

## Ax toowú át wudikeen, *my spirit soars*: Tlingit direct acquisition and co-learning pilot project

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Many Indigenous languages, including Tlingit, are critically endangered and in urgent need of new adult speakers within the parent-aged generation. However, no consensus exists on language revitalization strategy, curricular design, lesson plans, assessment, or teaching methods. A small Tlingit cohort courageously developed and piloted a new curriculum and acquisition method by following a proven curricular design borrowed from an Interior Salish language, Nsyilxcn. This article introduces broad concepts such as the motivations behind language revitalization and quality immersion strategies for creating proficient speakers. It further describes recording techniques, the creation of sequenced curriculum designed for learners to raise each other up while teaching, and training learners to teach. It also presents a story of Tlingit language activism blended with Syilx language activism, specifically the direct acquisition method and its successful application by an adult cohort of beginner Tlingit learners.

**Author bio:** My name is Sʔímlaʔxʷ. I am Syilx (Okanagan Interior Salish) and suyapix (Euro-Canadian) and I live in unceded Syilx territory, Penticton, BC, Canada. I am a language activist and Nsyilxcn language teacher in my community and am studying to become nʔtʔcin (a clear or advanced speaker). My action-based research strives to stem the erosion of Indigenous languages by training adult learners to become speakers, assessing our progress, and recording our remaining Elders. In my time off you will find me cross-country skiing and hiking in the mountains and forests.

**1. Introduction**<sup>1</sup> wayʔ iskʷíst Sʔímlaʔxʷ. sqilxʷ uʔ suyápix isʔaxʷíps. My name is Sʔímlaʔxʷ and my ancestry is Syilx-Okanagan and Euro-Canadian. I am a language activist and language teacher. This article presents a story of Tlingit language activism blended with Syilx language activism, a story of courage, discovery, and language development, representing an initial phase of language revitalization in two critically en-

<sup>1</sup>I hold my hands up in the air to Anafahash Sam Johnston and Kʔyishí Bessie Cooley for generously creating Tlingit recordings, Christopher Parkin and the Salish School of Spokane for freely sharing the proven teaching methods, and the curricular design of the *Nʔsəlʔxcin Curriculum Project* ([www.interiorsalish.com](http://www.interiorsalish.com)). I extend gratitude to all the other knowledge keepers, Elders, Grizzly Bears, tmixw, and ʔəʔmaʔls I have learned from; Nancy and Christina for their spare bedrooms in Whitehorse; and to Gary Bailie, lead wolf at the Kwanlin Dūn First Nation Coyote Ski Cabin for providing cross-country ski trails and physical exercise to balance the cerebral. Limlōmt gunalchéesh to Dr. Marianne Ignace at Simon Fraser University First Nations Languages Centre for supporting the project vision with a post-doctorate research fellowship, Aboriginal Languages Initiative for support, and most especially to Kʔèdukà Jack and Kʔwinikweik Morgane Pennycook for taking up the torch of Tlingit revitalization in Whitehorse, Yukon.

dangered languages. My role and responsibility to Indigenous language revitalization is to empower adult learners to become speakers—an honor that makes my heart sing. We do not talk *about* language—we *do* language.<sup>2</sup> A small cohort of Tlingit learners formed over the winter of 2013–2014 and piloted an immersion learning strategy borrowed from a geographically distant Indigenous language, Nsyilxcn (Okanagan, Interior Salish), my language. I developed a draft of a new Tlingit textbook by following a proven curricular design developed by the Salish School of Spokane.<sup>3</sup> I taught the text and teaching method to a small cohort of two students, meeting weekly for intensive six-hour immersion blocks. During the project, a co-learning strategy emerged as the cohort gained confidence, we began to take turns teaching each other, and we *raised each other up*.<sup>4</sup> The direct acquisition method, cohort-style learning, description of our pilot project, and curriculum development are the focus of this article. A filmed language assessment is discussed separately (Johnson in review).

Our Tlingit lessons followed the curricular design and ‘direct acquisition’ teaching method modeled in the *N̓səl'xcin Curriculum Project*, a series of six textbooks, including teaching manuals, audio recordings, lesson plans, and teaching graphics, from beginner to advanced proficiency (Peterson et al. 2015). The ‘direct acquisition’ method is designed by Christopher Parkin and draws on the Natural Approach, Total Physical Response, and full immersion, and is designed to be taught by learners. The differences between this method and other methods (for example, mentor-apprentice programs or other language textbooks) is that learners are empowered right away to become teachers, are given the tools (i.e., lesson plans, teaching manuals, and teacher training) to *learn while teaching*. Curriculum covers 1,000 hours of sequenced language exposure from beginner to advanced and includes daily quizzes and regular written and oral assessments. The Lesson Plans, Direct Acquisition Teacher’s Manual, and the six textbooks in the curriculum can be downloaded at <http://www.interior-salish.com/nselxcincurriculum.html>.

This article shares the application of these methods and strategies by beginner learners and shares experiences of grassroots language activism in Indigenous language revitalization. I outline the concrete steps required to achieve beginner, intermediate, and advanced proficiency in Indigenous languages by following sequenced curriculum designed to be taught by learners, and provide recommendations for programs and sequenced curriculum that can be built and taught by grassroots language activists. This article at times speaks directly to activists who are dedicated to creating new speakers in their languages.

Many of Canada’s Indigenous languages are critically endangered and lack speakers under the age of seventy (Norris 2011). Many of these languages lack, but critically need, trained teachers, sequenced curriculum, and effective second-language teaching methods (Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer 1998; Hinton 2003:79). Beginner learners are now required to step up and become trained teachers. Leanne Hinton

<sup>2</sup>A nod to Khelsilem and his powerful blog post about advanced language activism on Oct. 26, 2015: <http://liberatedyet.tumblr.com/post/131729888386/why-i-avoid-word-of-the-day-projects>.

<sup>3</sup>[www.interiorsalish.com](http://www.interiorsalish.com).

<sup>4</sup>Tlingit speakers are known for poetic metaphor and oratory; I heard this expression in community, accompanied by holding up the hands. Tlingit is spelled Lingit, in Tlingit.

refers to these learners as “heroes” (Hinton 2003:79). Research shows that learning while teaching is an effective language learning strategy (Grzega 2005; Johnson 2013). Teaching as a beginner is a challenging process, requiring stringent application of methods, maintaining consistent classroom safety, and managing the tensions that naturally arise between the learners and the teacher. Classroom safety, a term used informally by second language teachers, also known as emotional safety, is a critical component of a successful Indigenous second-language teaching strategy (Johnson 2013); it can take only one negative comment to sideline a learner’s motivation to continue learning (Hinton & Hale 2001:3) and it is well known that Indigenous language programs face additional pressures due to ongoing tensions of colonization.

Grassroots Indigenous language programs have a better chance of success than institutionally based programs because learners are able to quickly adopt and implement new methods. Many critically endangered language revitalization efforts need techniques which support learners to learn while they themselves are teaching. Grassroots language activists can perform a vital role in adopting new techniques, writing curriculum, piloting it in their own languages, and overcoming any community resistance to change.

My primary goal was simple: to use methods which supported Tlingit language acquisition and proficiency, with the ultimate aim of creating new speakers. I had seen these methods work for my own language, Nsyilxcn, and had facilitated Nsyilxcn learners to slowly and courageously gain their voices. My Tlingit cohort demonstrated, through filmed assessment (Johnson in review), that a second-language acquisition method from another Indigenous language, Nsyilxcn, can be effectively applied to Tlingit, even when the teachers were not fluent. We raised each other up from a near-zero proficiency level at the start of the project to a mid-beginner speaking level (Johnson in review). This in itself is significant, after only forty hours of instruction—but more than that, we learned we *can* do this.

**2. Who we are** As an Indigenous researcher it is imperative to situate oneself within the research and share backgrounds and motivations. This is the story of two Tlingit language learners, K’èdukà Jack and George Bahm, later joined by K’winikweik Morgane Pennycook and other learners. It is also my story, their curriculum writer, trainer, teacher, and co-learner from the Syilx Okanagan Nation. We begin in Whitehorse, Yukon in the winter of 2013–14.

