



"ONE MIND; ONE PEOPLE"

## **Mentor-Apprentice Programs: Effects on mentors and apprentices' wellbeing**

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# NETOLNEW - A community-university Indigenous research partnership

## UVic-based Co-investigators

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## Community Partners



WSÁNEĆ School Board  
Saanich Adult Education Centre

First Peoples' Cultural Council (FPCC)

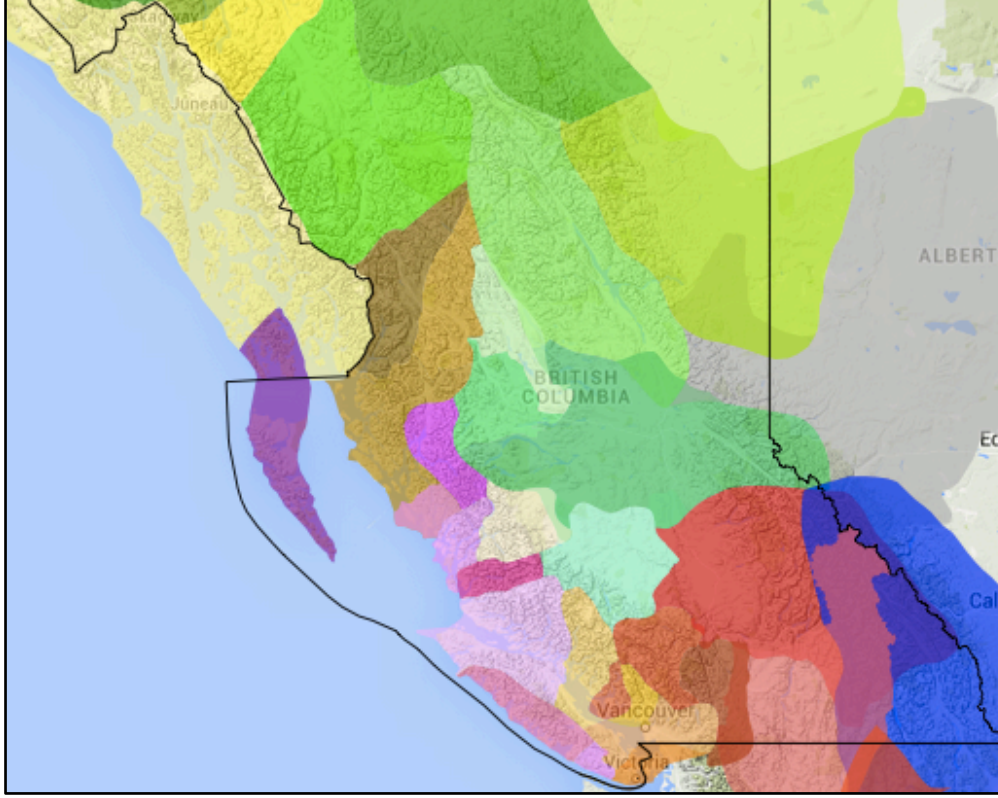


**Collaborators and research assistants** with backgrounds in Education & Indigenous Education, Applied & Theoretical Linguistics, and Community Research

# Outline

1. Overall research project
  - Context & rationale
  - Methods & analysis
2. Framework to explore link between language and health
3. Results: Effects of Mentor-Apprentice Program on apprentices and mentors' wellbeing
4. Conclusion

# Indigenous languages in British Columbia

- Home to 60% of the First Nations languages in Canada, with **34 distinct languages**
  - This diverse wealth of languages is at risk; **every First Nations language in B.C. is endangered**
  - Fluent speakers make up 4.08% (5,289) of the total population (and the vast majority of them are elders)
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- The map displays the province of British Columbia, Canada, with its borders with the United States to the west and south, and Alberta to the east. The province is divided into numerous colored regions, each representing a different Indigenous language territory. The colors include shades of green, yellow, orange, red, purple, and blue. Major cities are labeled: Juneau in the northwest, Vancouver and Victoria in the southwest, and Calgary in the east. The text 'BRITISH COLUMBIA' is written across the central part of the map.
- Indigenous language learners make up 9.14% (11,862) of the total population
  - Only about 1% of fluent Indigenous language speakers in BC are under the age of 25, but this age groups makes up 29% of semi-speakers and 78% of learners.



# Rationale for NE7OLNEW\_ study

- Initially, children main focus of ILR movement
- Growing demographic of adults who want to learn, teach and pass on the language
- Adult Indigenous language learners (AILL) research sparse, but growing body of literature
- **AILL** under-developed foci in most of Western Canada
- Looked at one specific approach for AILL, popular in British Columbia: (Master) **Mentor-Apprentice Program**  
(*'mentor' preferred term of partners in this research project*)

# Mentor-Apprentice Program (MAP)

Focus on MAP due to promotion of **creation of new adult speakers** of Indigenous languages

What is MAP?



