event (e.g., a special feast or ceremony)
- Incorporating language into community events
- Family language and culture workshops
- Family language games for home-based learning
- A social media campaign (e.g., a “Word of the Day” Facebook page, etc.)

Showcasing language champions, celebrating achievements made through your language revitalization efforts, and recognizing the invaluable contributions of language speakers and Elders as part of the initiatives also can help inspire people and sustain excitement and commitment.

While we are heading to the finish line, we need to recognize that things are working. It is helpful to take time to reflect on what has been achieved, and to be inspired by people who have gone before us.

**Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices**

If your program is well-established but needs increased community support, or if you are looking to draw deeper connections between the various language revitalization activities and initiatives in your community, the following community mobilization projects may be useful.

- Conducting a language survey to determine community interests and needs
- Developing and promoting home language learning programs
- Recording adults and children practicing and speaking the language to build pride and enthusiasm
- Creating an online platform for self-directed language activities

We have been recording Elders and fluent speakers, and we are making sure that we record Elders from various families. And we are recording children speaking so they have the opportunity to share. It is important that everyone feels celebrated and proud, and feel that their voices are being heard.

**Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices**

It is important to remember, as well, to be optimistic and make as much progress as you can – in spite of challenges. One of the most successful immersion programs began with just five dedicated people!

We need to avoid burnout. Check in. Where is everyone at? What are they able to take on? Where are we at for capacity? What is a reasonable workload? We need to sustain our efforts by protecting the people who are regularly involved.

**Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices**

A Checklist of Things to Consider When Planning Community Language Mobilization Projects

What messages should we communicate to leadership to ensure they support the project we are planning?

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Who can be part of our team? Are other allies available to contribute to our efforts?

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Are there important political considerations we should anticipate and prepare to navigate?

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What are our goals and objectives for this project – short, medium, and long term?

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What resources do we need for our community mobilization project? Are those resources readily available? Are there recordings and archives in museums? If not, how can we plan to access the necessary resources?

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Who will be doing what tasks? For example: Who will be advertising the project or event? For an event, who will be setting up the room, gathering the needed materials, and making the necessary technology work? Who will be speaking or presenting? Who can help clean up after the event or activity?

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How will we assess the effectiveness of the project? How are we going to know if we achieved our objectives?

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Note: When considering new initiatives, it is important to discuss how much time and energy should be invested in new ideas and activities, versus how to appropriately support the busy people who are already contributing to existing language revitalization efforts. It is critical not to expect too much if a small team of people are dedicated to the language efforts. It may also be useful to use language funding to pay for administrative support for the team of language champions, such as organizing meetings, taking notes, and creating reports – reducing the time required of the language learning experts.

What's Happening in First Nation Schools Related to Community Mobilization?

Sample activities schools include in their workplans for First Nations Language and Culture grants.

- Implementing fun activities that involve students, families, and community members together, such as:
 - Stick game events
 - A school-community gardening project
 - Fun language competitions
 - Family gatherings that involve students demonstrating singing and drumming or other cultural learnings
 - Winter “story-telling concerts”
 - Language learning dinners, with families and community members invited to attend
 - “Wellness Wednesday” dinners, with Knowledge Keepers leading arts and crafts sessions
 - An open house BBQ, with students hosting families and community members and demonstrating their language and culture learnings
- Hosting meetings and gatherings with families and community members to facilitate input into the school’s language efforts
- Establishing a formal language and culture committee, to collaboratively plan and guide the implementation of the school’s language and culture programming
- Creating an online newsletter and Facebook pages to share students’ language learning activities with the community
- Having students host practice tribal feasts throughout the year, so they are prepared to host a full Learning Feast for families in the Spring
- Holding family language lessons, including a dinner and resources for families to take home, and with language speakers and cultural experts invited to share their knowledge
- Collaborating with the community on cultural activities, including parents and elders demonstrating appropriate practices and supporting students in organizing a student-led potlatch at the end of the year
- Asking families and community members to provide support during field trips and other cultural activities happening in classrooms
- Organizing a full day of cultural activities in the gym, where students can go station-to-station with their families and other students and participate in events together
- Hosting family interactions like learning feasts, a welcome back BBQ, a family Truth and Reconciliation day assembly and luncheon, a National Indigenous Day celebration, etc.
- Hosting family regalia making nights, incorporating language and story lessons in the gatherings
- Workshops and information sharing to help families incorporate more language at home, and providing signs in the language for common household items

SAMPLE WORKPLAN EXCERPT: There are many activities and community engagement events that we hold during the school year to promote language and culture learning, including a yearly potlatch hosted by our students, a week-long school/community camping trip to a culturally significant location in our territory, monthly Cultural Friday afternoons, gatherings at the Big House, etc.

LAND-BASED LEARNING AND TEACHING

“We need to connect children to the land through our language, because if you don’t make those connections when they’re young, they’re not going to appreciate the land that they come from.”

Jessica Arnouse

“The context of the classroom really limits the experiences that you have when you are speaking the language. It’s unnatural. It’s really important to be able to honour the language by having those true experiences.”

Jaskwaan Bedard

We need to expand our concept of land-based learning activities. It is about our relationship with the land. It is about our history, our territory, the names of our people. Our land, our language and our people are connected. And the language is how that is expressed.

Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices

3.1 What is land-based learning and why is it important?

Land-based learning and teaching refers to learning activities that take place on the land, whether outdoors on or near the school property, or on more distant cultural landscapes or sites of significance in the territory. Land-based learning activities can foster thoughtful engagement with and reflection on the land and its critical connections to language.

The connections between First Nations’ languages and territories run deep. Many Elders relate that languages come from the land, and many Indigenous scholars have written evocative and thoughtful descriptions of the interconnectedness of language and land. For learners to fully understand and develop their use of the language, the connections between the language and land must be honoured.

Land-based learning and teaching approaches are one way to achieve this goal. They also provide opportunities for hands-on and interactive learning that can engage and excite learners in ways that classroom-based learning may not. As highlighted in the 2023 Focus Group Meeting on Promising

Practices for Language Revitalization, on-the-land learning opportunities make it possible to deconstruct the classroom environment, and “allows our worldview to come through, rather than fitting learning into a classroom box.” The Focus Group participants also emphasized that, whether there is a little or a great deal of direct language teaching included in the land-based activities, on-the-land opportunities teach respect for the Nation and help students better understand their roots, their identity, and their spiritual connections to the land, water, and animals – all of which are important components of language learning.

The more we participate in activities on the land, the more we are connected to our language. And the more we learn about the language, the stronger our connection to the land.

**Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices**

When we go out for land-based learning, our focus is often on cultural activities. This helps people learn to be comfortable out there, not afraid, understanding that it is a safe place. Then language learning can be added.

**Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices**

3.2 What are some considerations and challenges related to land-based learning?

While land-based learning is an important tool, there can be associated challenges that should be considered.

Outdoor activities – particularly those that take place at a site that is removed from the school – often require extra planning and additional supervisory and/or administrative support. Depending on school policies and the activities planned, a range of safety and contingency plans may be needed, and parental or guardian consent will be needed for school-age learners. Some of the key considerations when planning an outdoor activity include:

- The size of the group and the adequate number of chaperones / supervisors
- How to accommodate students with disabilities and diverse abilities
- Ensuring that students have the necessary equipment, clothing, and adequate food and water
- Any required safety certificates for staff or volunteers, and safety equipment such as satellite phones, safety vests, life jackets (if applicable) ...
- Transportation – of students, equipment, support personnel and volunteers / participants, etc.

Lack of funding is also a common challenge for on-the-land opportunities. At the 2023 Focus Group meeting on Promising Education Practices, participants discussed the difference between a school “visit” to a territorial site and an on-the-land activity that becomes a school “tradition.” If an on-the land learn-

ing and teaching activity is intended to become a “tradition,” it must be built into the school’s annual budget planning, and there must be ongoing contact with the staff and experts needed to bring students out on the land safely.

Every community and situation is different; it is important to take the time to consider what logistical challenges you may face in carrying out planned outdoor activities.

Additionally, while First Nations language educators have expertise in language and in education, not all language teachers are also experts in traditional land-based practices. As a result, some educators who may want to integrate land-based learning into their teaching may be intimidated to do so. Forming relationships with Elders and other Knowledge Keepers who can share their traditional expertise and skills can help bridge this gap – extending the concept of on-the-land learning beyond language teaching, to include cultural and traditional activities taught by semi-fluent or non-speakers.³

When implementing on-the-land learning and teaching activities, it is valuable to share with students how to appropriately recognize land acknowledgements, such as knowing where territorial boundaries begin and end, and respectfully requesting permission to undertake activities on someone’s land.

If a land-based program is well established, you can take students to a deeper level of understanding. Involve the students in research in the community about appropriate practices and protocols.

**Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices**

We are reintroducing our children to our family’s traditional use area. We explain how it has been handed down through the generations. We explain our spiritual connections. We make sure they get the feel of the land, the smell of it ... we teach them the history of the land. That is important for all children.

**Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices**

³ See also “Learning from Elders” on page 21.

3.3 What can help promote land-based learning?

Land-based learning can take many forms, and there are various types of projects and initiatives that can help learners create connections between the land and their language and culture. The list below is intended to provide a starting point for thinking about your own land-based learning projects.

For land-based learning activities that can be conducted remotely, without gathering people together, the following ideas and digital or virtual technologies may be useful.⁴

- ✓ Recordings of your Elders or Knowledge Keepers on the land
- ✓ Descriptive videos of cultural activities
- ✓ Interactive digital atlas projects (see nunaliit.org and atlas-ling.ca for examples)
- ✓ Place name projects (see [Indigenous Place Names in Canada](#) for an example)
- ✓ Virtual reality projects (see thundervr.ca for examples)

If you and your students are able to gather safely outdoors but you are just beginning to integrate land-based learning activities into your curriculum, it may be beneficial to start with something simple. The following activities can be conducted with basic materials and are sometimes possible on or near the school grounds.

- Nature walks
- Berry-picking
- Ethnobotany projects (identifying / naming / describing plants and animals)
- Songs and storytelling outdoors
- Talking about the significance of traditional places while being outdoors together
- Sharing cultural teachings / protocols
- Talking about traditional foods and methods of preparation

If you are working with Knowledge Keepers and/or educators who are familiar with traditional land-based practices, and if a strong infrastructure and capacity to support land-based learning is available, the following projects may be possible.

- Collaborative harvesting, gardening, hide-tanning, or carving projects
- Language & culture camps
- Outdoor ceremonies and rituals
- Field trips (to cultural landscapes, places of significance (such as sites of oral histories), or to engage in traditional land-based activities)
- Seasonal rounds – or activities that are organized seasonally, which involve teaching students how seasonal activities are connected to First Nations' histories and traditions

⁴ See also "Integrating Technology into Language Teaching and Learning" on page 29.

When planning our activities, we think about how all of us – teachers and learners – can think, feel and experience with our Tribal hearts. This is what we naturally do. This is what we naturally feel. We always keep in mind all of creation. We think about our tradition of observational learning – watching, trying, getting guidance from our Elders, and when things don't work out, trying again. In this way we are teaching our students to think – and thinking is a real survival skill.

Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices

One First Nation school in BC has planned the school calendar to focus on in-school, conventional academic learning 4 days each week, to allow one day for on-the-land learning activities. This approach emphasizes to the school community that land-based learning is a priority. Other schools have extended their calendars, beginning before September and continuing after June with longer breaks during the school year. In that way, students are in school for the same length of time; the school is just in session in different periods of the year in order to incorporate more seasonal activities into the curriculum.

There are, of course, significant challenges associated with school calendar adaptations. Change is always difficult to accept, and for parents who have children attending different schools, varied schedules could cause difficulties in terms of childcare and/or vacation scheduling. In addition, some teachers may be concerned about losing their lengthy summer break. Recognizing such challenges, schools could consider altering their calendar incrementally—such as starting school a week or two early and possibly extending the school year and/or increasing the breaks during the winter and spring accordingly. Making small adaptations can allow parents, students, and teachers to gradually determine their comfort with an altered calendar.

It may also be helpful to share with families some of the other potential benefits of an adapted calendar. For example, some evidence suggests that shortening the summer break helps to maintain learning over the summer (i.e. avoid summer learning loss) and eliminate the amount of review required each fall, which is an attractive benefit for many educators and families. Longer breaks at various times of the year may also reduce student and teacher burn out and reduce the exhaustion often felt at the end of June.

We tell our teachers to do their planning so they can meet the learning standards within the timeframe of four days a week so we allow time for land-based learning. That way staff understand that language and culture learning is a priority that we plan around, rather than a superficial or supplemental activity. We need to reframe thinking.

Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices

It is useful to think about how to match the calendar of the school with the calendar of nature. We need to incorporate seasonality into learning opportunities and our structures.

Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices

Additional tips to consider for land-based learning and teaching activities include:

- Consider who needs to be consulted and involved in planning the activity
- Think about how to distribute roles and responsibilities appropriately, depending on the availability and expertise of people who will be involved
- Include children in planning the activities to build enthusiasm and enhance their knowledge
- Prepare students for on-the-land activities by implementing related classroom activities
- Ensure you have appropriate permissions for access to lands and cultural sites and for knowledge sharing

In the classroom, before or after an outdoor activity, we can share our own stories about how things came to be – which connects us to the land. We can talk about how we came to be in our place, on our territories. Our stories are our truths. Our stories carry the most important messages. We are the people of the land, inseparable, interdependent.

**Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices**

- Encourage students to retell their experience after the activity to build in more use of the language

Language learning is also in the retelling after the activity – talking about the activity we did, using our language. Where did we go? How did we get there? What did we see? What did we do? We can make the language and culture learning mirror each other.

**Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices**

- Use reflective questions after the activity for staff to think about the activity and possible improvements for future planning, such as:
 - Did we have all of the materials we needed?
 - Was the trip to the site successful?
 - Were the students adequately engaged throughout the activity? If not, what would help increase engagement in the future?
 - Was the supervision adequate or were more people needed?
 - Did the activity achieve our intended outcomes? If not, what could be improved?

Land-Based Learning Activity Planner

Land-based activities can help learners make valuable connections between the language, culture, land and identity. This planner may be helpful for planning and organizing land-based language learning activities.

WHAT: What is the activity? (e.g. berry picking)

.....

PROTOCOLS: Did we appropriately seek guidance and approvals for the activity? For example, did we consult with Elders / Knowledge Keepers? Did we ask enough questions to make sure the activity is appropriately implemented?

.....

.....

LANGUAGE: What vocabulary and grammar will be taught? Do we need to research any specific vocabulary? (e.g. vocabulary for types of berries; grammar of shape-classifiers; etc.)

.....

.....

CULTURE: What cultural lessons can be incorporated? (e.g. the significance of berries in ceremony and as a food staple)

.....

.....

PLACE: Where and when will the activity take place? (e.g. at the berry patch in the late spring)

.....

PEOPLE: Who will be involved? (e.g. Elders, teacher, EAs, students, parent volunteers)

.....

.....

MATERIALS: What materials or resources are needed? (e.g. buckets for berries, long sleeved shirts and good footwear, thank you gifts for Elders and volunteers, etc.)

.....

.....

ADMINISTRATION: What permissions are needed? (e.g., from parents, community members, ...). How will we get to the location of the activity (e.g. by bus, walking, carpooling, etc.)

.....

.....

COSTS: What are the associated costs? (e.g. bus costs, gas, meals and snacks, etc.)

.....

.....

PLANNING: Will this be a one-time activity or an annual event (i.e. is it intended as a "visit" or a "tradition")? If we want it to be annual, do we know who can organize and support it each year, and will it be regularly included in the school budget? How do we consider expanding the knowledge and experience of students based on grade levels?

.....

.....

What's Happening in First Nation Schools Related to On-the-Land Learning?

Sample activities schools include in their workplans for First Nations Language and Culture grants

- Sponsoring student participation in canoe journeys – which involve visiting other Nations or hosting students from other Nations who visit the school and community
- Implementing a hunting and trapping program, fish harvesting and preserving, organizing ice fishing opportunities ...
- Purchasing equipment needed to support land-based learning, such as tents, wood burning stoves, generators, winter clothes, safety equipment, sleeping bags, etc.
- Organizing spring break, summer, and after school outdoor learning camps
- Organizing a summer on-the-land cultural camp that includes creating videos of students in grades K4 to 7 speaking and practicing their language and culture, resulting in lesson resources with examples to share with other children

WORKPLAN EXCERPT: In the winter, our students will be hunting and trapping, learning how each animal is dressed and how the different hides are prepared. The students will be doing a lot of hands-on activities such as preparing food for winter, canning berries, fruit, salmon and moose meat, as well as learning the process of smoking the salmon and moose meat. They will be gathering medicines, learning how to sew moccasins, key chains, headbands, handbags, and change purses, and the students will also be learning to bead with the loom and practising how to do different designs on beaded earrings.

WORKPLAN EXCERPT: Our outdoor education capacity in elementary/secondary continues to evolve and expand. There are increasing trips to our territories that are single day trips or multiday and overnight trips. Canoeing and water safety are opportunities of focus, as well as hiking, wilderness and survival skills, and all of the cultural components that come along with this. Learning to live on the land is integrated with learning of the land as it relates to responsibilities for specific regions. To support this, an outdoor ed facilitator provided training, which included work with elementary and secondary classes and teachers, and also a leadership training with a small group of staff to teach the skills needed to work with youth on the territories. Students also participate in field trips that take them to neighboring communities to become familiar with regional relationships.

WORKPLAN EXCERPT: Community members will be invited to share their talents with our students. This will include cedar workshops with K-7 students that will involve the language and storytelling around cedar and the importance of cedar to our people. Our fish unit will continue this year, where the students can experience how salmon is prepared for canning and smoking. The canned salmon will be used for the student's lunch program so they can sample what they helped prepare, which is part of the teaching. The garden teacher will continue to teach the students about growing their own food on the land, from planting seeds to harvesting and all the care in-between. This year the students were taught how to make strawberry jam from strawberries grown by their own hands! Students will also learn how to make sauce from tomatoes grown from their garden and enjoy that in spaghetti served in the hot lunch program. This program has been a great success since it was implemented at the start of the First Nations Language and Culture Program (FNLCP).

LEARNING FROM ELDERS

“Having Elders come into our classrooms to tell stories and sing songs actually explains who we are in our language.”

Peetah Bastien

“Our Elders are our window into what it means to think in Hesquiaht and view the world in their Hesquiaht way.”

chuutsqa Rorick

“Working with the Elders, they know the protocols, they know the laws, they know our traditional narratives. They know how strongly we’re connected to place. They have all these teachings, and they’re very humble about it. So we work hard to take care of them.”

Debbie Leighton-Stephens.

4.1 Why is it important to invite Elders to participate in school-based language learning?

“Elders really bring a calmness to the students and enrich learning with their presence.”

Jaskwaan Bedard

Elders provide cultural and spiritual guidance. Elders link us to the ancestors who came before us. They provide a vital link between traditional ways of being and knowing and contemporary life. They hold valuable knowledge that can be shared with younger generations. In many communities, Elders are the only mother tongue speakers of the language, meaning that their knowledge of and proficiency in the language is unsurpassed. In their essential and respected role as Knowledge Keepers, Elders can provide cultural and linguistic teachings in unique ways.

4.2 What are some considerations related to Elder involvement in school-based language programs?

A key consideration in learning from Elders is ensuring that students are well prepared to interact with Elders in hospitable and respectful ways. Respecting an Elder means learning about and following appropriate etiquettes and traditional protocols, honouring their important role, and valuing the knowledge and time they are sharing.

“You really need to be protective of the Elders’ time. You have got to make sure that everybody knows that if they are going to do this, then they are joining an Elder who is really serious and they need to mirror that.”

chuutsqa Rorick

Sometimes I create a lesson for my students before an Elder visits, which includes information about social structures and the traditional name and biography of the Elder.

Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices

In some communities, there are very few Elders available to participate in language work, and they should not be overburdened; it is important to be aware of the possibility of fatigue, and determine the best ways to mitigate those risks. You may want to consider whether each school project is the best use of the Elders’ time, or whether their attention would be best spent on other types of language projects. For example, some communities decide that Elders, as mother tongue speakers, should focus on language documentation projects that can then be used to develop educational resources. It is critical to understand your community’s priorities – and it is often important for school principals or other language staff to consider these issues, as Elders may overcommit due to their passion for language and culture transmission.

We have to be vigilant about looking after our Elders. They are so passionate about passing on their knowledge before they take the language with them. Sometimes they want to come and help even when they are tired or sick. We must emphasize to them that they need to look after themselves. We must always let them know how valuable they are.

Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices

The health and safety of Elders is vital. Some Elders may have reduced mobility or limited stamina, and this needs to be taken into account when planning for programs that require physical activity (e.g., land-based learning).

“Safety is a challenge with involving Elders. That’s why having really accessible activities is important.”

Jaskwaan Bedard

Working with Elders requires responding to their needs and feelings, including giving them space and allowing them to talk about issues in ways that are safe and comfortable for everyone involved. Sensitivity to Elders’ past experiences is important – which includes being mindful of the suitability of all Elders for all learning settings. It is also important to remember that the safety and well-being of students in the learning program is paramount, and not everyone is the right fit for a role in the school that involves direct interactions with children.

“We need to constantly remind people of the way we are aiming to be together in a learning situation. Every single Hesquiaht person was brought up in residential school, which could be a major stumbling block. But people are getting pretty good at it. We keep in mind our overarching aim and how we want to be treating everybody when we come together.”

chuutsqa Rorick

It is also important to find out what skills and interests Elders have. For example, some Elders may have skills for land-based learning, but they would prefer to spend their time speaking with children in a language nest or classroom setting.

It can be useful to collect a list of Elders and Knowledge Keepers who have completed criminal record checks and are a good fit for a role in the school, noting their special skills and interests as a way to build rapport and involve Elders in activities they enjoy. Gathering the list can also lead to creative ideas for new activities for students and Elders to engage in together.

**Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices**

It is important to maintain good communications so Elders feel informed and comfortable about the activities they will be supporting. For example, it is beneficial to talk to Elders about the goals and intended outcomes of learning activities so they feel included and able to contribute in the best way possible. It is also critical to confirm their availability and the schedule for all activities more than once to ensure they are still able to take part as expected.

“If you can have Elders there, that’s good, but don’t make your Elders do all the work. You are their hands, their feet... One Elder had a hard time because she wanted to do more in the classroom. But we just wanted her to be comfortable, be the JOMEĖ (great grandma). You be the feet for the Elders.”

SXEDFELISIYE Renee Sampson

Potential administrative issues regarding fair compensation for Elders should be resolved in advance of their involvement in any program. In some communities, it is customary to give Elders gifts that include cash honoraria when they share their time and expertise, but some educators report that this protocol may not always align with standard administrative procedures. It is critical to understand your Nation’s perspective to ensure you align with established protocols for compensating Elders. And be sure to also consider transportation to and from the school or meeting places, and make sure that the Elder is comfortable with all of the arrangements for their involvement.

“You can’t ask these Elders—who know the most in the Nation about our heritage—to volunteer all this time and push away their financial responsibilities in life.”

chuutsqa Rorick

4.3 What are some suggestions for involving Elders in your language programs?

“The Elders are there to model the speech and do a little bit of conversation so the children can hear that flow of the language from a grandmother.”

Jessica Arnouse

Every community is different, and every Elder is different. You are encouraged to adapt the suggestions below to your own context, and to share the ideas with Elders in your community to determine if they will work well in your context.

“The Elders have all been interested in our programs, and generally they are receptive to anything we do. They are always willing to participate.”

Pamela Hagongak Gross

“The eldest people who are our speakers, their work ethic is really strong. They are always willing to keep on going with the teaching, and they have this staying power that is really awesome.”

chuutsqa Rorick

If your language program is new, if you are in the early stages of integrating Elder involvement, or if you are establishing new relationships with Elders in your community, consider the following.

- Consult with Elders on key decisions about your language program
- Seek guidance from Elders on language content (e.g. new vocabulary for concepts in math, science or technology)
- Invite an Elder to lead a prayer or ceremony with the language learners
- Invite an Elder to visit your classroom to share stories, songs or other teachings

If your program is well-established and you are seeking to increase the involvement of Elders, the following ideas may be relevant.

- Establish an Elder-in-residence program for regular Elder-student interactions, such as storytime, sing songs, vocabulary lessons, or cultural activities like beading
- Create a dedicated position for an Elder to advise on curriculum and resource development, or create an Elder Advisory Board to serve a similar purpose
- Engage Elders in a mentorship program⁵ by having them help educators improve their language proficiency
- Invite Elders to instruct land-based activities⁶ or traditional arts practice in the language
- Organize a class project on language documentation, with students making audio or video recordings of Elders saying words or phrases
- As suggested in the Focus Group Meeting, consider including Elders of differing ages, allowing experienced Elders to guide “younger Elders” – who might identify themselves as “Elders-in-training” – and build their confidence and leadership capacity

5 See “Adult Education” on page 41 for more information.

6 See “Land-Based Learning and Teaching” on page 13 for more information.

Elder Involvement Checklist

Elders are an integral part of language learning, but they must be thoughtfully engaged in language activities to ensure they are appropriately honoured and respected. This checklist is meant to help you consider important aspects of including Elders in language activities. All items may not apply in every context, and there are blank spaces in each section to include extra applicable items for each context.