I am a Syilx-Okanagan language teacher and learner from the Nsyilxcn, or Okanagan language territory, Interior Salish, Southern British Columbia, Canada. I’ve now had the opportunity to step into two worlds of language revitalization: Nsyilxcn and Tlingit. I completed my PhD in language revitalization, formed a pilot language house in Chopaka, BC, brought myself and a small cohort of five Nsyilxcn learners to intermediate speech in our own critically endangered language, and filmed our progress<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup>*Chopaka Immersion House: Goldilocks 1*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KVj3vpCf6JE>; *Chopaka Immersion House: Goldilocks II*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3DxQbLr1rw&spfreload=10>; and *k’u n’əq’cin we speak clearly*: <http://youtu.be/O7fFMN-KSa4>.

(Johnson 2013, 2014). More recently I formed the full-time Syilx Language House in Penticton BC.<sup>6</sup>

I was requested by K'èdukà and George to help them learn their Tlingit language in 2013 and I agreed. It began as a volunteer endeavour, then a pilot project supported by a Simon Fraser University post-doctorate position, and finally supported by a federal Aboriginal Languages Initiative grant.

K'èdukà Jack is a Tlingit community member from Atlin, BC. She is twenty-five years old and comes from a strong activist family. She is committed to learning Tlingit ways including spending time on the land with her family engaging in traditional resource practices. During the time of this pilot project, she taught at a Tlingit daycare in Teslin, Yukon. George Bahm is a Tlingit community member from Teslin Yukon. He is forty-nine years old, an ex-pilot with a twenty-five-year safety record, and an experiential Indigenous education consultant for the Yukon Department of Education school programs in Whitehorse. He is a role model to youth, a member of the Dakka Kwaan traditional Tlingit dance group, and an active trapper on his family's trapline up the Canol Road near Teslin.

Tlingit is an isolated branch of the Na-Dené language family, and is comprised of Coastal and Inland Tlingit, which are contiguous but separated by the Canada/U.S. border. Coastal Tlingit is situated on the Southeast Alaska Coast; Inland Tlingit is situated in the northwestern part of British Columbia and the southern Yukon Territory in Canada. Tlingit is notable for its poetic oratory, complex grammar, and sound system, having a handful of phonemes unheard in any other language.

Nsyilxcn, also known as N'səl'xcin or Okanagan, is an Interior Salish language located on the Interior Plateau of Southern British Columbia, Canada, and Northern Washington. Both Nsyilxcn and Tlingit are critically endangered with around fifty to one hundred first-language speakers remaining. In a critically endangered language, "the youngest speakers are grandparents and older, and they speak the language partially and infrequently" (Norris 2011:124).

Tlingit and Nsyilxcn are stage seven languages, on the eight stage GIDS scale of language shift (Fishman 1993). A stage seven language has few culturally active speakers, rarely counts speakers younger than sixty years, has some people learning the language, and few if any children being raised in the language. A stage eight language has even fewer speakers and opportunities to interact in the language. The next stage after stage eight is language extinction.

It struck me from the beginning that Tlingit and Nsyilxcn have notable commonalities: each has a dictionary written by linguists (Mattina 1987; Edwards 2009; and several excellent Tlingit resources, verb books, and dictionaries<sup>7</sup>) and a considerable amount of beginner curriculum. Each is a cross-border language bisected by the

<sup>6</sup>The Language House's website can be viewed at: [www.thelanguagehouse.ca](http://www.thelanguagehouse.ca). Gratitude goes to the Penticton Indian Band, Westbank First Nation, and Osoyoos Indian Band for providing core funding and supporting employees to attend; to Okanagan Indian Band, Okanagan Nation Alliance, School District 23, and Sensisyusten School for supporting employees to attend; to Simon Fraser University, Mitacs, Aboriginal Languages Initiative, and First Peoples Culture Council for support; and to my courageous students and co-teachers for their unfailing enthusiasm and motivation.

<sup>7</sup>These dictionaries may be downloaded at <http://tlingitlanguage.com>.

Canada-U.S. border. Syilx is an interior culture, as is Interior Tlingit. Both cultures enjoy a rich story system and long winter gatherings where stories were told. There are a number of programs in each language. However no new fluent speakers have emerged or been created on the Canadian side of Syilx or Tlingit territory in over sixty years. Nsyilxcn and Tlingit programs in Canadian schools plateau at the beginner level due to a lack of teaching time and a lack of trained teachers, who are generally beginner speakers themselves. There are no strategies in place for teachers (or any adults for that matter) to become proficient Nsyilxcn or Tlingit speakers in Canada. I should add there was no strategy in Canada for Nsyilxcn until last September when we opened the Syilx Language House Association which is following a 2,000 hour strategy to create parent-aged speakers.

Interestingly, for both languages, successful programs have emerged on the U.S. side of the language territories but not in Canada. Both Nsyilxcn and Tlingit have hundreds of beginner second-language learners, and a handful of intermediate and advanced second-language speakers, all based in the U.S. sides of their territories (these assessments are based on personal observations, not published sources). A handful of new Nsyilxcn speakers, adults and children, has emerged with the assistance of the *N̄səl'xcin Curriculum Project* and an immersion school based in Spokane, Washington. A handful of new Tlingit speakers is based in Juneau, Alaska. These new speakers were catalyzed by immersion Tlingit language camps which initially had an extraordinarily high speaker-to-learner ratio (five speakers and five learners in the first camp in 2005), organized with support of Sealaska Heritage Institute and later by the Goldbelt Heritage Foundation (Chester et al. 2013). The new speakers maintain their language skills through ongoing institution-based initiatives, including language classes at the University of Alaska Southwest, taught since 1995 by Florence Shaekley and more recently by Marsha Hotch and X̱'unei Lance Twitchell.

In Nsyilxcn as well as in Tlingit, we still have the opportunity to learn from our remaining Elder speakers. In many of our communities' schools on the Canadian side of the border, Elders shoulder the burden of teaching beginner adults and children. High-quality Elder recordings are being produced on the U.S. side of the border in both Nsyilxcn and Tlingit.<sup>8</sup> My intention was, and is, to follow the example of the *N̄səl'xcin Curriculum Project* and create high-quality, teachable Tlingit lessons, with audio recorded by Elders, and make them freely available to Tlingit learners who are interested in learning by teaching.

**3. Our motivations for learning** I was motivated to implement for Tlingit the best teaching practices available and assist in a transformative praxis similar to the one I facilitated for parent-aged Nsyilxcn learners (Johnson 2013, 2014). K'èdukà and George were motivated by a deep desire to learn to speak their language. They each

<sup>8</sup>For excellent Tlingit conversations recorded by the University of Alaska Southeast in Juneau (Taff, Alice 2013. We're talking conversation): [http://www.uas.alaska.edu/arts\\_sciences/humanities/alaska-languages/cuped/video-conv/](http://www.uas.alaska.edu/arts_sciences/humanities/alaska-languages/cuped/video-conv/). For numerous texts, learning materials, grammar resources, audio and videos shared by X̱'unei Lance Twitchell, young Tlingit professor at University Alaska Southeast, see <http://tlingit.info/video/>.

expressed a frustration in the lack of adult programs and hoped for support from their workplaces to learn Tlingit, which is essential to their teaching.

As an Indigenous researcher, it is imperative to conduct action-based research which is useful to community and leads to transformation, in other words, from conscientization to decolonizing praxis (Friere 2005; Smith 2000, 2003, 2005). Language revitalization work is by its nature decolonizing—re-asserting the use of a language which has been eroded or stripped away by generations of colonization. Revitalization requires great effort, a force of will, and a reliance on proven second-language acquisition tools and techniques—there is nothing traditional about re-birthing an Indigenous language. In the initial stages of language revitalization, moving from near-death to life, the resuscitation process will rely on “artificial” methods such as second-language acquisition techniques, teaching methods, sequenced curriculum, language nests, and classroom study (Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer 1998:79; McIvor 2005:100).

Language knowledge has been linked to absolute indicators of community health (Hallett et al. 2007). It is very empowering and culturally healthy for children and adults to hear even a few words spoken by an Indigenous language teacher in the classroom and outside on the land.

**4. Learning from others: failing strategies for critically endangered languages** For stage seven and eight languages, the main recommendations (Fishman 1993) are to regenerate a parent-aged community of speakers as quickly as possible and to document Elders. For these critically endangered languages there is no time to lose, but Elders’ precious time is often over-exploited in teaching children and beginners. Indigenous language revitalization efforts are often mis-matched with unsuccessful strategies. Primarily, efforts focus too early on teaching children (often by the few remaining fluent Elders) before there is a parent-aged cohort of proficient second-language speakers (Fishman 1993; Parkin 2012). Chris Parkin, Nsyilxcn language leader and activist, warns of common mistakes of many stage seven and eight languages of an over-reliance on “public school language programs, casual community language classes, college and university language classes, cultural events with some language, media production (web, radio, TV), linguistic studies and analyses” (Parkin 2012 08:59). These strategies are routinely employed by stage seven and eight languages and all are “associated with failure” (Parkin 2012 09:24).