- Pairing of language Mentor and Apprentice
- Pair creates immersion context, no English
- Team decides on daily activities for language immersion
- 15-20 hours/week

# Methods and analysis

- **Qualitative study** (NVivo 11, for PC)
- Interview data from participants from 2 community partners:
  - 23 New/current learners – up to 6 interviews each over 1-2 years
  - 10 Past “successful” learners – 1 interview each
  - 22 Current & past mentors – 1 interview each
  - 5 Program administrators – 1 interview each
- Total of **138 interviews** with **60 participants** over **two years**
- Focused on motivation, successes, challenges, impacts, etc.
- **Thematic content analysis** of transcribed interviews
- Inductive open coding across all interview questions / participant groups and partners

# “Measuring” link between *language* and *wellbeing*

- **Participants shared how MAP (also) affected their wellbeing and health was surprising**
- Studying link between language, health and wellbeing is a relatively recent field of inquiry (~10 years)
- Previous studies showed Indigenous people see language as vital part of belonging to a community and transmitting culture (Healy & Meadows, 2008; C. Hill, 2015; McIvor, 2013)
- Other studies found links between language retention and biomedical health measures, such as lower suicide rates in BC (Hallett, Chandler, & Lalonde, 2007) and lower rates of diabetes (Oster, Grieg, Lightning, Mayan, & Toth, 2014)
- **Challenge:** How to “measure”, i.e. establish link between language (learning) and broader / holistic concepts of wellbeing?

# Approach / framework:

## Self-reported health outcomes

- Health-related Quality of Life (HRQoL): Framework to assess **self-reported health outcomes**; considered responsive to diversity in cultural and socio-ecological contexts
- In HRQoL context, health or wellbeing are not just understood as the absence of disease
- Allows us to **understand subjective experience** of a person or their community's health and wellbeing
- Relates to World Health Organization (WHO)'s definition of health: “A state of **complete** physical, mental, and social wellbeing”

# Language and wellbeing

- The WHO definition of health relates to the **holistic concept of wellbeing traditionally held by Indigenous Peoples**
- We adopted this framework in this study to further analyze the **self-reported** health-related outcomes from interview responses about **how MAP affected individuals**
- Despite no specific questions about health, responses to open-ended questions yielded six themes related to health and wellbeing

# 1) Cultural and spiritual health and healing

*“I am keeping something very precious alive by speaking my language.”*

(Jaskwean Amanda Bedard, X̱aat Kíl)

- 27 participants contributed to this theme
- Apprentices reported MAP has strengthened their identity, given them a sense of connection and taught them how to conduct themselves in life and in relation to others.
- Learning language has contributed to feelings of fulfillment and belonging.



## 2) Health outcomes

*“When I take care of my health I’m a lot better at learning.”* (Giselle Maria Martin, Nuuchahnulth)

- 10 participants contributed to this theme
- Effects of MAP on participant’s own health status
- Participants were motivated by MAP to maintain general wellbeing, provided them with a tool to cope with challenging life events and emotions
- In a small number of cases provided additional support for recovery from substance abuse,  
*“it was [...] the language that... pushed me to sobriety, [...] it gave me... a sense of who I was.”* (s3ni?wlm, n’səlxcin)

### 3) Language loss negatively impacts the wellbeing of Indigenous people

*“[The word] doesn’t just mean a bad, misbehaving child, it also means a poor child that has been uprooted [...] and is disconnected from their culture.”*

(Giselle Maria Martin, Nuuchahnulth)

- 7 participants contributed to this theme
- Many participants discussed the effect of the residential school system and colonization on themselves and their communities.
- Participants discussed feelings of grief, shame, embarrassment, and displacement.

## 4) The relationship between the commitment of MAP and wellbeing of participants

*“There’s so much to be done. [...] that’s the exhausting part of it. It’s trying to learn and teach at the same time.”*

(Ben Louis, n̥səlxcin)

- 22 participants contributed to this theme
- Participation in MAP requires a commitment from both apprentices and mentors. Apprentices in particular often juggle MAP participation with family obligations, jobs, and other educational pursuits.
- Participants reported fatigue, exhaustion, and prioritizing language learning over other activities that could contribute to their health.
- At the same time participants reported feeling strengthened by language learning.

## 5) Strengthening MAP apprentices to become community leaders

*“It brings a huge sense of pride [...] and helps me be an inspiration to anyone else.”*

(Adam Manson, Hul'qumín'um)

- 19 participants contributed to this theme
- Fostering apprentices through MAP to feel strong and confident to take on leadership roles in their communities will *“help [them] be an inspiration to anyone else.”*  
(Adam Manson, Hul'qumín'um)
- Participants have recognized MAP as a factor contributing to job offers and promotions, recognition in the community, and being asked to lead language or culture activities.

## 6) Elders' healing through becoming language mentors

*“We once again have that belief in ourselves  
where we can feel free.”*

(STOLÇEŁ, SENĆOTEN)

- 13 participants contributed to this theme
- Some of the mentors are residential school survivors, who have been forced to suppress their language and feel shame about it.
- Participation in MAP has provided many mentors with an opportunity to become once again engaged with their language, or to deepen their engagement, and supplied a strong feeling of hope to Elder participants.

# Take away...

- 1) Strengthening Indigenous languages has **effects beyond the use of language alone** -> Exploratory themes suggest MAP may provide mechanism to increase wellbeing in language learners and teachers, and communities
- 2) Next steps: Use themes as **starting point** for further research to better understand health outcomes of MAP, and possibly language revitalization efforts at large
- 3) Promising framework: Involving participants' self-reports ensures **relevant wellness concepts** are generated and subsequent research questions provide answers of good content validity, while **truthfully capturing the perspectives** of Indigenous language learners and teachers

# HÍŚWĚ, gilakas'la, Chen kw'enmantumiyap, ninanâskomitin, Mahalo (*thank you*)

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**A journal article related to the content of this presentation will be published in the late summer / early fall 2017 issue of the International Journal of Indigenous Health <http://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/ijih>**