Consultation and Communications

- ☐ Have you consulted with the Elder about the goals and design of the activity?
- ☐ Have you communicated enough logistics about the activity (e.g., time, what you think will happen in the activity, number of students to be involved, etc.)?
- ☐ Have you confirmed the visit or activity with the Elder shortly beforehand?
- ☐

Compensation

- ☐ Are you following community protocols for compensating Elders?
- ☐ Have you received administrative approval for the compensation?
- ☐ Have you organized the logistics for compensation (e.g., cash honorarium, gifts, etc.)?
- ☐

Comfort

- ☐ Have you scheduled the activity at a time that is convenient for the Elder?
- ☐ Have you confirmed that all aspects of the activity are safe and feasible for the Elder?
- ☐ Have you arranged transportation for the Elder?
- ☐ Have you arranged for support staff or translators to assist the Elder, if needed?
- ☐ Have you planned for breaks and refreshments?
- ☐

Cultural Protocols

- ☐ Have you identified someone to greet the Elder, bring them to the classroom, and escort them out?
- ☐ Have you prepared students to interact with the Elder respectfully?
- ☐ Have you taught students the relevant protocols of your Nation?
- ☐

What's Happening in First Nation Schools Related to Learning From Elders?

Sample activities schools include in their workplans for First Nations Language and Culture grants

- Hosting monthly dinners with Elders and Knowledge Keepers
- Working with Elders to map the territory
- Hosting Elders' teas, Elders' story-times, and evening language classes
- Organizing an Elder-in-Residence program
- Paying a resident Elder to assist school staff with curriculum development
- Having an Elder assist with the development of a traditional garden to teach students proper processes and protocols
- Sponsoring Elders' participation in the collaborative development of thematic-based lessons
- Hiring Elders and fluent speakers to help selected staff with language learning in mini apprenticeships
- inviting Knowledge Keepers and Elders to join weekly community building activities and cultural learning activities, such as visiting sacred sites, sharing snacks and meals
- Having 5-6 Elders attend the school (rotating and sometimes attending together) to participate in cultural activities alongside the primary and elementary school teachers
- Inviting Elders and Knowledge Keepers to attend the school weekly to mentor students
- Purchasing portable equipment and supplies to facilitate the comfortable involvement of Elders in half-day on-the-land activities

WORKPLAN EXCERPT: We hold biweekly Elder meetings, with honoraria and lunch for our Elders and our language and culture teacher, curriculum developer, and a support worker. These meetings are to ensure that our language and culture materials are approved by our Elders (the experts) and that our local dialect is upheld.



INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY INTO LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

“We don’t have to give up face-to-face language transmission, language learning, or traditional ways of knowing for technology ... Rather, it’s a way to supplement.”

Candace Kaleimamoowahinekapu Galla

5.1 What are language technologies and how can they be effectively integrated into teaching?

While the term “technology” can be interpreted very broadly, in this document, the term *language technology* is used to refer generally to digital technologies such as remote learning platforms, web-based or software programs for language learning, or language apps for portable devices like Smartphones.⁷

“I feel that technology has expanded language domains so that we can reconnect with each other, and that’s one of the big positive aspects of utilizing technology.”

Candace Kaleimamoowahinekapu Galla

Effective apps and programs can be fun and engaging for students. To empower young people to learn and pass on their languages to future generations, they need to perceive language learning as relevant and vital, and language technologies enable young people to connect with their languages using a medium that they use and see as current and applicable to their lives and experiences.

“Having our youth make videos, they have a lot of fun doing it. They are learning new things, speaking to our Elders, and recording the traditional knowledge.”

Pamela Hagongak Gross

⁷ See Littell et al. (2017) for a discussion of a broad range of digital technologies used for Indigenous language revitalization in Canada, including keyboards, spell-checkers, predictive text programs, speech recognition software, and virtual reality interfaces.

It is important to connect with youth using the tools and social media platforms they use and like. For example, our post-secondary students share videos of their experiences over social media, and those videos quickly circulate through the community. The community members really enjoy sharing them. We can do something similar to mobilize excitement and attention to the language.

**Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices**

Technology also allows teachers to network and share resources, graphics and tools. Sharing with other language teachers is especially important because, in addition to instruction, assessment, and behaviour management, many First Nations language teachers are faced with the challenge of creating their own resources and teaching strategies.

Technology can also help connect teachers and learners when physical proximity isn't possible. Face-to-face learning is not always feasible – for a variety of reasons. Many First Nations people live away from their home communities, but they maintain the right and often they remain very interested in learning their languages. Technology can foster opportunities to make that happen. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance and usefulness of remote learning as an important real-time tool to connect teachers and learners at a distance.

“Thinking of the many Indigenous communities that are diasporic, with many people not living in their traditional territories, there are important questions of how to connect, or reconnect, us all, for the purpose of language and cultural revitalization.”

Candace Kaleimamoowahinekapu Galla

“With my remote students (during the pandemic), I had to really be creative with how I presented my material... I was quite surprised at how much my students were actually able to learn from digital technology.”

Kathryn Michel

Technology can also create extra learning and practice opportunities beyond the classroom. A significant challenge for language education is the shortage of trained teachers who are also proficient speakers. Proficient speakers are often Elders, who are usually in high demand and may have limited time and energy. Language technologies—particularly those with an audiovisual component—can capture the words and wisdom of Elders and share it with learners, who can view the materials on their own schedule.

“You might get funding to offer a program once but not everyone can attend, so creating resources and delivering them through different means, online and in-person, is important.”

Pamela Hagongak Gross

5.2 What are some considerations and challenges related to integrating technology into language teaching?

“This is a really exciting time, but also the divide is widening, especially for communities that don’t have access to these technologies or infrastructure, or that lack the consistency to allow them to connect.”

Candace Kaleimamoowahinekapu Galla

In considering promising practices for technology integration, it is important to consider and address common challenges associated with language technologies.

For example, accessibility to technology may be a concern. As technologies rapidly change, there is a risk that not all learners will have the requisite devices, internet connection, or necessary software versions to host the learning platforms or apps. These accessibility and compatibility challenges of your community must be considered when choosing language technologies to integrate into your teaching and learning, such as considering technologies that are accessed off-line versus those that require an ongoing and stable internet connection.

It is also important to ensure that investments in language technologies are commensurate with their potential benefits – including the costs of up-front purchases and ongoing subscriptions.

“What tools are really necessary to achieve our particular goals?”

Candace Kaleimamoowahinekapu Galla

Language technologies can be costly, and when investing in a new technology option it is important to consider its adaptability for varying or changing needs of teachers and learners, whether it requires IT skills training, or whether there are possibilities for using the technology in a way that will create employment opportunities for community members.

The increasing use of technologies also places new responsibilities on school staff and language program planners. Principals must ensure that language teachers and students have access to equipment that is up-to-date and in working order, but the range of new technologies and educational software programs that are available can make it challenging to decide what to purchase and for what purposes. In making these decisions, it is important to explore how technology can facilitate and enhance learning, and decide as a team which tools to purchase and how to use them. Such discussions will raise a range of interesting questions, including how technology options can improve the quality of teaching and learning and advance educational goals. It is particularly important that decisions about what technologies to purchase and use are led by educators and people who bring expertise in language revitalization, with IT specialists contributing their important knowledge – as a complement to the educational decisions.

“We have to really think about how to ensure that the tools that we use can really enhance and not inhibit our language learning.”

Candace Kaleimamoowahinekapu Galla

There are many useful language technologies that further the proficiency development goals of First Nations language revitalization, and others that don't. Some technologies simply re-create content already available in other learning materials, just in a different – and perhaps redundant – digital medium. Be sure that new technologies actually advance your language education goals.

It is also important to be attentive to training and support for ongoing technology use. The power of new technologies will be wasted unless language teachers have the training and in-service they need to use technology to raise student achievement. Teachers and speakers also need time to plan and practice using technologies and to share their technology-based practices with colleagues to learn more. They need assistance in order to make the best use possible of new technologies, rather than having technology options become one more task on their already long list of things to do.

Some Elders and fluent speakers are afraid to touch buttons and use new technology. They need an assistant to be with them the whole time. It often works well when our Elders work alongside our young EAs.

**Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices**

It's difficult for language teachers to not only design lesson plans from scratch but also learn technologies and build technologies into their teaching. They need support.

**Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices**

If you don't know how to effectively use the technology, it isn't a worthwhile investment. It is important to strategically think about how to use Language and Culture workplan funding to have someone learn about technology ... to find out what's possible.

**Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices**

As teachers and students are using technology and the Internet, critical questions arise, including how it should support teaching and learning and how students can use it safely and in the most enriching and meaningful ways. Teachers need to be aware of safety concerns when selecting and implementing new technologies in their classrooms – and many language teachers will need support in this area.

Finally, it is critical to be aware of ownership and access rights to language data and language technologies. Partnering with IT developers can be an efficient and economical way to leverage existing technologies for your school and community's use. But it is important to be aware of your Nation's rights related

to the ownership of language knowledge, information, data and technologies to ensure those rights are fully protected in any collaborations with IT developers.

“As for our resource development, the data that has been collected thus far, it belongs to the Elders who have participated as well as the community members. I think it’s best that it stays here in the community and that it’s basically for the use of our school.”

Cherith Mark

5.3 What are some examples of effective language education technologies?

“We must be able to transform and we must be able to move with the world.”

Peetah Bastien

All of the examples presented below have been developed by or in collaboration with Indigenous organizations. In some cases, the examples are listed as sources of inspiration for designing or developing your own technologies. In others cases, there may be opportunities to adapt the technologies for your own needs. With an adequate budget and strong IT support, customized remote learning platforms, software, or apps can be developed in-community, using First Nations expertise and providing opportunities for community capacity development.

Chief Atahm School (www.chiefatahm.com)

- School-based repository of resources for Secwepemc teaching and learning
- Online language learning resources
- Recordings of Elder stories
- Specific fonts
- Jetpack games
- Information about the immersion school and networking opportunities

FirstVoices (www.firstvoices.com)

- Web-based tools for Indigenous language teaching, learning, and documentation
- Adaptable for any Indigenous language
- Grant funding, training and support available

Mother Tongues (<https://mothertongues.org/>)

- Electronic dictionaries available on- or off-line
- Inuktut Tusaalanga (<https://tusaalanga.ca/>)
- Online lessons and resources for dialects and varieties of Inuktut Algonquian Linguistic Atlas (<https://resources.atlas-ling.ca/>)
- Online dictionaries, text collections, conversational phrases, lessons, and other resources for languages in the Algonquian language family (e.g., Blackfoot, Cree, Innu, Michif)
- Learn Ditidaht (<https://www.learnnditidaht.ca/>) Online dictionary; phonetics and word-practice; alphabet and resources for parents; games, videos and online language school to learn Ditidaht

Other useful technology tools to consider:

- Google classroom
- Kahoot
- Whiteboards

5.4 Assessing the use of technologies

When effectively integrated, language technologies connect and support learning. However, there is a real possibility of technology being misused or failing to meet language goals.

Language Technology Worksheet

This worksheet may help with evaluating potential language technologies – but it should be noted that language teachers should not be expected to complete this worksheet individually in order to request the purchase of a new technology. The intention of this worksheet is to help school teams collaboratively consider technology options thoroughly, to make the purchase and use of language technologies more effective.

What are the educational goals of the technology?

.....

.....

What will the technology add to our language program / teaching and learning? For example, will it help mobilize youth in the community? Will it help with the creation of new teaching materials? Will it be useful for documenting language resources? Will it help students engage in language learning using tools they will find current and exciting?

.....

.....

How much will the technology cost – including up-front and subscription costs? Is it affordable / a good investment? If there are subscription costs, is there an ongoing budget to support this?

.....

.....

Is the technology accessible? Do we have the necessary infrastructure to support the technology?

.....

.....

Is the technology up-to-date, or will it soon be outdated / obsolete? What is the cost to maintain the technology?

.....

.....

What training should be provided for those who will be using the technology?

.....

.....

Can the technology serve our purposes as it exists, or will we have to adapt it or add specific information to make it relevant for our language? If adaptations will be needed, do we have resources (funding, time and people) to make that happen?

.....

.....

Will our rights to our language information be adequately protected? Are there any specific considerations to make sure this happens? What will we ask the developers / look for in the contract to ensure that our Nation's Intellectual Property will be protected (e.g. the Nation will maintain ownership of all content added to the technology, etc.)

.....

.....

What will we do to assess the effectiveness of the technology for teaching and learning?

.....

.....

- The First Peoples' Cultural Council (FPCC) has also created a *Check Before You Tech! A Guide For Choosing Language Apps & Software As Part of Your Plan To Reclaim, Revitalize and Maintain Your Indigenous Language*. The FPCC also implements a Language Technology Program, which provides funding plus equipment and training to support language revitalization using technology. See www.fpcc.ca for more information.

What's Happening in First Nation Schools Related to Technology Use?

Sample activities schools include in their workplans for First Nations Language and Culture grants.