The key demographic in reversing language shift is the parent-aged generation (Fishman 1993; Kamana & Wilson 2009:375). However, many Indigenous language programs rely on Elder-based teaching programs even as the teachers become very elderly. In both Syilx and Tlingit communities (particularly on the Canadian side of the border), there is an over-reliance on school programs, coupled with a common belief that Elders are the *only* ones who should teach language and should lead the lessons (more on this below). This is not a sustainable strategy, and is one which the Elders at the Chief Atahm School in Chase, BC consider being “thrown to the wolves” (Michel 2012). While our Elders are our most fluent speakers, younger teachers have higher energy to employ immersion teaching methods.

Most language programs do not provide enough time on task (a term which in this case means number of hours spent learning language); a crucial factor in learning any language (Jackson & Kaplan 1999; Rifkin 2003). Most programs fall far short of the *at least* 1,000 hours of intensive, quality instruction required to become proficient (Johnson 2013, 2014), discussed below.

Many or most Indigenous language communities lack effective tools, knowledge, strategies, and resources necessary to revitalize their language (Maclean 1994). Casual drop-in classes are often employed, and though these programs raise awareness and create positive feelings toward language, they will not create speakers. I have heard it estimated that one-hour-a-week drop-in language classes will take one hundred years to create fluent speakers, accounting for repetition and review. Nora and Richard Dauenhauer (1998), well-known Tlingit activists, researchers, and teachers, state that what is most needed are effective teaching methods.

Indigenous language programs, particularly school-based programs, often plateau at the beginner level because beginner teachers lack training in methods, curriculum, and sufficient hours of instruction. Stephen Greymorning critically assessed unsuccessful Arapaho instruction in the schools (strikingly similar, in my view, to Nsyilxcn being taught in Canadian schools) prior to his pilot project. Children received only fifteen minutes a day of language instruction and had plateaued at numbers and colors:

After assessing the school's Arapaho language classes it was very clear that they were one dimensional, focusing almost exclusively on numbers, colors, and a variety of vocabulary words including food items and animals. And, although students from grade two to six could recite a translation of the Pledge of Allegiance, these students did not have any comprehension of what they were actually saying. Students at the Junior High presented a similar problem. (Greymorning 1999)

An obstacle to language revitalization in the early stages is fear, unconstructive negativity, resistance from community, ongoing discussions, disagreements over strategy and methods, delay tactics, and community politics (discussed further below). Stephen Greymorning describes criticism he received during Arapaho language revitalization efforts:

It is interesting how some of our strongest efforts can at times bring about opposition from our own people. As our language efforts intensified so did the criticism. I frequently heard comments about the sacredness of the language and that it should not be in a cartoon, in books, or on a computer. Comments like these made me wonder what benefit could come by keeping language locked away as though it was in a closet. (Greymorning 1999)

## **5. Learning from others: successful strategies for critically endangered languages**

While many efforts fail to create new speakers, there are a number of successful strategies. With only a handful of Elder speakers left in each community, it is critical for

stage seven languages such as Nsyilxcn and Tlingit to create a new generation of parent-aged speakers and teachers. The focus must be to re-start intergenerational transmission of the language; to “train new speakers of childbearing age, build connections between new speakers and culturally active fluent Elders, empower speakers to raise children in the language, and work to form a language-culture, bringing together speakers” (Parkin 2012, 08:03). In successful immersion schools, younger teachers have developed strategies to lift the burden from the Elders and lead the lessons (Parkin 2012; Michel 2012). Initial efforts will require activism and faith and should follow proven second-language acquisition methods for creating cohorts of beginner, intermediate, and advanced speakers.

When I refer to terms such as beginner, intermediate, and advanced, I am referring to the terms as understood by the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB 2012), the American Council for Teaching Foreign Languages (ACTFL 2012), and Jack Miller’s Indigenous Language Benchmarks (2004), summarized in the appendix to my dissertation (Johnson 2013:253-255). To briefly summarize, at beginner levels, speech is difficult, sentences are very short, consisting of one or two words, and topics are constrained to simple question and answer dialogues in a safe environment with a patient teacher. It is very difficult for Elders to understand beginner speech. At intermediate levels, learners are able to speak about daily topics and can storytell for up to ten minutes; speech is still difficult and contains many mistakes but is intelligible to Elders. At Intermediate levels, learners can begin to teach in immersion, write lessons, speak with Elders, and record and transcribe Elders’ stories. At advanced levels, learners are able to engage in debate, converse and lecture on specialized topics. The term *speaker* is often used informally in community; by *speaker*, I mean anyone at a mid-intermediate to advanced level. I identified a series of steps necessary to produce cohorts of adult speakers.

**5.1 Step 1: Choose a proven strategy and commit 1,000 hours** For a learning strategy to create advanced speakers, it doesn’t matter which teaching method is chosen as long as it is sequenced, taught by trained instructors, and intensively followed for over 1,000 hours (Jackson & Kaplan 1999:76). The United States Foreign Service Institute (FSI), with fifty years of success in creating advanced speakers for diplomatic service, provides many insights (Jackson & Kaplan 1999). They stress the sheer number of intensive hours required; at least four hours a day (plus three hours a day of homework), five days a week, for two years. They find an optimum class size to be four to six learners. They stress the importance of a structured, supportive environment, intensive language exposure, language drills, and stress that learning time cannot be shortened:

Time on task and the intensity of the learning experience appear crucial. Language learning is not an effortless endeavor for adults (or for children, for that matter). For the great majority of adult learners, learning a language rapidly to a high level requires a great deal of memorization, analysis, practice to build automaticity, and, of course, functional and meaningful language use. (Jackson & Kaplan 1999:76)



The Foreign Service Institute reports 2,200 intensive hours for “average” students to achieve advanced levels in Category 3 languages (those that are most difficult for English-speaking learners) (Jackson & Kaplan 1999:78). To achieve intermediate proficiency, more than 1,000 hours are required for Category 3 languages (Jackson & Kaplan 1999; Rifkin 2003), including North American Indigenous languages (Johnson 2013). University programs for languages such as German or Italian typically teach 420 hours, far short of the number of hours required to achieve an advanced level, even in a language relatively simpler for English speakers to learn (Rifkin 2003). Most Indigenous language programs fall far short of 1,000 intensive hours. 1,000 hours can be accomplished in two years of full-time study or four part-time years. Two thousand hours amounts to approximately four years of full-time university study (assuming no electives), or two years of full-time study, forty hours a week. With twelve hours a week, 48 weeks per year, a program can log 2,000 hours in four years. A thousand hours can create a cohort of mid-intermediate Nsyilxcn or Tlingit speakers, in my experience. Two thousand hours can create high-intermediate speakers. A full-time language program is best. However, if a full-time program is not possible, five hours a week is the bare minimum.

In Nsyilxcn, I assessed my co-learning cohort after six-hundred intensive, transformational hours of study in our own pilot-project, an immersion language house at Keremeos, BC in 2011. We achieved low-intermediate speech after six-hundred hours, a testament to the effectiveness of the direct acquisition method and the *N'səl'xcin Curriculum Project* (Johnson 2013, 2014). I subsequently achieved mid-intermediate speech after 1,000 hours of continued study, through a combination of teaching direct acquisition and working with Elders. I hope to raise my proficiency to high-intermediate through 2,000 more hours of teaching. In 2015, I launched a language house which will expose students and teacher-learners to 2,000 hours of sequenced Nsyilxcn lessons over four years.<sup>9</sup> and is also recording and documenting our remaining fluent Elders.

For critically endangered Indigenous languages such as Nsyilxcn and Tlingit, I propose that the teaching method must be intensive, sequenced, interactive, fun, rely on classroom safety, and have the added consideration that it is designed to be taught by learners. At Chief Atahm Immersion School, teachers are supported by teacher training and sequenced curriculum designed to be taught by learners, based on Total Physical Response (Michel 2012). Similarly, the *N'səl'xcin Curriculum Project* supports teachers with hundreds of hours of sequenced curriculum, teacher training, and lessons designed to be taught by learners who will learn while teaching.

**5.2 N'səl'xcin Curriculum Project** Once a strategy is chosen, the curriculum must be built. My chosen strategy for Tlingit was to follow the ‘direct acquisition’ method and curricular design of the *N'səl'xcin Curriculum Project*. The *N'səl'xcin Curriculum Project* consists of a series of six textbooks (Peterson et al. 2015) designed to be taught by learners and bring students from the beginner to the advanced level in one year of full-time study or approximately 1,000 hours. The materials were jointly developed

<sup>9</sup> [www.thelanguagehouse.ca](http://www.thelanguagehouse.ca)

by Salish School of Spokane and its sister-organization in Canada, the Paul Creek Language Association, based on a curricular design and teaching method by Christopher Parkin. The curriculum is used extensively in Nsyilxcn and Kalispel territory, as well as in Flathead territory, and has created a new generation of a dozen or so speakers (Johnson in review).

The six textbooks in the *N'səl'xcin Curriculum Project* each consist of a learner's textbook with worksheets, audio CDs, partner exercises (in the third through sixth books), and computer games (Peterson et al. 2015). Each textbook has a story-based computer app (game), used to augment the learning process. The apps are not used to *teach* the lessons, but can be used by learners to review previously learned lessons and stories. The teacher's materials for each textbook consist of printed color images (clipart and illustrations), props for games, teaching manuals, and training in the method.<sup>10</sup>

The first textbook (*N'səl'xcin* 1; for simplicity I will refer to the six textbooks as Books 1-6) produces a learned vocabulary of 500 words in ninety hours of instruction. Book 1 has forty-five lessons, each with ten vocabulary words (either nouns or verbs) and three question and answer sentences. Each lesson takes an hour and a half to teach. The three sentences are typically a question, a 'yes' answer, and a 'no' answer, all of which can be practiced in question-response with the ten vocabulary words. For example, the Book 1 lesson "Foods" has ten food-related vocabulary nouns (bread, salmon, corn, etc.), and four question-answer sentences: "Do you want \_\_\_\_?", "Yes, I want \_\_\_\_," "No, I don't want \_\_\_\_," and the general question "What do you want?" Book 1 words and sentences are taught in an identical pattern each time, outlined in the teaching manuals, by using color clipart images printed on cards.

The direct acquisition method follows the "natural acquisition phases" (Krashen & Terrell 1983): comprehension phase, limited production phase, and finally full production phase. During the comprehension phase (also known as the silent phase) the learner is not expected to say anything other than *yes* or *no*; games are played with gestures, charades, total physical response (actions), fly swatters, and laser pointers among other activities. By the end of the series of comprehension games, learners have heard each vocabulary word at least fifty times by the teacher. In the limited production phase, the teacher guides the students to repeat the words and play simple games involving speaking the words. Learners have already gained a recognition-level for (they can recognize but not necessarily say) the words during the comprehension phase games. During the limited production teaching phase, students gain the ability to say the words. A cornerstone activity is the 'either-or' game. An image, for example, a salmon is held up and the instructor asks the group, "Is it bread *or* salmon?" Students answer as a group according to the picture. After the students have gained confidence, they may be asked as individuals.

After the vocabulary words have been taught from comprehension to limited production for approximately forty-five minutes, the teacher introduces the first of the

<sup>10</sup>To download the six textbooks, audio and web-based language games, and teaching manuals: <http://www.interiorsalish.com/nsexcincurriculum.html>. For teaching graphics and teaching methods training, contact Christopher Parkin [cparkin@interiorsalish.com](mailto:cparkin@interiorsalish.com).

three sentences described above and moves on to full-production exercises. The vocabulary is practiced with the three template sentences, using the color images as mnemonics. Eventually the students can ask and answer questions in full sentences with each vocabulary word. There is a courage and temerity in this phase that must be nurtured and reinforced by a supportive teacher, particularly accounting for the tensions introduced by colonization.

The second textbook is based on story-based learning and scaffolds on the skills and vocabulary learned in Book 1, progressing from single-word and simple sentences to beginner stories, again by using direct acquisition methods. Book 2 teaches fifteen traditional stories, recorded, illustrated, and taught at a beginner speaking level. Each story has approximately twenty-five simple sentences and ten to fifteen new vocabulary words. Each sentence is written as simply as possible, the rule being: if there is a comma or an 'and' in the sentence, it is too long.<sup>11</sup> Each of the fifteen stories consists of an audio recording of each word and sentence, a color illustration for each sentence in the story, and a set of clipart graphics for each new vocabulary word. about four and a half hours of teaching time. Book 2 is designed to be taught in 90 hours of intensive lesson-based immersion.

Each story in Book 2 is taught one set at a time, starting with vocabulary words. The teacher and students use a familiar set of techniques; the vocabulary words are taught following the same sequence of direct acquisition methods to those used in Book 1. Next, the sentences are taught following the direct acquisition method, progressing through comprehension phase, limited production phase, and full-production phase games and activities. The instructor produces hundreds of full sentences in each lesson, and by the end of the lesson students are able to repeat, comprehend, and play interactive games using full sentences from the story. After the first two texts are taught, they are succeeded by Books 3, 4, 5, and 6.

The Kalispel language program successfully employs the *N̓səl'xcin Curriculum Project* curriculum, translated into Kalispel, and has graduated two cohorts of intermediate to advanced speakers. Their lead teacher, Jessie Fountain, trains adult learners for two years in full-time classrooms, five days a week. The Kalispel teaching experience is reported annually at the Celebrating Salish Conference in Spokane, Washington. The following newspaper interview with Kalispel language champions J.R. Bluff and Jessie Fountain illustrates many factors such as personal responsibility, and hundreds of hours of programming, and is worth quoting at length:

Just a few years ago, the Salish language languished in near oblivion. Enter JR Bluff, assistant director of culture for the Kalispel Tribe. He said several years ago he heard the elders worry about how to preserve the language. "They wanted to do this, but they just didn't know how," he said. "A light came on for me."

Bluff reached out to Chris Parkin, a leading expert in Salish language revitalization and curriculum development. "He said the only way this

<sup>11</sup>To see beginner-level story-based lessons, sentence length and presentation, download Book 2 of the *N̓səl'xcin Curriculum Project*, entitled *Captik'ł 1*, <http://www.interiorsalish.com/nselxcincurriculum.html>.

will happen is if you do it. You learn the language and teach the people,” Bluff recalled.

So, he recorded the elders’ words and phrases. He adapted a program given to him by Parkin and created a curriculum. “I started slamming the language down my throat. I’m a guy who likes responsibility. I’m not afraid to take chances. I was thrown into deep water, and I just started swimming.”

Bluff dove in not a moment too soon. When he began working for the tribe there were a dozen elders fluent in Salish. He said, “We lost half of them by the time we started this program.”

As quickly as he learned the language he taught it to others. “I was learning 10 words right before I had to teach them in the classroom.”

The first goal was to introduce a Salish class at Cusick High School. Bluff said, “Now, every day we have about 70 kids at Cusick High School, 10 adults in language intensive classes and one hour of immersion (class) in grades 1 through 6 in conjunction with the Cusick School District.”

For Bluff, a key has been finding others as passionate about the language as he is and encouraging them to teach. One of those teachers is Jessie Fountain, 25. “I was working in the tribe’s child care center and JR taught me and a few others the early childhood curriculum,” she recalled. That taste whet her appetite for more. “It came naturally to me,” she said. “It was a missing piece of my culture.”

Currently, Fountain serves as language coordinator for the tribe. “I dream in the language. I’m raising my son in the language,” she said. “I teach it every day. Within 15 months we can bring someone to fluency.” (Hval 2013)

**5.3 Step 2: Create Book 1 of beginner lessons** Having chosen the curricular design of the *N̓səl’xcin Curriculum Project*, my next step for Tlingit was to create sequenced teachable lessons and compile teaching materials following the format of the first textbook. In your language, there may be pre-existing beginner materials; however many beginner texts follow a linguistic-based teaching method or a word-list teaching method, and we now have more effective methods. Tlingit has several published beginner textbooks with audio recordings by fluent speakers in a variety of formats. I was able to glean words and sentences from the published works of respected Tlingit Elders Nora Dauenhauer (Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer 2005), Jim Marks (Marks et al. 2005), Taku River Tlingit (Anderson et al. n.d.); and Emma Sam (Sam 1994).