- Purchasing a video camera to record traditional teachings and a digital reflex camera to photograph student language and culture activities
- Hiring a technology expert to digitize language and culture resources
- Developing and maintaining a language and culture website
- Purchasing ipads to allow students to explore online language and culture learning opportunities
- Purchasing video and audio equipment for recording Elders, fluent speakers, and other community members for language preservation
- Providing training for the Language teacher to learn how to operate and integrate a new smart board
- Hiring someone to assist with creating monthly calendar, games and songs on the smart board, and having staff visit other communities to gather ideas about how to use technology for the language program
- Purchasing technology to create language learning resources and school signage, as well as cameras and recording equipment to record outdoor learning
- Equipping a language recording studio with sound studio equipment for Elder interviews, and recordings of songs, stories and history



EARLY CHILDHOOD – K4 AND K5 PROGRAMMING

“It is important to give the children, the very young children, that opportunity to hear the songs, see the dances ... just hear the language being spoken.”

Jessica Arnouse

6.1 Why is early childhood an important domain for language revitalization?

“The babies and the toddlers would have a chance to hear the songs, hear the language, and hopefully grow through ... to where there was no English at all.”

Jessica Arnouse

Research has proven that language learning is most successful and efficient in children's early years. Young children acquire new languages faster and with more ease than older children and adults, and they are able to achieve higher levels of proficiency more quickly. Some people say that language learning can become part of the “cellular memory” of young children. All of this means that young children can become the next generation of fluent speakers, who will grow up to share and pass on their languages within their communities—thus making them excellent candidates for immersion opportunities.

6.2 What language learning options are there in early education?

Preschool language immersion programs, often called language nests, create home-like environments for small groups of children (usually from birth to five years of age) to interact with Elders and other fluent speakers exclusively in the language, until it becomes a mother tongue. Several First Nation schools offer language nest programming at the Kindergarten 4 or 5 (K4 or K5) level. In other cases, language immersion is embedded in a broader curriculum of culturally-relevant programming, using an immersion approach (as opposed to explicitly teaching a language) for young children to learn in a natural manner. Other types of preschool programs may not offer immersion experiences, but may have language learning activities embedded in their K4 and K5 programs in various ways.

“We slowly made it from a half-day immersion environment to a full day, and we are continuing to build our skills around speaking and interacting with the children to create what they call a language nest environment.”

Jessica Arnouse

6.3 What are some considerations or challenges for K4 and K5 language programs?

6.3.1 Capacity issues

Because language nests and immersion settings work best with small groups of children, many educators may be needed to effectively offer these opportunities in the community. Moreover, language nests and immersion settings at the K4 and K5 level require trained ECE professionals or certified teachers as well as proficient speakers, and it is often difficult to find individuals who have both skill sets. Elders are an important asset in language nest programming, but it is important not to fatigue Elders by putting too much responsibility on them to care for active and busy young children.⁸

“We wanted to train more ECEs and other types of educators to learn the language and participate in on-the-job mentoring. But I know it’s difficult to invest all your time and energy all day with young children and then try to go learn more language on your own at home.”

Jessica Arnouse

6.3.2 Family involvement⁹

Research indicates that for young children to effectively acquire their First Nation language as their mother tongue, it is best that they be immersed in the language in a range of environments. This means that the language learning they receive in the education setting will ideally be supported by home-based learning. Family involvement in language nests and immersion programs can provide parents and other caregivers opportunities to learn the language, and can ensure that young children are supported in their learning, but this requires time and commitment, and not all parents and families are able to participate in this way. Accommodations may be necessary to address this issue.

“We were hoping the children would be teaching mom or dad or grandpa at home. And we did get feedback that they were learning at home.”

Jessica Arnouse

⁸ See “Learning from Elders” on page 21 for more information.

⁹ See “Community Language Mobilization” on page 5 for more information.

6.3.3 Challenges with continuity of programming

Once preschool children age out of the language nest or immersion setting and transition to primary school, it is important that they have opportunities to continue learning their language. Ideally, immersion education programs will be available to children transitioning from a language nest or immersion K4 or K5 program, but if this is not possible, school- and home-based language learning and continued language exposure can help support children to retain their language skills in higher grade levels.

“We just started with preschool because that was where we had staffing, where they were very interested in doing it. And also, it’s just the best starter. We started there, and this year we’re doing full time preschool all in immersion and then kindergarten half day. We’re taking little incremental steps.”

Desiree Danielson

6.4 What are some promising practices to consider in designing an early language program?

“Our traditional narratives hold our teachings, and once you get into them, those teachings show up over and over again, and it gets immersed right in your mind, in your heart. That knowledge impacts how you carry yourself on a daily basis and those teachings are what we need to be passing on to our children, right?”

Debbie Leighton-Stephens

“We knew that we had to have at least one person modelling the language every day. One person who knew how to say all the words we needed to know.”

Jessica Arnouse

Every community is different and no two early learning programs will be exactly the same. However, Indigenous communities around the world have experience operating language nests and immersion programs, and surveys of these programs point to some effective strategies for success. They generally:

- Use full immersion in the language (e.g., no English use)
- Use culturally-based programming
- Involve Elders, parents and other family members
- Involve small groups of children (less than 10)

► The First Peoples’ Cultural Council (FPCC) has a number of resources available on their web site to support early learning, including a *Language Nest Handbook* and a *Language Nest Online Toolkit* that includes teaching tools for language nests, teaching approaches and methods, resources for administrators, information about program planning for language nests and language assessment, and more. See www.fpcc.ca

Early Childhood Planning Checklist

Do we have the curriculum and materials that are needed for a K4 or K5 language nest or immersion program? Do we have songs, scripts for routines (such as snack time, washing hands, etc.), games and stories to teach and share? If not, what can we do to start their development?

.....

.....

Do we have adequate funding for ECE professionals and fluent speakers / Elders to support the type of K4 or K5 program we want to create?

.....

.....

Do we have a plan for transitioning students from early learning to primary settings to help them retain their language learning?

.....

.....

What's Happening in First Nation Schools Related to Early Learning?

Sample activities schools include in their workplans for First Nations Language and Culture grants.

- Organizing daily drumming, singing and dancing, and a morning protocol
- Purchasing drum making kits, rattles, arts and craft materials, medicine pouches, etc.
- Hosting a variety of Elders with different cultural backgrounds to come to the classroom to share their culture with the children
- Starting a gardening project to harvest, preserve and share food with the community
- Various cultural field trips to museums and special cultural land locations.
- Taking the children on a trip to the hatchery, to our first home, to watch our fishers use nets, and to walk our local trail to identify plants, trees and birds
- Having a resident elder spend 90 min every day in the K4 setting, immersing the children and staff in the language, and having cedar headbands made for the children to participate in the morning protocol with drumming, singing, and dancing
- Developing visuals (posters, signage, etc.) to increase the presence of the language orthography within the pre-school, and making children's picture books / creating early literacy materials in the language
- Hiring a part-time language coordinator to create resources for basic songs, stories, and nature walk activities, such as plant and animal identification

ADULT EDUCATION

“What I told myself is that if I’m going to become fluent then that’s the most important part of my whole life’s aim.”

chuutsqa Rorick

7.1 Why is adult education an important domain for language revitalization?

Language revitalization relies on the creation of new speakers across all age levels. Adult language learners are critical for the success of a language revitalization program, because as they build proficiency in their language, they can contribute to the rebuilding of cultural systems that support intergenerational transmission. Adults are needed to teach children, to create opportunities for language learning and language use for all ages, and to build networks of speakers within communities.

“Being in the language nest really strengthened the adults’ speaking in everyday active environments because we were always talking about what the kids were doing and what was going on around us in the nest.”

chuutsqa Rorick

“We have a real demand for adult speakers of the language to go in and take positions in language... We want to create people who are going to be educators of language.”

Kathryn Michel

Adult language learning can have benefits well beyond just increasing proficiency. Many adult language learners experience improved health and well-being as a result of their language learning, as well as improved economic outcomes, as language learning can lead to new job opportunities and new leadership roles in the community.

Learning our language is healthy. It is good for our spirit.

Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices

7.2 What types of language learning options are there for adult learners?

A diversity of strategies can be used to help build language proficiency amongst adult learners. Structured language classes – either through post-secondary or other institutions, or in community-based programs – can be part of a comprehensive language learning strategy, and many adult students want opportunities to practice so they can use the language more in their everyday communications, as well.

“You can’t just come into the classroom and expect to learn the language. It’s going to be a lot of work with your Elder and active participation on your behalf.”

Peetah Bastien

“The more hours you can spend in the language, the better.”

Kathryn Michel

For communities with smaller populations of speakers and learners and more limited resources, the Mentor-Apprentice Program (MAP) is a popular method that pairs a proficient speaker with a learner so they can spend time together immersed in the language. This method can take place anywhere – at home, on the land, in the grocery store – and its flexibility is appealing to many people. FNEESC sponsors a MAP program for First Nation school staff. More information about this opportunity is available at <https://www.fnesc.ca/fnlmap/>

“That was kind of the idea, ‘how do we make people for the future?’ Master [mentor] apprenticeship is a significant part but only one piece of several that we chose to do. It’s really been about capacity development from the get go.”

Tye Swallow

A more structured approach might involve bringing a small group of learners and speakers together to live for a period of time in an immersive environment, like a language camp or language house. Some communities also partner with a post-secondary institution to offer an immersive fluency-building certificate, diploma or degree in the language.

“I was always promoting and encouraging that we’re a team. We do things together, and we make mistakes together, but we also learn together. If you just put in that effort, you will see how much you can say in the language.”

Jessica Arnouse

7.3 What are some considerations and challenges related to adult education?

Whereas young children can acquire languages quickly with relative ease, it can be more challenging for adults. Linguistic research points to something called the “critical period” in which the human brain is highly receptive to language learning; after that critical period ends in late childhood, adults may have to work harder to learn new languages.

Language learning won’t come as easily to adults. We have to encourage them to be hungry for it, so they “hunt out” language learning opportunities. That means we need to get people excited somehow.

**Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices**

Many adults encounter additional barriers to language learning related to intergenerational trauma and historic disruptions to language transmission in homes and communities. Adult learners also may have to balance language learning with all of the other commitments in their lives; working, raising children, managing a household, caring for Elders – all of these responsibilities take time and energy and can make it more difficult to commit to language learning.

Life is so busy. We need to be dedicated to creating opportunities for all adults to learn their language.

**Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices**

A barrier for some adult learners may be related to not having people at home to practice with. We tell our adult learners to try practicing with their dog, a toy ... they just need to become more comfortable speaking.

**Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices**

Despite the challenges, however, many adult learners achieve high levels of proficiency, and some even reach a stage that linguists call “ultimate attainment,” when their language abilities are indistinguishable from those of first language speakers. Research shows that early exposure to a language – even if just in informal or ceremonial settings – can assist adult learners with their language journeys later in life.

“It really is stretching your brain every step of the way, because learning a new language, you’re actually building neural pathways.”

Kathryn Michel

“I try to show adults that if we just immerse you for five minutes, you forget about everything else you’ve got to do if we just focus on five minutes of staying in the language, you’re going to remember it more.”

Jessica Arnouse

7.4 What are some promising practices to consider in designing adult education programs?

Adult learners need to be well-supported in their language journeys, with understanding of any challenges they are facing and recognition of their achievements. With encouragement and a strong support network, adult learners can succeed.

“You want to encourage all the students, whether they know it or not, to really listen to language and speak it the way they hear it. Rather than correct them, you need to just let them know that this is another way you can say it. Not to do it harshly.”

Cherith Mark

“If you’re going to wait to be the perfect speaker, it won’t happen. Don’t be afraid. Be willing to make mistakes. Encourage your mentors or Elders to be gentle.”

SXEDFELISIYE Renee Sampson

While being gentle and encouraging, it is also important to hold high expectations for adult language learners, encouraging them to stretch themselves to higher and higher levels of learning and understanding.

Additionally, adults, like school-age students, enjoy and benefit from on-the-land learning opportunities. And for learners of all ages, learning through culture is critical, and a range of cultural activities can encourage people to learn and speak their language.

“I think a large portion of it is that we are ashamed and feel guilty that we don’t have our language. But guilt is a construct that doesn’t exist in our language. So that will free you right off the bat. If that doesn’t compel you to learn, what is a better motivator?”

Peetah Bastien

We tell our adult students to put their pens away and try to focus on oral and spoken practice. That requires being vulnerable, but it is critical.

Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices

Adult learning programs should be maximally flexible to accommodate different types of learning and different levels of commitment. Ideally, there should be many pathways available to adult language learners. Additionally, it is important to look for adult learners' interests and build learning opportunities and activities from that starting point; adult learners should be encouraged to be self-directed and follow their own passions to learn the language.

Online programming and evening/weekend courses may be more easily accessed by those who are working, and having childcare options (or programming that is child-inclusive) can be very beneficial. Compensation for those who need to take time away from work to attend to language learning may also be an effective strategy to promote involvement.