I pored through the existing textbooks to identify sets of ten vocabulary words and three template sentences that could fit within the curricular design of Book 1 (in our case, *Lingít* 1). Sometimes I compiled words and sentences from two different books in order to get a full set of ten words that would fit neatly into three template sentences without changing the grammar of the sentence. I typed out new lessons and edited the audio files from the CDs using audio software to re-format the audio with

no English. I collected clipart for each vocabulary word and printed color graphics for each lesson. It took approximately four to eight hours to create each lesson and I learned Tlingit as I went. I soon knew enough to begin to create original lessons with a Tlingit Elder, which turned out to be necessary due to copyright considerations of previously published audio material. During the initial stages of the project I built the first thirty lessons from previously published recordings, created a lesson plan and piloted the lessons with George and K'èdukà. After the pilot was complete, we received a grant, K'wikikweik Morgane Pennycook and Sherri Green joined our team, and we re-recorded, transcribed, edited and finalized all forty-five lessons with Tlingit Elders Sam Johnston and Bessie Cooley. We were able to complete the first textbook within approximately six months.

**5.4 Step 3: Teach Book 1 to the first cohort** Once the first textbook is written, the next step is to gather together a cohort of motivated learners and teach the lessons. The cohort may be small, and that is fine because remember that an optimum size is four to six learners. The *N'səl'xcin Curriculum Project* recommends a maximum class size of twelve. Prior to teaching, teachers are trained in the teaching method which follows the direct acquisition teacher's manual and lesson plans.<sup>12</sup>

Choose a young person who has a facility with languages and make them the teacher. In an ideal situation, there will be a young person available, slightly more advanced than the students (like Jessie Fountain in Kalispel). In some cases, there will be no one available, and the group will have to buckle down and co-learn. Learning as a cohort without a teacher requires more perseverance, motivation, and a high level of commitment, but can produce proficient speakers, as we found at the Chopaka Language House (Johnson 2013).

As the first Tlingit pilot project, K'èdukà, George and I did not have the benefit of an available teacher who was more proficient than us, so I led the first few lessons to demonstrate the curricular design, the direct acquisition method, and train the cohort. After that, we took turns teaching and taught ourselves. I facilitated ongoing methods training, scheduling, curriculum building, assessment, and provided the location (my home). We met six hours a week, on evenings and Sundays, and worked through the first book. Each week we studied three lessons, took weekly quizzes and reviewed previous material. We co-learned thirty lessons in forty hours and covered three hundred vocabulary words and over sixty sentences. K'èdukà and George received university credit from Simon Fraser University in May 2014, as a pilot cohort.

Each lesson began by listening to the Elder recording of the vocabulary words while the teacher held up the graphics. Then we turned the recording off and relied on the direct acquisition method. There were many moments when we felt ourselves flying with the language. In one memorable lesson we learned this phrase, which became a favorite: *Ax toowú át wudikeen. My spirit soars.*<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Download at: <http://www.interiorsalish.com/nselxcincurriculum.html>.

<sup>13</sup>Another example of Tlingit poetic metaphor (see ii). I found this phrase in a beginner's list of responses to the question, "How are you?" in Nora and Richard Dauenhauer (eds.) 2005. *Hear it in Tlingit: Mini Phrase Book*. CD tracks 21–26, audio by John Marks.

We filmed our teaching methods and performed regular filmed speaking assessments. We shared our first filmed assessment on YouTube,<sup>14</sup> where we described a colorful poster using as many words and phrases as we could. We progressed from low- to mid-beginner speech and our sentences more than doubled in length from one-word sentences to four- or five-word sentences (Johnson in review).

A sample lesson (Lesson 2, “Foods”) from the first textbook is provided in the Appendix, as well as the lesson plan. The lesson includes ten words and four sentences, and takes one and a half hours to teach, using a sequence of games included in the lesson plan. Teachers are trained in the phrases necessary to teach the games in full immersion (some examples include: ‘Listen,’ ‘It’s your turn,’ ‘Hit the picture with the flyswatter,’ ‘Point at the picture,’ ‘Repeat after me,’ ‘Is it this word or that word?’ [choice of two], ‘Yes,’ ‘Good work,’ ‘You win’).

**5.5 Step 4: Create Book 2 beginner story-based lessons** Once the first textbook has been written and taught, the next steps are to teach it again to a larger cohort, and to write Book 2 and its teaching manuals. You will eventually need to write the entire six-textbook curriculum. For Book 2, fifteen traditional stories are re-written and taught at a beginner level. In the pilot project we created one story-lesson, but later created and recorded fourteen more to complete Book 2. For our first story I was lucky to find a beautifully illustrated Tlingit children’s story, *How Raven Brought Light to the People*, in the Whitehorse public library and received permission to use the images from the artist, James Watts, and author, Ann Dixon (1992). I wrote out simplified sentences in English for each of the twenty-seven illustrations. For subsequent stories, we hired a local artist to create simple color drawings for each sentence.

K’èdukà and I met with Analaash Sam Johnston at his home in Teslin, Yukon in May 2014, to record the sentences and vocabulary for the first story. We showed him the illustrations and the twenty-seven simple English sentences. We explained the beginner learning process to Sam and signed a respectful sharing agreement and consent to publication. We explained that a simple version of the story was needed by beginners, rather than the much more complex, eloquent version he would ordinarily have told, and he agreed to try. We started with a simplified English version of each story, simplified to have approximately twenty-five sentences. Sam and I read over each English sentence, fine-tuned the wording, and recorded each Tlingit sentence and vocabulary word twice. If a word had not previously appeared in the first textbook, *Lingít 1*, it was a typed out as a new vocabulary word, and recorded. We came away with twenty-seven full sentences (thirty-two with story repetitions) and twenty-four new vocabulary words. While I led the recording session, K’èdukà observed and assisted as part of her training to write curriculum and lead recording sessions on her own. The recording experience was a learning experience for Sam, K’èdukà and me; we learned as we went. We recorded the first story *How Raven Brought Light to the People*, and found the simplified English sentences I had written out were very complex when translated to Tlingit. For example the first sentence, “Long ago, the

<sup>14</sup>Tlingit 1: [http://youtu.be/nPBYYr\\_CeF8](http://youtu.be/nPBYYr_CeF8).

whole world was dark,” introduced three new vocabulary words in one sentence, “beginning,” “whole,” and “world,” and so we simplified the sentence to “The world was dark”. Initially, there were more than thirty new vocabulary words for the entire story, much higher than the ten to twenty we were aiming for, so we went back and simplified a few sentences with Sam Johnston. In 2015 when we recorded the other fourteen stories for the textbook, we wrote out three very simplified stories to be the first stories and moved the *Raven* story nearer the end of the textbook, which reduced the number of vocabulary words considerably, as the words had already been introduced and taught in earlier stories. Despite its complexity, *Raven* is still my favorite story to teach, because it was the first.

I edited Sam Johnston’s audio recording, clipped the vocabulary and sentences into separate audio files; it took approximately ten hours to edit the audio files for that first story and organize them into the teaching order used in Book 2. I transcribed the vocabulary and sentences, looking up every word in the Tlingit dictionary (Edwards 2009) and in *Lingít 1*. We chose the Coastal Tlingit spelling convention for our curriculum. There was learning inherent in the transcription process—during those ten hours, I listened to Sam’s voice over and over and began to absorb the sounds and meanings. A year later, when we received a grant to complete Book 2, we recorded all fifteen stories and had Lance Twitchell transcribe them, but as a learner, I highly recommend the learning inherent in transcribing on your own. To see the format of Book 2, in Nsyilxcn, download Captikwł 1 at <http://www.interiorsalish.com/nselxcin-curriculum.html>.

**5.6 Step 5: Teach Book 2 to a cohort** After taking the time to write the second textbook, compile its teaching materials, and pilot it with the first cohort, hopefully a cohort of twelve adults is standing by ready to learn it. It is important to maintain momentum and a regular teaching schedule. After ninety hours of co-learning and practicing the method with Book 1, the more confident students will be ready to teach. Similarly to Book 1, the teacher will be trained in the teaching method and provided with teaching manuals and graphic images. As mentioned above, it is best to have a designated teacher, as this person maintains momentum, immersion, classroom motivation, and classroom safety. If a confident teacher has not emerged, continue with co-learning the material (taking turns leading), stick with a small cohort of six or fewer, maintain strict immersion and manage classroom safety as best you can. You can do this. To view K’èdukà, K’winikweik, Sherri, and I co-teaching Book 2 in a wall-tent in Whitehorse, Yukon, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4NdG-VePBHo>. The immersion lessons were transformational and beautiful, following the colorful story images and traditional Tlingit stories, yet in a sequenced format with vocabulary acquisition games followed by sentence learning.

As described above, once vocabulary is learned the lessons shift into games with *full sentences* from the story. When students first experience the shift from word- and sentence-based learning to story-based learning, there is a sense of exhilaration bordering on panic—their heads are full. Luckily, the pre-established teaching pattern and safe learning environment provide confidence and trust in the instructor

and themselves. In full-immersion, it is natural for learning tensions to rise and it is important to constantly reaffirm classroom safety (Johnson 2013). There is a big change, cognitively and emotionally, from learning one word and simple sentences to story-based learning.

After learning Book 2, students will be at approximately mid-beginner speech.<sup>15</sup> The teacher will be slightly higher because of the extra opportunity to repeat sentences and create exercises on-the-fly. The teacher's skills and confidence skyrocket while teaching the stories; they discover they are able to produce full sentences in various combinations almost non-stop for the duration of the lesson. In Nsyilxcn I have watched my co-teachers gain confidence, fluidity of speaking, and marked improvements in pronunciation through teaching Book 2.

### 5.7 Steps 6–13: Write and teach Books 3–6, the entire 1,000-hour curriculum

The curriculum developer works with an Elder to create the gift of hundreds of hours of lesson-based curriculum and recordings for future learners. Books 3–6 provide an additional 800 hours of learning, laddering upwards in complexity from Intermediate to Advanced. In learning Books 3 and 4, the students will become low-intermediate speakers (Johnson 2013, 2014).<sup>16</sup> After learning all six books, approximately 1,000 hours, students are approximately high-intermediate speakers (Johnson 2013). To achieve 2,000 hours, the strongest learners can teach the curriculum to others. I have taught the first four books to Nsyilxcn cohorts of seven to fourteen learners and the process is challenging and transformational. Celebrate each book's completion. Invite Elders and community. Once your learners and their teachers have learned the full curriculum, celebrate their achievement. Their achievement is groundbreaking, revolutionary, decolonizing and transformative, both for individuals and for community. In your community, you may have succeeded in creating the first generation of new speakers in over seventy years.

**5.8 Step 14: Create full-time language domains** Once the celebrations are over, the real work can begin in community. Take the skills you have gained and repeat the process. Form a new cohort and train new teachers. Once you have graduated at least one cohort, you need to build full-time language domains in order to support the advancement and maintenance of the cohort's language skills (Johnson in review). These full-time domains can be workplaces such as schools or language nests, university departments, First Nation governments, offices, television studios, or radio programs. Only in full-time language domains, with continued study and review, can adult intermediate speakers progress towards the advanced level. The new graduates will work in these immersion domains, but must continue to set aside at

<sup>15</sup>To hear mid-beginner speech by learners who have completed Book 2 of *N̓səl'xcin Curriculum Project*, see this film: *Goldilocks I: Chopaka Immersion House* (4 min) <http://youtu.be/KVj3vpCf6JE>. These are my Nsyilxcn cohort and I at the start of our 6-month immersion house project in 2011 in Keremeos, BC.

<sup>16</sup>To hear much-improved low-intermediate speech by Syilx learners who have completed Books 3 and 4 of the *N̓səl'xcin Curriculum Project*, see these two films: *Goldilocks II* (7 min) [http://youtu.be/3DxQb\\_Lr1rw](http://youtu.be/3DxQb_Lr1rw); and *k̓u n̓'əq̓'cin (we speak clearly): Chopaka Immersion House* (6 min) <http://youtu.be/O7fFMN-KSa4>.



least five hours a week for intensive study and review of previous lessons (at their advanced level) with their cohort. The Salish School of Spokane has created a full-time language domain where English is turned off from the moment the teachers enter the doors. Once students have achieved at least mid-intermediate and are given the support of full-time employment and study in their language, they have the skills to choose to raise their children in the language. Bringing the language home to the children is the ultimate goal of language revitalization.

Language revitalization often looks to Hawaiian revitalization as an inspiration. Hawaiian language programs were catalyzed in the 1980s by a small group of second-language learners who formed immersion schools as full-time language domains (Kamana & Wilson 1996). The college of Hawaiian language at University of Hawai'i Hilo now counts fifty people, all under the age of thirty, who were raised in the Hilo area speaking Hawaiian as their first language (Gionson 2009). The observation from Hawai'i is that "in order for our languages to survive they must be used in all facets of our contemporary life and we must take responsibility for using and developing them. We cannot depend on having elders forever." (Kamana & Wilson 1996:140).

There are tiny pockets of new advanced Indigenous speakers emerging around the world and raising their children in the language. Each new speaker has learned through a combination of intensive classes, curriculum, immersion, and employment in their language. A small cohort of young Tlingit parents in Juneau, Alaska have become advanced speakers and are raising their children in Tlingit. A handful of new Nsyilxcn speakers at the Salish School of Spokane, Washington, and Kalispel speakers in Kalispel, Washington have become speakers and are raising their children in their Interior Salish languages. This shows what can be achieved with community support, full-time language use, and creation of opportunities for young adults to learn, speak, and teach language.

**6. Ax toowú át wudikeen, My spirit soars: the experience of learning** There are moments in language revitalization when I am filled with hope. There was a thrill in the air the first day K'èdukà, George, and I sat down and actively learned our first Tlingit lesson. It came from *doing* rather than *talking about* language revitalization. We felt a deep visceral sense of true acquisition, of words absorbing one by one into the fabric of the mind. I remember my very first *N'səl'xcin Curriculum Project* lesson, in Keremeos, BC, and the immediate realization that proficiency was possible (Johnson 2013:113). The learning potential in the direct acquisition method was immediately captivating. K'èdukà and George were convinced of its potential after one short lesson.

Very early on in their lessons, both K'èdukà and George found opportunities to practice their beginner speaking ability in their classroom workplaces and out on the land with children. Their students are now exposed to Tlingit from enthusiastic second-language learners who learned from Elders' recordings. K'èdukà worked in the Teslin Tlingit daycare and reported with growing excitement each week that she was able to recall and use many of the words and simple sentences learned in the lessons. Her co-workers were impressed by how fast she was learning and she was

thrilled by her new ability to speak and to construct simple, original sentences while out on the land with the daycare children: “This is a rock,” and “Oh! I see an ant! Do you see an ant? I see an ant crawling.”

George reported after a very few lessons that he had already learned more than in years of drop-in lessons. He recounted the following story. During an outdoor experiential education day in Whitehorse, George and the schoolchildren were walking across a snowy field and crossed a set of moose tracks. George pointed animatedly at the tracks and asked the question from a Book 1 Animals lesson, “Daa̓ x̓us.eetí sáyá?” [What tracks are those?]. The young boy beside him looked quizzically at George, read his body language, thought for a second, and replied hesitantly, “Dzísk’w?” [Moose?]. To which George shouted, modelling a full sentence as we did in our lessons, “Aaá! Dzísk’w x̓us.eetí áyá!” [Yes! They are moose tracks!]. George later speculated that the boy must have understood the question, but I told him most likely, the boy’s entire Tlingit vocabulary consisted of animals, colors and numbers, much like the situations described above in other languages. George had conveyed the full meaning with his enthusiasm (safe learning environment) and contextual clues (pointing at the tracks). The best possible language teaching moment. In moments like these, language lives.

When K’èdukà and I met with Analahash Sam Johnston to record the first story-based lesson, there was a sense of nervous excitement. At the end of the evening when I closed my laptop, K’èdukà and I shared a glance across the kitchen table. She told me afterwards she was amazed we were able to record an entire story in one evening. I believe we each felt the same thing: a̓x̓ toowú át wudikeen, my spirit soared. Our first recording experience had been a success and we were awed by the learning potential within the complex and beautiful sounding sentences.

**7. Spirits are struck down: resistance to community activism** Just as there are moments that are filled with hope, there are moments when the future seems impossible. Activists do not like to talk about these moments because it is important to foster hope and to motivate and encourage learners. However I would like in this writing to support other activists in the realization they are not alone. Indigenous language activists can face a stage of criticism, distractions, negativity, anxieties, lack of support, lack of training, and lateral violence (a term commonly used in First Nations community to refer to negative personal attacks), particularly in the early stages of revitalization (Cohen 2010; Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer 1998:65; Greymorning 1999; Johnson 2013). In this section I discuss typical roadblocks that language programs may face within our own communities, and challenges I personally faced during Tlingit and Nsyilxcn revitalization.