It helps to expose adult students to as many different language teachers and speakers as possible. Some people “click” better than others. Having diverse teachers speaking to adult learners is beneficial if you have that option.

**Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices**

We need to take adult's feedback seriously about what's working and what's not, collectively and individually.

**Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices**

7.5 What are some examples of successful adult education programs?

The examples listed below are widely cited programs noted for their success in helping adult learners build proficiency in their languages. In many cases, these programs are successful because they were designed with the unique strengths and needs of the community in mind. These examples can be used to inspire your own ideas for adult language learning programs.

- **Mentor-Apprentice Program (MAP):** A proficient speaker (the mentor) and a learner (the apprentice) commit to 300 hours of immersion experience. This program is offered through FNEC (<http://www.fnesc.ca/fnlmap/>) and the First Peoples' Cultural Council (FPCC) (<http://www.fpcc.ca/language/Programs/Master-Apprentice.aspx>).
- **Sylx Language House** (<http://www.thelanguagehouse.ca/>): A N'syilxcn language immersion program for adult learners that is intensive and requires a strong and ongoing commitment from its participants. Learners achieve high levels of proficiency through concentrated immersion with fluent Elders.
- **Onkwawenna Kentyohkwa** (<https://onkwawenna.info/>): Structured language learning and adult immersion program in the Kanyen'keha (Mohawk) language, which includes online courses for learners, followed by up to 3 years in intensive immersion.

- **Indigenous Language Fluency/Proficiency Degree** (<https://iahla.ca/projects/>) In partnership with the Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association (IAHLA) and FNEESC, an Indigenous Language Fluency/Proficiency Degree Consortium developed a framework for an Indigenous Language Fluency/Proficiency Degree to be offered by First Nations and post-secondary institutions in partnership.

Don't be afraid to pilot new programs. Try something you think might work. Assess it. If it worked, look for opportunities and accreditation options after.

Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices

What's Happening in First Nation Schools Related to Adult Education?

Sample activities schools include in their workplans for First Nations Language and Culture grants.

- A traditional bentwood box-making workshop led by a master carver
- Study of feast protocols and hosting an all-clans feast
- Outdoor education and language learning in our homelands
- Hosting guest speakers to speak about contemporary First Nations issues
- Purchasing materials for cultural activities, such as drum-making, regalia and hide-tanning
- On-the-land learning field trips to culturally significant sites, to harvest medicines, and to participate in traditional feasts and ceremonies
- Conducting assessments of language proficiency to enhance planning and programming
- Sponsoring Master-Apprentice teams for participation in the FNEESC MAP initiative

TRANSITIONING TO LANGUAGE IMMERSION

“If you went through the K-12 program and you took language classes, [the linguist] estimated that by the end when you graduated, you would get maybe 100 hours of speaking practice, if you’re lucky. Whereas if you were going to the nest, even half time, you could get those 100 hours of speaking practice in about 6 weeks.”

Desiree Danielson

8.1 What is language immersion and what does it mean to transition to immersion?

Language immersion refers to a learning context in which all instruction – for all subjects – is in the First Nations language. This contrasts with language education, in which the language is taught as a subject (sometimes referred to as “exposure” learning), and from bilingual education, in which some instruction is in the language being learned and some is in the language the students already speak and know.

“There was nothing but exposure language programming at our schools and we were all starting to educate ourselves about Indigenous language revitalization and immersion. Things just started to evolve with our SENĆOTEN survival school, which originated in 2010-2011. That first little cohort is now going into grade seven.”

SXEDƧELISIYE Renee Sampson

Language immersion is widely thought to be the most effective strategy for learners to develop proficiency in their languages. Not only does immersion education expose learners to the language for longer periods of time than the “language-as-subject” model, but it also requires learners to actively use the language to communicate, furthering their language abilities.

8.2 What are some considerations or challenges related to transitioning to language immersion?

The primary challenge related to transitioning to immersion education relates to planning for capacity development.⁸ Certified educators and proficient speakers are needed for immersion to be successful. Ideally, educators will have specialized expertise in language immersion and will also be proficient in the language. However, that goal is not always possible, meaning that multiple people are sometimes needed to fulfill the objectives of the program (e.g., a certified teacher who is a language learner plus a proficient speaker who can mentor the teacher, translate materials, and/or provide the language).

“The very first hurdle was getting people to believe that they can do it; the second step would be really supporting them in their language learning.”

Desiree Danielson

In addition to the human capacity that is needed in the classroom, other resources are needed, as well. For most Indigenous languages, there are no textbooks, readers or other materials in the language. Transitioning to immersion entails moving from a model of instruction in which the language is taught as a subject to one in which all subjects are taught in the language. This means that more instructional time is spent in the language, and that educational resources for a range of subjects must be available to the students and educators must be able to talk about a diversity of topics in the language. It also means that schools and educators must develop their own resources – a task that is time-consuming, labour intensive, challenging and possibly expensive.

“I tell everybody: just be ready for long nights, studying, laminating, cutting, preparing. I would research what I wanted to do. Then I would create lessons, and stick tape up all over the walls until I could memorize things. It was scripted. Then I would go in to the class and teach.”

SXEDʔELISIYE Renee Sampson

We need to properly acknowledge immersion teachers for the added work they do. They go above and beyond. Everything is created from scratch. School administrators, other instructional staff ... the whole school community needs to really celebrate them.

**Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices**

Challenges related to infrastructure also exist. Especially in the early stages of transitioning to immersion, the immersion classroom may be housed in a non-immersion school, in which the primary language of communication is usually English. This means that outside of the classroom – e.g. at recess or lunch, on the bus, in assemblies, etc. – students are often hearing English, effectively bursting the “immersion bubble.” Many educators report that this can be disruptive to the immersion process. Moreover, with two

⁸ See “Succession Planning” on page 61 for more information.

different streams in a single school (one immersion, one non-immersion), there arises the potential for competition for resources amongst staff.

If you are offering two streams in your school – immersion and non-immersion – be strategic about finding opportunities to bring the two streams together once in a while for team building, such as a designated pro-d day once a year for communal learning, and opportunities for students to do activities together, as well. You want to avoid a disconnect.

Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices

8.3 What are some successful strategies for transitioning to immersion?

“It is a dynamic process. You can’t expect to have a map [that shows] the exact next step. It’s so dynamic and every successful immersion program that I saw was not afraid of getting into the nitty gritty, not afraid to collaborate, not afraid to work overtime. It’s the mindset of being able to deal with things not being perfect and just get right in there.”

Desiree Danielson

We should focus more on proficiency. We can’t expect everyone to be fluent. We don’t need people to be perfect in order to help revitalize the language.

Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices

Immersion education requires careful and strategic planning. Before considering a transition to immersion, the following needs to be in place:

- i. A team of educators, administrators, and proficient speakers who are capable of and committed to developing and implementing an immersion program.
- ii. A strategy for building capacity so that immersion programming can continue to be offered at progressively higher grade levels and/or to new cohorts of students.

If your school or community does not have a dedicated language immersion team, it may be useful to consider some community mobilization activities as a way to recruit new team members (see Section 2), and/or you may encourage team members to participate in adult education programs to improve their language proficiency (see Section 7). If your school or community does not have a strategy for growing capacity in your language immersion team, you may engage in succession planning to ensure continuity of your program (see Section 10).

If you have a dedicated team and a plan to grow capacity within that team, then you may be ready to transition to immersion. The following tips from experienced language immersion educators may provide some guidance.

- Network with other Indigenous language experts. There are well-established language immersion programs for Indigenous languages around the world, including Hawaiian, Māori (in New Zealand), Kanien'kéha (Mohawk, in Ontario and Quebec), Mi'kmaq (in Nova Scotia), as well as Secwepemc, St'at'imc, and SENĆOŦEN. These are just some examples. It may be useful to visit other communities and schools or network with them virtually to learn about their successes and challenges.
- Build the program incrementally. Most successful language immersion programs start with one small cohort of early primary school students (e.g., kindergarten or grade 1) and then successively add a year of programming as the cohort moves to the next grade.
- Establish mentorship programs. Even relatively proficient speakers will likely not be able to comfortably use all of the vocabulary or grammar they need to communicate effectively in all school subjects and at all grade levels. Mentorship programs, in which more proficient speakers mentor less proficient speakers, can be a cost-effective way to share language skills within the school and community.
- Set aside time and funding for resource development. Resources are not readily available for instruction for all subjects in most First Nations languages, and it takes time and energy to develop curricula, lessons, and teaching materials. Linguists and other professionals may be able to help with resource development, but teachers need to be involved to ensure the end products are classroom-ready. Providing teaching release or offering paid employment to teachers in the summer months can be an effective way to support teachers in resource development. It is also important to be aware of any relevant processes for approval of new materials.
- Communicate within your team. In an immersion program, teachers, EAs, administrators, curriculum developers, Elders and others involved in program design and implementation must work together to achieve the common goal of educating students and building their language proficiency. Regular team meetings and working sessions can ensure that all team members are aligned in their approaches.
- Respect the immersion bubble. Even when students are not in the classroom, you can support their language learning by remaining in the language. Recess, lunch hour and other non-instructional times can be valuable opportunities to reinforce the importance of the language and its significance in students' lives.

And remember ... transitioning to immersion can start slowly and build over time.

“It goes back to that mindset of readiness and belief in yourself and your team that you can do this. So yes, you have to take the plunge and know that it’s okay if you don’t do it perfectly. Know that you won’t do it perfectly but it’s still worth doing, worth trying.”

Desiree Danielson

- The First Peoples’ Cultural Council (FPCC) has created a *Language Immersion Handbook*, as well as *Cultural Camps for Language Learning: An Immersion Handbook*. See www.fpcc.ca

What’s Happening in First Nation Schools Related to Immersion?

Sample activities schools include in their workplans for First Nations Language and Culture grants.

- Hosting immersion evenings that include games and refreshments
- Developing immersion Language Arts and Math curriculum and for Nursery/K4
- Organizing year-end family immersion camps
- Developing immersion curriculum for K4 to grade 4, including hiring a curriculum developer to provide the graphic art/diagrams for the curriculum, and hiring a curriculum assistant to help with the production of related written and audio learning resources
- Visiting existing immersion schools in BC for inspiration and ideas



COLLABORATING FOR SUCCESS

“Collaboration is a challenge. We’re doing well at it because we’re able to listen to each other, but it’s not something that we don’t work on; we work on it and we will always continue to work on it.”

Desiree Danielson

As discussed at the 2023 Language Revitalization Focus Group Meeting, when considering language revitalization it is important to think about community broadly – recognizing that widespread contributions are needed to achieve success.

The Focus Group participants specifically highlighted the importance of the entire school community working together to make language learning a priority, as it is not only the job of language teachers or principals to plan, implement, and support First Nations language programming.

For example, Education Assistants (EAs) play a key role in language learning in many First Nation schools. EAs can support busy teachers, help with assessment, help with the creation of needed materials and resources, record sessions that take place out on the land, and be language learners and teachers in training.¹¹

The Focus Group participants particularly highlighted the value of working with school leadership and the School Governing Authority to articulate a mission statement and strategic plan that includes a focus on language and culture learning as a key priority for the school. The mission statement can be a source of inspiration and can be revisited when tough questions and issues arise.

The statement can be used as a reminder that “this is our mission; this is where we should be dedicating our resources.” When considering how to allocate funding and time, it is helpful to return to the mission statement.

**Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices**

¹¹ FNESC and FNSA have created *Education Assistants (EAs) in First Nation Schools: A Framework For Describing Roles and Responsibilities and Guiding Professional Growth*. Contact FNESC for more information.

In First Nation schools, orientations for new staff who are not community members are also beneficial.

We need to help new staff who are not from our communities learn about the uniqueness of our schools, and see that language and culture learning is the main goal of the school, our priority. We need to give adequate space for language and culture learning and honor our language and culture teachers. When all staff demonstrate that understanding, it translates to the children, and then the children influence their parents. It spreads out.

**Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices**

The Focus Group members further emphasized the value of gathering together a range of people to showcase the various ways people learn the language, including beginning learners, to shift the focus to what everyone can do – regardless of their experience. In fact, it is useful when students are supported by and exposed to a diversity of people who are at varying levels of language proficiencies and who have a variety of cultural skills, so considerations of who can help support language learning should be as inclusive as possible.

“Supporting language learning means making the work manageable and really listening to your team and what they need.”

Desiree Danielson

We applied for a grant to fund positions for men in our school who can play a “grandfather” role. They are available to help with fishing, trapping, building nets Having them work for our school is important; we don’t have to search for people who have that expertise to be available for cultural learning opportunities. It helps to think creatively about how to build your capacity for language and culture teaching and learning.

**Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices**

Our language experts need opportunities to build their own expertise. Schools should consider creating space for teachers and other language champions to learn with each other and from each other – getting exposed to new things and ideas and building additional knowledge.

**Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices**

Additionally, support from non-Indigenous allies, from provincial organizations like FNEESC, FNSA, the FPCC, as well as other contributors who assist First Nations with some language revitalization responsibilities, can free up time for language champions and speakers to put their energy into other activities.

Non-First Nation allies can be pivotal in helping with the work if they are working closely with the community. We need to let allies know what will help, what we need.

**Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices**

It can also be very beneficial when communities and language activists who have extensive experience share their knowledge with people from communities that may not be as far along in their language programming.

9.1 Working With Linguists

The field of linguistics is concerned with how humans have the capacity for language and explores the grammatical underpinnings of language, what all languages have in common, and how they vary. Linguists develop models of grammar as a way to understand human linguistic capacity and variation. Formal linguists have expertise in modeling the structure of language, while applied linguists are experts in using linguistic theories to study reading, writing, and language instruction.

Linguists, language champions, speakers, and language teachers have very different kinds of expertise. Linguists are concerned with abstract models of language, while language teachers are concerned with pedagogical frameworks such as grammar and the improvement of learners' communicative competence. Linguists do not have specific expertise in education or how to teach. They also are not necessarily experts in developing programs and creating speakers.

Some linguists – particularly those from outside the community – may not have the skills or knowledge to *lead* language revitalization projects, but they can use their knowledge and training to *support* community-based language teaching and revitalization.

“These kinds of collaborations, where a linguist and language educator come to the table with different toolkits, can make things go faster or make the end product more useful.”

Richard Compton

A number of First Nations work extensively with linguists in their language revitalization work.

9.2 How can linguists support First Nations language teaching and learning?

- Linguists are trained to analyze grammatical patterns and language structures, which can be informative. Particularly for more advanced learners, recognizing word and sentence structures in a language can assist with learning, and linguistic analysis of these structures can help with the design of learning materials. Linguists can also provide advice for navigating orthographics and provide options for spelling.
- For some First Nations language learners, pronunciation poses challenges, as many sounds or sound patterns in their languages are not present in English — which is the first language of many learners. Because of their training in phonetics (the study of speech sounds), linguists can offer practical tools and resources to support pronunciation.
- First Nations language learning materials are often developed using models from French or other widely taught languages, but in fact, First Nations languages have very different grammatical structures that may require different teaching and learning strategies. Because linguists are concerned with cross-linguistic patterns of grammar, they can advise on the similarities and differences between languages, and how these impact teaching and learning.

“Having a broader sense of language from a comparative sense, you are expecting to find grammatical categories, so then you can ask what the categories are. As a speaker, you may not have that same default expectation.”

Richard Compton

- For language revitalization to fully succeed, it must extend beyond the classroom. Often extracurricular projects require funding and teams of experts for implementation. Linguists may be able to support efforts to secure grant funding through their university affiliations and networks.

9.3 What are some considerations and challenges related to collaborating with linguists?

Historically, linguists took the lead in transcribing spoken First Nations languages into writing systems. Generally, as First Nations have reclaimed their expertise and leadership role related to their languages, linguists' primary role now is to be helpers. Many communities also have had problematic experiences related to linguists taking intellectual property and language data for their own gains. Although these types of situations are decreasing, their legacy remains – which can create serious barriers to engaging with linguists who are not from the community.

In the past, linguists were viewed as experts in the language, and they were put in a position to lead language revitalization efforts. Now things are changing. Linguists have a place, but we as First Nations people must decide the relationship. There is a space for them, but we will determine what aspects of our language and identity we want to share.

**Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices**

Many linguists look at languages through a colonial lens because of their education. We must identify the lens through which our language is taught and understood – which is a wholistic lens, not only an academic lens.

Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices

“One of the things that was hammered into me very early on: you are not going to be a helicopter academic; you are going to make lifelong relationships with people; you will not just walk away; this is a thing that’s going to last.”

Rebekah Ingram

It is also important to be aware that some linguists apply a “top-down” approach to language revitalization, without a clear understanding of day-to-day challenges, while language educators may have different priorities, centered around developing effective tools and resources for language teaching and learning. For collaborations with linguists to be effective, there must be open communication about potentially different perspectives and goals, and how the objectives of communities and linguists can be successfully blended.

“We really are into partnership. But real true partnership. We’re not into somebody taking over and manning the ship for us.”

Kathryn Michel

“Educators have the goal of creating new speakers, and linguists often have the goal of analyzing, describing, and documenting – which is not necessarily the same goal. But the end product, the toolkit, that comes along with that can be useful in some aspects of teaching.”

Richard Compton

Additionally, although linguists, speakers, Elders and language teachers bring different types of knowledge and skills, their different backgrounds require deliberate efforts to ensure there is agreement during project collaborations. Everyone must openly acknowledge and address their differences, share an understanding of the terms and theories specific to each field, and communicate clearly about project plans and goals, avoiding jargon and making sure everyone involved in the collaboration is comfortable contributing what they can.

“You need to be clear about expectations of what each person is bringing to the table, and what their responsibilities are.”

Richard Compton

9.4 What are some examples of collaboration between linguists and language teachers?

“The key is that he (the linguist) is working with staff, not just doing things and giving it to them. They are working collaboratively and that is really essential.”

Desiree Danielson

“There is a danger of taking people out of teaching roles where they might be needed more. So using linguists to help develop pedagogical materials can be good.”

Richard Compton

Increasingly, linguists are moving past colonial models and towards collaborative frameworks, and they are advocating for universities to support this work. As a result, there are increasing examples of successful collaborations with linguists to support community-led First Nations language revitalization projects. Some examples of how linguists can be effective “helpers” include:

- Developing resource materials such as grammars or dictionaries, including resources for learners at different ages and levels of proficiency
- Recording, transcribing, and archiving the words and knowledge of proficient speakers
- Producing educational materials centered around grammar or pronunciation
- Promoting training or supports for teachers or community linguists
- Researching and summarizing linguistic publications about the language, so that the material is accessible and useful to the community
- Mentoring interested members of the community
- Advising on questions of writing, writing systems, and literacy

It can also be useful to pair a passionate linguist who is well connected to the community with a fluent speaker to design language courses for the post-secondary level, with the linguist playing a supportive role.

9.4.1 Questionnaire for Linguists

Despite what a linguist may offer to a language program, there remains a danger of choosing a linguist who is not a good fit for the community or the project. Organizations like the Canadian Linguistics Association (<http://cla-acl.ca/>) or post-secondary institutions may be able to help connect you with linguists. You can then use the following questionnaire to assess the linguists’ suitability for your project.

Questionnaire for Linguists Who Are Not From Your Nation

What is your understanding of the history and challenges related to First Nations languages?

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.....

What are your goals and expectations for our potential collaboration?

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.....

What is your area of expertise? Formal (theory) or applied (pedagogy)?

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.....

What do you know about our language?

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.....

Do you have previous experience working with First Nations?

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What specialized skills can you contribute? (e.g., coding, editing, grant-writing)

.....

.....

What are your expectations in terms of a time commitment? (e.g. a few months, a year, a few hours a month, or more time)

.....

.....

What are your expectations in terms of compensation?

.....

.....

What is your understanding of First Nations' intellectual property rights? Do you understand that our Nation will retain ownership of all information related to our language? Are you willing to sign a contract that protects our rights and ownership?

.....

.....

What is your expectation related to publishing? What are you hoping to achieve through a collaboration?

.....

.....

What's Happening in First Nation Schools Related to Collaboration?

Sample activities schools include in their workplans for First Nations Language and Culture grants.

- Involving master carvers/artists from the community in school programming, including hiring an Artist-in-Residence to teach art classes
- Hosting an Elders tea once a month at the community Health Center, so the early years students can interact with the Elders for storytelling, and to help the community's Elders' program with "much needed connections"
- Designating a staff person to participate in community meetings with other departments for the purpose of planning how to promote the Nation's language and culture collaboratively
- Hosting a special gathering of Knowledge Keepers to guide the language and culture learning in the school
- Sending teachers to a neighbouring school that is immersion-based to learn promising practices
- Working with curriculum developers/illustrators to develop curriculum
- Working with a linguist to assist the curriculum development team and immersion teachers and to develop a pronunciation workshop
- Working with the Band's language department to access grants to continue curriculum development work
- Hosting Elder visits to the school to teach students about stories, having students visit the Chief's office to ask permission to hunt in certain territories, and holding weekly song/dance practices with the language keepers, who grant permission for the students to use the songs
- Inviting a local dance group to the school to teach songs and dancing
- Hiring a language/linguist/expert to assist in providing in-service to the curriculum development team and the immersion teachers on language usage, grammar and spelling

WORKPLAN EXCERPT: Our language team and our Health Coordinator have collaboratively applied for a grant to host "Fire Fridays" on the land. These sessions will focus on First Nation Food Sovereignty issues and teach the children traditional preservation techniques for food security. The sessions will include local First Nations chefs who will work with the upper intermediate grades to grow, cook, preserve and eat local, traditional foods. The upper intermediate classes will also be conducting an inquiry into different forms of traditional cooking techniques and then they will be designing and constructing a collaborative cooking pit for the school to use on "Fire Fridays." This project will link to core curriculum areas of science, social studies, ADST, and visual arts, as well as building essential competency skills - researching, communicating and reflecting.

WORKPLAN EXCERPT: Fluent speakers are working with selected staff in language learning engagement sessions and mini apprenticeships. There are 3 mentor/apprentice teams who will work together for short periods of time outside of regular working hours, and then all will come together for a debrief and collaboration weekly.

WORKPLAN EXCERPT: Our linguistic consultant is working with our team to create language lessons, units, and year plans that meet the B.C. curriculum and also utilize the knowledge and content that exists in this territory. The Language and Culture team continues to build higher levels of curriculum, involving: recording with our Elder advisor to populate the lessons in the curriculum; processing the audio recordings; transcribing the audio recordings into written language; populating the Direct Acquisition Teacher's Manual with activities and games for learning the language, including recording, processing, and transcribing instructional phrases; resource development; building a shared Google drive (that contains curriculum content and lesson plans); creating teacher resources to teach vocabulary, sentences, and stories in the language; and planning a language lab on iPads, which will allow students to listen to our Elders speaking and for students to record themselves speaking.

SUCCESSION PLANNING

“How are we going to keep them with us to learn the language for the next 30 years? You need to plan for the next group of young people to come in and hopefully take it on.”

Jessica Arnouse

10.1 What is succession planning and why is it important?

Succession planning means developing long-range strategies to ensure that there are enough people to develop and run language programs on an ongoing basis. Succession planning is one piece of the larger puzzle of language revitalization planning.¹²

“Because our culture is so interconnected in all ways, the biggest thing for us was to hone in our strategic plan, and have our priorities align with all of the work we are doing. If something doesn’t fit in our mandate, we have to focus in.”

Pamela Hagongak Gross

A lack of educators who have language proficiency is often cited as a barrier to language education.

“We were trying to figure out ways of promoting those young band members to take it up, because we already knew there weren’t enough. We were constantly trying to mobilize and raise the profile of language learning.”

Jessica Arnouse

“You need to find people who are willing to kind of put their other life on hold and become students and learn the language.”

Kathryn Michel

12 For information on language revitalization planning, see McIvor (2015) or the First Peoples’ Cultural Council Language Planning Program at <https://www.fpcc.ca/language/Programs/Language-authority.aspx>.

Communities need to have foresight and commitment to build and maintain capacity for language education, and this means ensuring that there is a strong and stable team of teachers, EAs, administrators and staff who can support language learners. Having a strong and stable team requires that new language education professionals are continually being recruited and trained so that, even if someone leaves the team, there are sufficient human resources to continue the language programming.

10.2 What are some considerations or challenges related to succession planning?

If the language team in your community is very small and there is not widespread community interest in language revitalization, recruitment can be challenging and it may be difficult to find suitable candidates who can be trained as language educators. In that case, community mobilization activities may be used as a starting point for recruiting new people to the language team (see section 2).

10.2.1 Training and Mentoring

Language educators also may need to continue working on their own language learning, as well as their teaching skills. However, as highlighted in the 2023 Focus Group Meeting, not everyone can easily access teacher training, and often pursuing post-secondary is a complicated decision. Those who choose to pursue post-secondary opportunities often have to move away, meaning they have to sacrifice time spent on-the-land and with their community's culture teachers. Other people may remain at home, spending time learning with their language mentors, where cultural training is very involved, but in doing so they may not learn the skills that are taught in formal teacher education programs. Having an in-house mentorship program for educators to share their language and teaching skills may be helpful. Adult education strategies (see section 7) are also an integral part of succession planning.

“It worries me that since we started twenty-five years ago, we’ve lost quite a few [fluent speakers]. When we started, we had four fluent speakers on our team in the classroom and then six, and now we’re back down to two. Some have passed and some have retired.”

Debbie Leighton-Stephens

“When you have two proficient speakers who can model, that is an ideal situation. If you are always just teaching below your proficiency level, it’s hard. You need mentorship to continue your own growth. Continuous mentorship is the most important thing. That’s how we are able to create speakers.”

SXEDFELISIYE Renee Sampson

“Language teachers need things like the Mentor-Apprentice Program, an intensive and supported program where a language teacher in training has a supported immersion-like setting in the language in order to be able to teach it.”

Jaskwaan Bedard

“As new staff would join us, just being in that immersion environment gave any new person time to grow. We were very understanding in teaching compassion and reinforcing that we were a team. We were there learning and speaking together. If we didn’t know something in the language, we would ask our language mentors.”

Jessica Arnouse

“The one piece that really dawned on me when I first started my doctorate five years ago was that our younger team who were new to the program, they had some of our cultural knowledge, but they didn’t have the deep lived experience like our first team of younger teachers had. So we really needed to build that up to help them, because for the most part, they were afraid to use our traditional stories. I don’t like to call them stories or traditional narratives in the classroom, because they just didn’t have that foundational understanding.”

Debbie Leighton-Stephens

“We always have our knowledge holders, our fluent speakers right there, you know, to support us. So, when I facilitate the Sm’algyax course, the real teachers are there. I’m doing the facilitation and I’m learning as well.”

Debbie Leighton-Stephens

Issues related to certification may create barriers in some communities. Different schools and communities use different pathways to certification; some may certify educators through a community Language Authority, whereas others may partner with a postsecondary institution to offer teacher education programs. Developing a clear strategy for certifying educators will help with succession planning.

“I know there can be headaches at the university with teacher programming and accreditation and those kinds of things. There’s still a lot of battling happening. There’s still systemic racism at the teacher certification board.”

Tye Swallow

“In an ideal world, I would love to see more institutions give credit hours to people who are trying to fluently learn their language.”

Desiree Danielson

There also may be issues related to retention of educators and staff. Trained and certified teachers who are also proficient speakers of First Nations languages are in high demand, as they have a very specialized skill set, meaning compensation is an issue for consideration.

“We have such a low population of fluent speakers so we really need the people who are fluent to be well compensated for their time.”

Pamela Hagongak Gross

“The challenge is building capacity, getting teachers to stay with the program. We are training immersion staff, we are generating teachers, and then some staff start going elsewhere, to the public school, politics, different career possibilities. Money can draw people away.”

SXEDFELISIYE Renee Sampson

“If I had the administrative authority to pay people better, that’s one thing I would change. I still feel that our ECEs and these educators in the early year programming are not paid enough.”

Jessica Arnouse

10.3 What are some promising practices to consider in succession planning?

“You need to have a purpose, a reason. The purpose is to keep building up speakers, to keep building up teachers, to keep building up early childhood educators, to get more families involved.”

Tye Swallow

Succession planning can take many forms, and there are different approaches that can be used, depending on the specific strengths and needs of your school or community. Below are some strategies that may be useful to incorporate into your own succession planning:

- Involve the broader community (Elders, learners, families) to develop a long-range plan for your program. What are the language goals for the ECE or primary learners? How will the program need to adapt so that it continues to meet language learning needs?
- Situate succession planning in a broader framework of language revitalization planning. Consider how language education programs fit into the bigger picture of the community's vision for the future of the language.
- Consult with and visit other communities and experts in language planning to learn more about successes and challenges.
- Collaborate with other Nations to share language resources.
- Consider partnering with a post-secondary institution to develop customized programs for training educators and building language proficiency in your community.

The participants in the 2023 Focus Group Meeting also highlighted the importance of focusing on language team capacity, by asking:

- How will we continue to build capacity? What is our five year plan?
- What are our succession goals?
- How many teachers are emerging and when will they be ready to teach?
- Are there other language ambassadors in our school? How can they be built into our planning?
- What classes are needed? What activities are needed?
- Who will be retiring? How soon?
- Who needs a break? Who needs time out to build their skills?
- What realistic workloads can we manage?

What's Happening in First Nation Schools Related to Succession Planning?

Sample activities schools include in their workplans for First Nations Language and Culture grants.

- Creating a five-year plan for language and culture improvement, with monthly meetings to identify needs
- Making a five-year plan, starting out with a Kindergarten immersion program
- Reviewing and updating our five-year language vision to see what we have accomplished and where we are going
- Hiring an Education Assistant who is looking to develop her use of the language and understanding of the culture
- Hiring Language Assistants to work with students in the K/1 and the 2/3 classrooms to assist with creating a more immersive language environment

WORKPLAN EXCERPT: Two language teachers will continue to teach the K-7 students our language and culture, that strongly ties and grounds them to their self-identity, which they can carry into adulthood. This year a much needed Coordinator will be on board to support the 2 teachers and organize and coordinate the culture and language curriculum. This year we will also engage 1.5 cultural mentors, who will be trained under the tutelage of the senior language instructors. Through this process, the mentors will strengthen their vocabulary and use of language in sentences. This will enable them to substitute with full classes or move into other areas of language support.

WORKPLAN EXCERPT: One of our language teachers meets with our Resident Elder three times a week in the mentor-apprentice program. The immersive training involves having conversations while baking, going for drives, or interacting in other situations. They also do and play vocabulary activities and games. Lastly, the Elder provides pronunciation support.

CONCLUSIONS

“The first goal is student well-being – instilling pride in speaking your language and comfort in speaking your language.”

Desiree Danielson

We need to push the envelope. We need to try new things. Can we conduct more aspects of the school administration and school activities in our language? What else can we do that’s new and different?

Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices

With whatever we do, we need to continually assess and evaluate. We need to celebrate our successes. We need to identify ongoing challenges. We need to continually refine our programs and re-strategize to address necessary improvements. It is a cycle. We need to keep going.

Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices

Sometimes it seems like we are walking up a hill and we don’t know when we will get to the top. But the benefits of our work are showing up now. It is an amazing feeling to see young learners speaking their language. It gives us all hope. Showcasing people who have blazed the trail and learned their language shows us it is attainable.

Feedback from the 2023 Focus Group on
Language Revitalization: Promising Education Practices

Language learning is fundamental to the educational success and well-being of students of all ages. Related educational opportunities strengthen the relationship of First Nations students to the land – which is where their language and identity comes from. First Nations throughout BC look forward to a time when the first language of First Nations children is their own, and positive steps are being taken to make that goal a reality.

FNESC and FNSA hope this resource provides useful guidance for various aspects of school language programming, and inspires new and valuable initiatives. For more comprehensive language planning information, the following resources are available: *“Reviving your Language through Education: B.C. First Nations Language Education Planning Workbook”* (McIvor 2015), and *“First Nations Language Curriculum Building Guide”* (Ignace 2016).

We welcome feedback about this resource and invite anyone interested to share with FNESC and FNSA their initiatives and experiences in revitalizing their First Nations language.

“EWES TEQ TFE SONUSE. Don’t let the fire go out.”

SXEDFELISIYE Renee Sampson

APPENDIX

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS – BIOGRAPHIES

The development of this resource would not have been possible without the many contributors to this project, including Dr. Heather Bliss who drafted an early version of this paper.

FNESC would like to thank the following people for generously sharing their time and expertise.

Rosa Andrew, Xet'olacw Community School

Emhàlqwm Rosa Andrew is currently the Principal of Xet'olacw Community School. She was raised in Líl'wat and learned how to live off the land and to be proud of her culture and heritage. Emhàlqwm is passionate about asserting her identity as Stát'yemc and Líl'watemc and, although not yet a fluent speaker of the Ucwalmícwts Líl'wat Language, she has a passion for the revitalization of her community's mother tongue. In 1972, Emhàlqwm became a student of T'szil High, when a group of parents took over the Indian Day School on the reserve, which is now Xet'olacw Community School. Emhàlqwm serves on the T'szil Board of Education. She obtained her certificate in First Nations Language Proficiency in 1998, completed her B.A. General Studies from SFU in 2006, and got a master's in education and leadership from the University of British Columbia in 2013.

Jessica Arnouse, Tk'emlups Te Secwépemc

Jessica is a Secwépemc scholar and language advocate from Neskonlith First Nation (near Chase, BC). On completing her Bachelors, she worked at the Secwépemc Cultural Education Society where she built relationships with fluent Elders (first-language speakers). While working at the Tk'emlups te Secwépemc (TteS), she mentored the K4 Program at Little Fawn Nursery to achieve 100% immersion and completed her Masters in Indigenous Languages and Linguistics at SFU. She researched successful mentoring strategies to enhance the speaking skills of adult language learners through everyday language, yes/no question sets and SmartBoard technology. She was an instructor for the Me7 Tuxwtexwtsínem-kt Program at TteS and can attest to the Paul Creek curriculum designed to create new speakers of Secwepemctsin. Her goal with this teaching strategy was to immerse novice-level adult learners with gradual increments to build their speaking confidence in a nurturing learning environment. Jessica works with Secwépemc communities to revitalize the language.

Peetah Bastien, Red Crow Community College

Peetah is a Communications Officer Blood Tribe Administration, an Indigenous Social Work Master's degree candidate, and a former Red Crow College Indigenous Language Revitalization instructor/researcher. As an Indigenous Language Revitalization advocate, Peetah emphasizes the integration of experiential knowledge by promoting participatory relationships within the Blackfoot ethical framework. His research has assisted in the creation of Blackfoot Language revitalization course content that highlights the interconnection between the cosmos and Indigenous epistemologies. Peetah has participated in ceremony since a youth and has been mentioned in the NFB Documentary "The Last Round Up", Dr. David Peat's book "Lighting the Seventh Fire" and his mother Dr. Betty Bastien's Book "Blackfoot Ways of Knowing". In addition, as a Landmark Education Leadership graduate, Peetah informs the discussion of Indigenous leadership methodologies by practicing Blackfoot ontological responsibilities that guide his research and protect Indigenous kinship relational axiology.

Jaskwaan Bedard

Jaskwaan is from the Tsiits Git'anee Eagle Clan of Old Massett, G̓aw Tlageé. Although she did not have access to her language while growing up in Prince Rupert, Jaskwaan's inspiration to learn came when she was expecting her first daughter. She has now been learning Xaad Kil, the Massett dialect, for almost twenty years. Jaskwaan has worked with a number of Elders in the community to approach fluency which opened up the opportunities to create resources and curriculum and become the Haida language and Culture Curriculum Implementation teacher for School District No. 50. For the past eight years she has been a sessional instructor for SFU's Indigenous language program as well as for the Haida Gwaii Institute Semester program. For her PhD, she is writing an ethno-biographic dissertation on her work strengthening Xaad Kil at SFU where she was awarded the Dr. Ruby Peter Graduate Award in Indigenous Language Proficiency.

Janice E. Billy, M.Ed, B.Ed

Janice is a Secwepemc from the Adams Lake Indian Band in Chase, B.C. and has over thirty years' teaching experience in a Secwepemc Immersion classroom at Chief Atahm School. She graduated from the University of Victoria with a Masters in Language Revitalization. Janice has dedicated her life to learning the Secwepemc language and culture from the Elders of her community. She is a sessional instructor for Simon Fraser University Indigenous Language department and has worked with adult learners of the language to develop language proficiency. Janice is a master TPR (Total Physical Response) and TPRS (Total Physical Response-Storytelling) teacher and is co-instructor at the TPRS institute at Chief Atahm School. She continues to learn Secwepemctsin and to find best practices to teaching and learning the language.

Dr. Richard Compton, L'Université du Québec à Montréal

Richard is a Professor in the Department of Linguistics at the Université du Québec à Montréal and holds the Canada Research Chair in Knowledge and Transmission of the Inuit Language. His areas of research include syntax, morphology, polysynthesis, agreement, the study of lexical and functional categories, as well as language documentation and revitalization. He co-edited a dictionary of Inuinnaqtun with Emily Kudlak that was published by Nunavut Arctic College Media. He gives courses as part of teacher training certificates in Nunavik in collaboration with Kativik and UQAT and works with Inuit communities to describe and document their language.

Desiree Danielson, Acwsalcta School

Desiree's maternal line is from Nuxalkulmc. She spent her early childhood in Bella Coola, BC. Her family moved to Washington State and Vancouver, BC when she was older. Desiree got a certificate in acting from the American Musical and Dramatic Academy in New York, NY and her undergraduate degree in English from University of Washington in Seattle. Her inspiration in serving her home community started when she returned and worked in Bella Coola at Acwsalcta, and decided to get a second undergraduate degree, a Bachelors of Education from UBC. She returned to Bella Coola to teach and later got a Master's of Science in Literacy Education. Shortly after becoming Vice Principal, the school received language and culture funding to start a language nest. Her administration believed in the effectiveness of immersion to achieve fluency and started a language nest.