Your community may mask its resistance to change in the form of “politics of distraction” (Cohen 2010). Politics of distraction may take many forms: criticisms, negativity, blocking, internal politics, lateral violence, ongoing discussions, endless meetings, or arguments about details (Cohen 2010; Smith 2003:13). Self-abuse, perpetuated by hegemony, occurs when oppressed groups take on dominant oppressive thinking, even when it contributes to their own oppression; in practice, the colo-

nized colonize themselves (Gramsci 1999). Bill Cohen writes, “There was much opposition internally to the [Nsyilxcn immersion] school’s development, and I experienced firsthand the tensions between transformative action and colonizing hegemones, and with others was able to mediate and resolve many of those tensions” (Cohen 2010:288). I encountered similar subtle and not-so-subtle resistance to grassroots Nsyilxcn programs, generally limited to a few vocal individuals (Johnson 2013:209). My Indigenous professional friends advised me to develop a thick skin.

Maori language revitalization efforts also experienced a blocking phase, and the critical moment came when Maori people embraced transformative praxis, accepted responsibility for their own transformation, dealt with their ‘politics of distraction’ and shifted “away from waiting for things to be done to them, to doing things for themselves.” (Smith 2003:2). Community work is made more complex by the disarming fact, well known by Indigenous activists, that there is not a real and homogeneous entity known as ‘community’ (Whaley 2011:339).

Two lifetime Tlingit language activists and documenters, Nora and Richard Dauenhauer (1998) note that people’s underlying fears and anxieties about language revitalization can cause them to be unclear in their motivations. They may *say* they want languages to be taught, but actively oppose it in practice. The Dauenhauers recommend what Fishman terms “prior ideological clarification” (Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer 1998; Fishman 1993). Without this, people may answer a resounding “yes” to the question “do you *really* want to save the language?” when their actual, underlying answer may be “no”. (Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer 1998:63).

Before I started my endeavor to support new Tlingit learners, I spoke with many community members. Most were enthusiastic about a new learning strategy. However, a small number were openly critical. The following comments were made by one individual: “Only Elders can teach”; “You can’t call yourself a Tlingit ‘teacher’”; “You can’t teach Tlingit if you are not fluent”; “You can’t teach Tlingit if you are not Tlingit”; “You can’t teach in [a certain Tlingit community] if you are not from [that community]”; and, “You should wait.” This last counsel, to wait, was the strongest and worst of all. In the light of Tlingit’s critical endangerment and the loss of Elders each year, waiting is not an option. Waiting is, in my experience, damaging to the momentum and motivation of young learners. Initially, out of respect to community, I refrained from referring to myself as a teacher and used the more bulky description: learning facilitator, curriculum developer, methods trainer, and co-learner.

Having said this, there will always be community members who answer a resounding “yes.” Knowing this, we chose to take the advice of language activist Darrell Kipp to ignore the critics “don’t ask permission,” and “get started” (Kipp 2000:8). Over time, in both Tlingit and Nsyilxcn, I developed a thick skin and listened to my learners and the Elders who did not want to wait.

**8. Recommendations and conclusions** Successful initiatives to create advanced speakers, in the initial stages, will not come from institutions (even First Nation institutions within the community), but will emerge from grassroots efforts. Institutions such as our First Nation governments, colleges, or schools may not have the freedom

to act as quickly as our languages need them to, and in fact may offer resistance in the form of criticism or endless meetings. Small grassroots organizations are the ones with the strength, flexibility, and resilience to quickly provide active resistance to the ongoing forces of colonization which continue to threaten Indigenous languages.

My Tlingit cohort and I were lucky in that Simon Fraser University offered me a post-doctorate research position and I was able to create and teach beginner Tlingit material full-time for six months in 2014 and part-time in 2015. The initial pilot cohort consisted of two learners passionate enough to meet as volunteers on evenings and weekends. To enlarge the cohort, further lobbying was required to learners' workplaces to support them to study during workdays. I lobbied Tlingit Government and employers and obtained letters of support and received paid time off for learners for the second pilot-project in 2015. K'èdukà and I received a federal grant and continued our pilot activities in 2015. We completed the recording and writing of the first textbook, and taught it to a cohort of nine students. We completed the story recordings and a draft of the second textbook and taught the first five stories to a pilot cohort.<sup>17</sup>

Ultimately, activists need to take time out from the institutional boxes, and raise ourselves up outside of the institutions. In the Nsyilxcn words of my Elder, Q'iyusálxqn Herman Edward, "t'l a? mnimltət mi əlxw'lał a? nql'qilxw'cntət" *It is from us that our languages will revive*. What he meant is that a miraculous solution is not going to arrive from outside people and programs. The solution will come from you and me, and people like us, committing to actively learning and teaching our languages. The solution will come initially not from focusing on children but on parent-aged learners; people who are able make the choice to learn and speak our languages. As Nsyilxcn language activist Bill Cohen says, "We are the ones to fix that" (Cohen 2010:198). We are the ones to create and embrace successful programs, hold each other up and support new learners like K'èdukà and George. Individual learners need the strength and support to keep pushing to learn our languages. One year it might be only two learners. Next year those learners can teach twelve more.

Building proficiency requires a series of small steps. It takes sequential curriculum, quality immersion, effective methods, and finding a way to get the initial group of people into a room for a thousand hours. I hold onto a sense of hope for Tlingit. Ax toowú át wudikeen. My spirit soars. When I work with Elders' recordings and co-learn with my small cohort, I feel a sense of hope, a sense that *we can do this*. We can learn to speak our languages, teaching ourselves, using sequenced second-language acquisition techniques such as those in the *N'səl'xcin Curriculum Project*. With a solid plan and 1,000 hours of good curriculum, learners can achieve full proficiency within a few years and build the proficiency to speak with our Elders while our Elders are still with us.

Darrell Kipp reminds us not to be discouraged by the low numbers of committed people in language revitalization—only a few are needed, and they are "chosen" (Kipp 2000:40). I find encouragement in Darrell Kipp's words:

<sup>17</sup>I hope to report on this further but for now you can see us practicing full-immersion story-based techniques here: *Learning Tlingit Through Story*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4NdG-VePBHo>.

You do not ask permission to use your language, to work with it, to revitalize it. You do not ask permission. You don't go to the school board and ask for fifteen minutes to plead your case. You don't change the entire community. You save your strength; you find the ones who want it. You look for the young couples; you work with the people who want you to work with them. You hone your skills, talent, and time. And these are precious. Take care of yourselves. (Kipp 2000:6)

K'èdukà and George recognize they are at the very beginning of their language journey. Their beginner speech represents only the tip of the iceberg of language vocabulary and grammatical complexity. They expressed to me that they want to be speakers. They want to be able to speak with the remaining Elders while the Elders are still with us. Mid-beginner speech is an incredible achievement after forty hours. However, we know the incredible amount of grassroots organizing and hard work that will be required to get to the next level. K'èdukà and George were able to say several words after only a few dozen hours of language instruction. Imagine their ability to transmit language if they were supported to continue studying for 1,000 more hours. As a post-script, they were supported to teach Book 1 in Whitehorse Yukon in 2015. They were joined by a highly motivated Tlingit youth, K'winikweik Morgane Pennycook and not only re-recorded each lesson with Sam Johnston and Bessie Cooley, and edited the textbook, but successfully delivered 90 hours of instruction to a cohort of seven Tlingit adults, supported by the Aboriginal Languages Initiative and accredited by Simon Fraser University.

As a further post-script, in the year following the Tlingit pilot program, in 2015 I received overwhelming community support for my own language, Nsyilxcn and formed a full-time Syilx Language House in Penticton, BC, attended by students from six of the seven Syilx Bands in Canada.<sup>18</sup> Our Chiefs and Councils supported a plan to form a grassroots language house and train parent-aged learners to become speakers over the next four years. We currently have sixteen adult students and four co-teachers, and have completed the first two textbooks of the Nsyilxcn curriculum. We will complete 2,000 hours of intensive language programming over four years. Syilx member communities and our leadership are overcoming the doubts and delay tactics that can beset institutional-based language programs and are taking the courageous step forward to adopt successful, proven, curriculum-based methods as our best hope for creating and supporting new speakers. I continue to record and document Elders when not teaching.