Dr. Candace Kaleimamoowahinekapu Galla, University of British Columbia

Born in Hilo, Candace was exposed to an array of languages and cultures from a young age. She received her B.A. in Linguistics, M.A. in Native American Linguistics, and Ph.D in Language, Reading, and Culture. Candace was the Program Coordinator at the American Indian Language Development Institute - a program that inspired her dissertation research on Indigenous language revitalization and digital technology. Now she is Associate Professor in the Department of Language and Literacy Education (Faculty of Education) and the Institute for Critical Indigenous Studies (Faculty of Arts) that comprise of First Nations and Indigenous Studies, and the First Nations and Endangered Languages Program at the University of British Columbia. Her scholarship focuses on Indigenous languages at the intersection of education, revitalization, digital technology, traditional and cultural practices, and policy and planning; and decolonizing and Indigenizing the academy to create pathways for Indigenous thinkers and scholars, and scholarship – locally, nationally, and globally.

Toni George, Outma Sqilx'w Cultural School

Toni Gallicano-George is member of the Penticton Indian Band and is of syilx and European descent. She obtained her BaEd through UBCO and taught Grade 1 for several years prior to taking her MaEd in Leadership and Administration. She is the Principal of Outma Sqilx'w Cultural School on the Penticton Indian Reserve and has been learning nsyilxcen since 2009. Toni has a passion for ensuring young people have a diversity of opportunities to learn their traditional language and culture so that they are grounded in who they are and where they come from. Ensuring programs are robust, engaging, continuous and have high levels of expectations are key to ensuring the future success of our young language speakers.

Pamela Hagongak Gross, Pitquhirnikkut Ilihautiniq

Pamela is an Inuinnaq (Copper Inuk) from Cambridge Bay, Nunavut who is a member of the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut. She serves as the Deputy Premier, Minister of Education and Minister responsible for Nunavut Arctic College. She is also the President for the Inuit Heritage Trust, Vice-President of the Amautiit, and Councillor for the Canadian Museums Association's Indigenous Reconciliation Council. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Anthropology and Aboriginal Studies from Carleton University and has undertaken studies in indigenous governance at the University of Winnipeg. She pursued work in Inuinnaqtun revitalization and Inuit Studies at Nunavut Arctic College and Nunavut Sivuniksavut.

Dr. Rebekah Ingram, Carleton University

Rebekah received her PhD in Applied Linguistics and Discourse Studies from the School of Linguistics and Language Studies at Carleton University, in Ontario, Canada. Rebekah is currently a Research Associate at the Geomatics and Cartographic Research Centre at Carleton where she serves as the coordinator for the Atlas of Kanyen'kehá:ka Space, which aims to reconnect language and landscape within Kanyen'kehá:ka communities. She is also an instructor within the School of Linguistics and Language studies, and the tribal linguist for the Catawba Nation of Rock Hill, South Carolina, who are seeking to revive and revitalize their language. Her current research focuses on knowledge of landscape through place names, landscape-based semantics and language revitalization using land-based learning. She is also the English editor for the journal *Onomastica Canadiana*.

Debbie Leighton Stephens, Sm'algyax Language Support

Debbie is member of the Ts'msyen Nation, of the Gisbutwada, (killerwhale), Gitwilgyoots tribe from Max-łaxaala BC. Debbie worked in the Prince Rupert school district for over thirty years as classroom teacher, coordinator of the Ts'msyen, Sm'algyax program and as District Principal of Indigenous education—working at the regional and provincial level. She is an active contributor to the success of Indigenous learners, supporting the understanding of First Nations and Ts'msyen history, language and culture for learners and educators. To give back to her community and Nation, Debbie continues to work with a committed team of Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders and teachers who support and strengthen Sm'algyax learning in communities and schools. Believing that learning is a lifelong process, she recently completed her Doctorate of Education at SFU and continues to immerse herself in the history, culture and language of her Ts'msyen territory.

Cherith Mark, Stoney Education Authority

Cherith resides in her home community of Mîni Thnî, Morley AB in Treaty 7 Territory. Cherith has a background in dance and theater and has studied at Grant MacEwan College, Simon Fraser University, the Aboriginal Arts Program at the Banff Centre and the Centre for Indigenous Theatre. Cherith actively contributes to her community, the Stoney Nation, including as a Board member of the Mîni Thnî Charity Foundation Board from 2014 to present and is a Banff Centre Board Governor for the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. She is a language champion for her community and is often called upon for assistance in coordinating with Elders for translations with language projects. In addition, she also advocates for the use of the language in schools through her work with Stoney Education Authority, serving as lead coordinator for the Stoney Language Resource Initiative Project.

Dr. Kathryn Michel, Chief Atahm School

Dr. Michel is a Secwepemc mother of four with six beautiful grandchildren. She is one of the founders of Chief Atahm School, a Secwepemc immersion school that began in 1991 on Adams Lake Reserve. Kathryn has worked as a language nest coordinator, curriculum developer, and researcher for over 20 years. In 2012 she completed her doctoral thesis at UBC that focused on language transformation through language immersion. Kathryn has written, edited and published numerous Secwepemctsin resources. Currently she is instructing in the SFU adult proficiency program and coordinating the language nest. She also devotes time to assist other language groups in developing their language programs. In 2013, she developed the "First Nations Language Essentials" language curricula for use in First Nations schools in BC.

chuutsqa L. Rorick, Hesquiaht Language Program

chuutsqa is a Hesquiaht First Nations woman and a founding member of the grassroots organization Hesquiaht Language Program. She began learning to be a speaker of her language from late Lawrence Paul and Angela Galligos in the Mentor-Apprentice Program from 2010-2013. Since then, chuutsqa has continued to seek out further language learning and teaching skills, sharing language immersion guidance with numerous Mentor-Apprentice teams across North America. A graduate of the Masters in Indigenous Language Revitalization Program at the University of Victoria (UVic), chuutsqa continues to learn and teach Hesquiaht language alongside remaining fluent Elders while she is a doctoral candidate in Education at UVic.

SXEDFELISIYE Renee Sampson, WSÁNEĆ School Board

SXEDFELISIE is a WSÁNEĆ community member and language revitalizer who works as the SENĆOŦEN program facilitator at the WSÁNEĆ School Board and is a sessional professor at University of Victoria in the W,SENĆOŦEN,ISTW Certificate, Diploma, and B.ED SENĆOŦEN Indigenous Language revitalization program. Her grandparents went to residential school, so she had a yearning for the language. From mentoring/apprenticing under J,SINTEN (John Elliott), her passions became language learning, teaching and working with the youth. SXEDFELISIYE has been working at the WSÁNEĆ School Board since 2009 and is the SENĆOŦEN program facilitator for both the ŁÁU,WEL,NEW Tribal School and the WSÁNEĆ Leadership School. She collaborated with elders to translate over 200 books which her language department STÁSEN self-published for their SENĆOŦEN immersion program—largely available on a reading platform called SIMBI @ simbi.io. SXEDFELISIYE is working on a SENĆOŦEN bilingual graduation pathway at the WSÁNEĆ leadership Secondary School. The first cohort of immersion students will begin grade 10 in 2024.

Jessica Starlund

Jessica Starlund is Gitxsan and Nuu Chan Ullth. She recently inherited a Sigidim Hanak (Matriarch name), Sin'unks. She began learning Sim Algyax in Language Nest and currently continues to work in a First Nations school, Wilp Si'wilaksinxwhl Simgi'gyet Elementary, as a Gitxsan language teacher. Jessica has ten years of experience with learning and teaching Gitxsan to the majagalee (flowers of the village, reference to children), as well as supporting Gitxsan members to learn. Jessica is also doing work outside of her community, she is a Mentor Apprentice Coach with FPCC, community language events and currently enrolled in the University of Victoria's Masters of Indigenous Language Program. It is Jessica's passion and dedication to continue researching methods, knowledge and experience within the field of Indigenous Language Revitalization.

Tye Swallow, WSÁNEĆ School Board

Since 2001, Tye has worked at the Saanich Adult Education Centre, part of the WSÁNEĆ School Board (WSB) near Victoria B.C., and has taught senior Biology, Geography and science to high school and adult learners. He co-created ÁLENENEŦ: Learning From Homeland with the WSÁNEĆ community in 2005, which has since seen several iterations and is now part of the core curriculum of the SENĆOŦEN LENONET SCUL,ÁUTW preschool, Kindergarten to Grade 9 SENĆOŦEN Immersion school. Since 2009 he continues to help facilitate Language Revitalization at the WSB through the STÁ,SEN TFE SENĆOŦEN language revitalization apprenticeship program. Tye holds an MA in Curriculum and Instruction in 2005.

Kendra Underwood, W̱SÁNEĆ School Board

S̱EMXÁMTENOT, Kendra, is from W̱SÁNEĆ, Tsawout First Nation, and has worked as director of the Saanich Adult Education Center (SAEC) at the W̱SÁNEĆ School Board for the past fifteen years. The SAEC is part of the W̱SÁNEĆ School Board in Tsartlip, serving Tsawout, Tseycum, Tsartlip and Pauquachin by providing educational programming leading to the Adult Dogwood program and community-based post-secondary opportunities that focus on SENĆOŦEN language revitalization and community-based initiatives. Kendra holds a Master of Adult Education from St. Francis Xavier University and an undergraduate degree from the University of Victoria. She sits on the Board of Directors for the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC), the Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association (IAHLA), and the BC Scholarship Society. She finds the opportunity to contribute to First Nations advocacy efforts at the local and provincial levels a true honour.

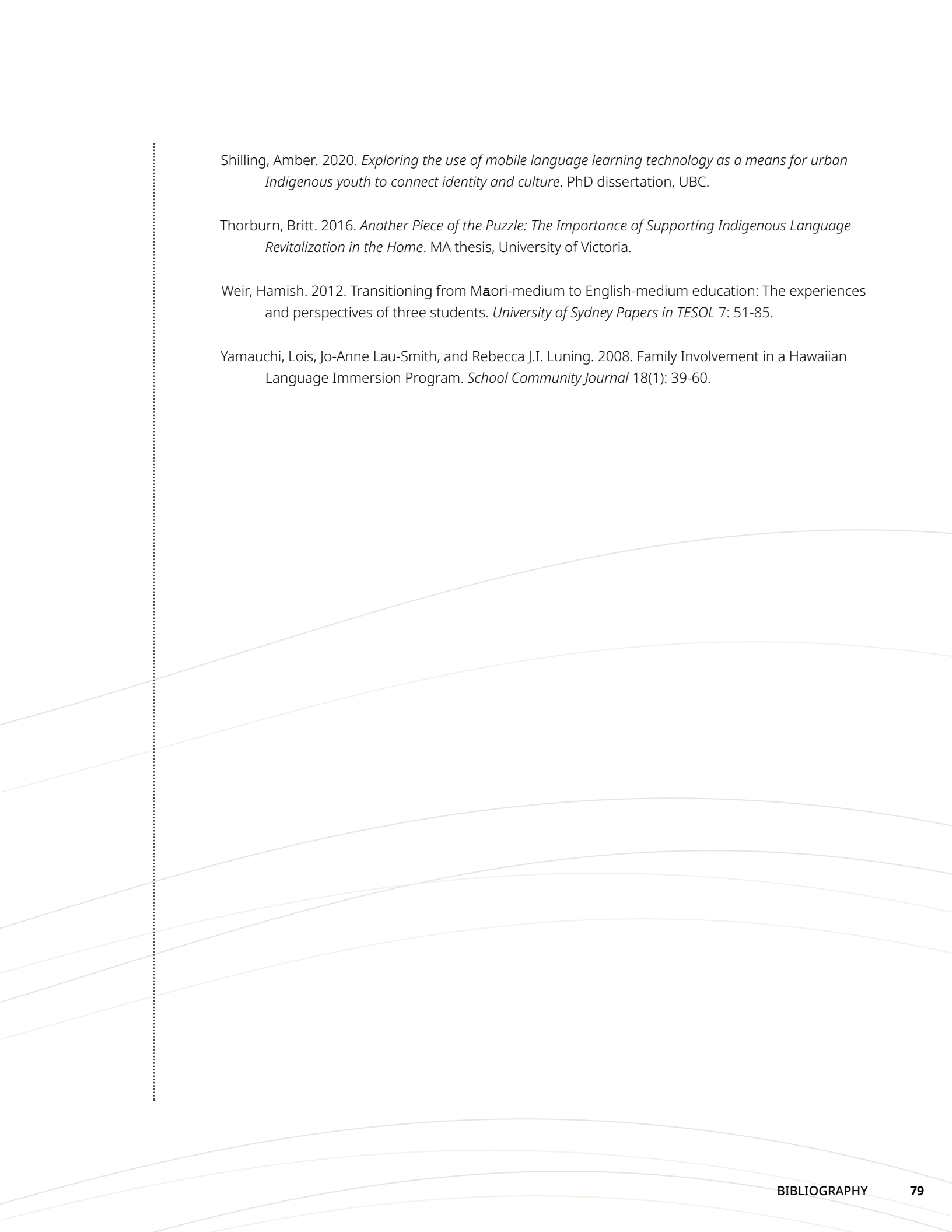
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