The Tlingit co-learning project demonstrated the possibilities inherent in a well-designed strategy in its initial stages. Most importantly, we gained the skills and confidence to continue to build new cohorts. I hold my hands up in the air to my two courageous Tlingit learners and for the cohorts that followed, for embarking on this language journey. For Tlingit, and all Indigenous languages, I hope and pray that communities will embrace intensive programs such as this one to create and support new speakers and *raise each other up*.

<sup>18</sup><http://www.thelanguagehouse.ca>.

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## Appendix 1: Lingít 1, Lesson 2 Foods

<i>Vocabulary</i>	<i>English</i>
káax'	chicken / grouse
kóox	rice (or lily root)
k'únts'	potatoes
inyán	onion
s'ín	carrot
k'wát'	eggs
x'áax'	apple
xáat	fish
gishoo taayí	bacon
sakwnéin	bread

## Sentences:

Daa sá i tuwáa sigóo?

What do you like?

\_\_\_\_\_ gí i tuwáa sigóo?

Do you like \_\_\_\_\_?

Aaa, \_\_\_\_\_ ax tuwáa sigóo.

Yes, I like \_\_\_\_\_.

Tléik', tlél \_\_\_\_\_ ax tuwáa ushgú.

No, I do not like \_\_\_\_\_.

## Notes:

*Audio recorded by Bessie Cooley for Lingít 1.*



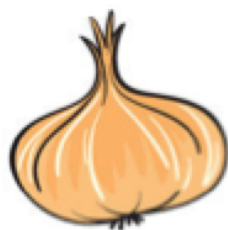
káax'



kóox



k'únts'



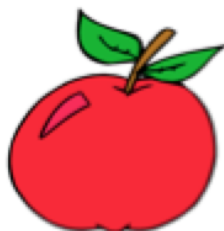
inyán



s'ín



k'wát'



x'áax'



xáat



gishoo taayí



sakwnéin

Lesson 2 Foods 1

yóo xat duwasáakw  
(       is my name)

Instructions: Answer according to what is shown in the picture. Follow the model.



\_\_\_\_\_ gí i tuwáa sigóo?  
Aaa, kóox ax tuwáa sigóo.

\_\_\_\_\_ gí i tuwáa sigóo?  
Aaa, \_\_\_\_\_ ax tuwáa sigóo.  
daa sá i tuwáa sigóo?

Do you want \_\_\_\_\_?  
Yes, I want \_\_\_\_\_.  
What do you want?



\_\_\_\_\_ gí i tuwáa sigóo?  
1. \_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_ gí i tuwáa sigóo?  
2. \_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_ gí i tuwáa sigóo?  
3. \_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_ gí i tuwáa sigóo?  
4. \_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_ gí i tuwáa sigóo?  
5. \_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_ gí i tuwáa sigóo?  
6. \_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_ gí i tuwáa sigóo?  
7. \_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_ gí i tuwáa sigóo?  
8. \_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_ gí i tuwáa sigóo?  
9. \_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_ gí i tuwáa sigóo?  
10. \_\_\_\_\_

### Lingít 1 curriculum description and copyright

There are forty-five lessons in *Lingít 1*, recorded with Elders, and shared freely with learners. The stories are designed to be taught in full immersion by trained teachers who are language learners themselves. Each lesson progresses from comprehension, limited production, to full production, using a variety of games and teaches approximately ten new vocabulary words and 3–4 sentences. Schedule 1.5 hours to teach each lesson. The entire *Lingít 1* will take approximately 90 hours of class time to teach.

*Lingít 1* is the first in a series of six planned textbooks, a curriculum designed to help students progress from beginner to advanced in an efficient, sequenced and predictable manner. These lessons are accompanied by teaching manuals, teaching images, CDs and an active method which must be delivered by a trained teacher. Each lesson is designed to be taught with immersion, repetition and games in small groups of maximum twelve learners. This curriculum follows a proven method which has succeeded in creating new speakers in Interior Salish languages in Southern BC and Washington.

For consistency, the Coastal spelling system is used. Images were collected from open sources. The second book in this series, *Lingít Story 1*, teaches 15 beginner-level traditional stories, taught with similar direct-acquisition methods. The next 4 books (*Lingít 2*, *Lingít Story 2*, *Lingít 3*, *Lingít Story 3*) will use grammatical-based teaching, story-based teaching, and finally culture-based teachings in Elder’s words, in full immersion. The Elders’ voices are original recordings by Sam Johnston and Bessie Cooley. Elders’ recordings are the backbone of the lessons. *These containers of knowledge have been set aside for us; it is our responsibility to study them thoroughly.*

Please note: there needs to be an additional teaching manual written, detailing the commands used in the games. In Nsyilxcn, it is called the “Direct Acquisition” manual.

The curricular approach and text organization follows a proven method developed and provided by Christopher Parkin, and is based on the *N̓səlxcin Curriculum Project*, by S̓ʔamtíc’a? (Sarah) Peterson, LaRae Wiley and Christopher Parkin © 2003–2015 the Salish School of Spokane, The Paul Creek Language Association, and Christopher Parkin; used with express permission. Download the six textbooks and teaching manuals in Okanagan at [www.interiorsalish.com/nselxcincurriculum.html](http://www.interiorsalish.com/nselxcincurriculum.html). If you would like to use and modify this curriculum for another language, or for training in the teaching method, please contact Christopher Parkin at [info@salishschoolof-spokane.org](mailto:info@salishschoolof-spokane.org), [www.interiorsalish.com](http://www.interiorsalish.com).

Contact [michelekjohnson@gmail.com](mailto:michelekjohnson@gmail.com) and [kedukajack@gmail.com](mailto:kedukajack@gmail.com) for Tlingit teaching graphics and audio files.

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*Whitehorse, Yukon*

*Dec. 14, 2015*

### Lesson Plan & Teaching Method for Lingít 1 Lesson

Teach in *full immersion with no English*. Teachers must be trained in teaching method and teaching phrases. Each lesson takes 1.5 hours (10 words and 3 sentences). Teach 3 lessons in a 6-hour day, with 1.5 hours for review (essential). Quiz each day 5–10 vocabulary words learned the previous day. L1 (45 lessons) takes 90 hours, and 500 words are learned.

#### 1. introduce the first 5 vocabulary words, with graphics

- “once in English”: say English word for graphic ONCE while holding up graphic
- “listen, don’t speak”: say Tlingit word 3 times for each graphic, then once more; if your pronunciation is weak, play the audio file from the CD for the first 5 words (play audio at least three or four times – then rely on your own pronunciation).
- **COMPREHENSION PHASE, play 3 comprehension phase games:**
  - yes/no, 1/2, pointers, lasers, fly swatters, mexican tag, hand slapping, etc.
  - repeat the correct answer three times, every time!
- **LIMITED PRODUCTION PHASE, play two games:**
- “everyone repeat after me” choral repeat all words three times
  - play 2 games: either/or; point and say (point at pic, say wrong word, students repeat when you say right one); memory games. [start either/or as a group, then do individuals, only IF they are confident]
  - repeat the correct answer three times, every time!
- “everyone repeat after me” choral repeat all 5 words once, with graphics

#### 2. teach second set of 5 vocabulary words, following same steps

3. teach sentences (generally 3 sentences per lesson: question/answer and yes/no sentences)
  - teach YES answer FIRST “Yes, I want \_\_\_\_\_.”
    - say answer phrase 3 times, then translate ONCE, act it out.
    - “everyone repeat after me” choral repeat phrase, while holding up all 10 pictures
    - *ignore the question* exercise with individuals, each picture (teacher says Yes answer first, then asks one student the question, student repeats the Yes answer)
  - Teach the No answer “No, I do not want \_\_\_\_\_.” (follow same steps as Yes answer)
  - Teach the question phrase: “Do you want \_\_\_\_\_?”
    - model the question 3–4 times, then translate once
    - “everyone repeat after me” choral repeat the answer with 4 or 5 graphics
    - ask the teacher (individuals) (teacher models Q, student asks, teacher answers)
  - **FULL PRODUCTION** exercises, choose one exercise to practice all full sentences
    - ask-and-answer (with pictures, full sentences)
    - class mixer (hand out pictures, class mingles around using full sentences)
    - mini dialogue (with one-letter prompts written on board, using full sentences)
    - or any kind of full production game, ie heads up 7 up
  - Finish with a choral repeat of all 10 words, using full sentences (some yes, some no, some Q)

This Lesson Plan is a template, summarized from  
*N'səl'xcin 1 Lesson Plans and Direct Acquisition Manual*  
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