“THEY ALL TALK OKANAGAN AND I KNOW WHAT THEY ARE SAYING.”

LANGUAGE NESTS IN THE EARLY YEARS: INSIGHTS, CHALLENGES, AND PROMISING PRACTICES

by

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Abstract

Indigenous early language learning programs for young children, commonly known as “language nests”, are well established in New Zealand and Hawai’i. By contrast, in Canada there are few such programs and the concept is not commonly known in Indigenous communities. This study presents the experiences and insights of twenty-one fluent Elders, administrators, language teachers, early childhood educators and parents who have been involved in language nest programs in the start up years. These interviews were shaped by research questions on key issues, challenges and promising approaches. A thematic analysis was used to highlight dominant themes and to honour the words and ideas of the participants.

The participants in this study described the benefits that young children and fluent Elders experience through their involvement in early language immersion programs. Research participants shared visions for nests, deeply held beliefs about the need to fully immerse young children in their language, as well as promising approaches. These insights give evidence that Language Nests support young children to understand, speak and sing in the language, and that participation in these programs has the added effect of enhancing the daily lives of involved fluent Elders. This research is presented in service to the reclamation of early learning, Indigenous languages, and intergenerational ways of knowing and being.
Preface

This work is approved by:

- The University of British Columbia Okanagan Behavioural Research Ethics Board (H11-03011) on February 28, 2012.
- Okanagan Nation Alliance on June 28th, 2012.
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List of Abbreviations

CBC – Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
FPCC – First Peoples Cultural Council
MCFD – Ministry of Children and Families
PRATEC - El Proyecto Andino de Tecnologías Campesinas (Andean Project for Peasant Technologies)
UN – United Nations
UNESCO - United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNDRIP – United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
Aotearoa – the Māori term referring to the Māori homeland (New Zealand)

aloha ‘aina – a Hawai’ian term that means “love of the land”

Captíkʷɬ - the traditional Sqilxw story system

Criar y dejarse criar – a Quechua term that means “to nurture and let oneself be nurtured”

E hee-a-thinaugh chekwook"tl"ap il skwook"tl"eelt I'll "tl" ghugh "tl"a hap - The sun rising over the hill on the fawn and old people. The name for the Okanagan Indian Band language nest.

Kiʔtáwnaʔ - grizzly bear

I nga wa katoa, I nga wahi katoa - Māori term that means “all the time and everywhere”

Ikl sqilxwtet – Indigenous/Indian ways

Māori Te Kōhanga Reo - Māori Language Nest

Nkmaplqs – an Nsyilxcen term referring to the Head of the Lake, Vernon, BC

Nkmaplqs I Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet – the Head of the Lake place of learning of Sqilxw ways

Nsyilxcen – the language of Sqilxw/Okanagan peoples

Okanagan – Anglicized version of Sʔuknaʔqín, a Nsyilxcen term to refer to the people from this territory

Pūnana Leo – nest of voices

Sama - a general term used by Okanagan peoples to refer to settler peoples in the present day. Historically used to refer to a “French speaking person”.

Skmhist – bear in the Nsyilxcen language

Snc’c’amalaʔtn – place where the children are

Speetlum – bitterroot
Sqilxw - an Nsyilxcen term for Okanagan Indigenous peoples

Suyapix – Historically this term was used to refer to a "white person"; "pix" meaning "white"

Syilx - an Nsyilxcen term for the people who speak the language

Whanau – Māori term that refers to the Māori extended family group
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For my children

On the path of service, we are constantly given feedback, which helps along the journey of awakening. Ram Dass and Paul Gorman

“I was copying them [the voices of the fluent Elders] in my head. That’s because I wanted to learn what they were saying.” My son Devon, age 4
Chapter 1. Introduction

I am a “sama”, a white immigrant woman of English (and Chinese) ancestry. For the last thirteen years I have lived in the Okanagan Nation in the Interior of British Columbia, Canada, with my Sqilxʷ Okanagan partner, stepchildren and now children. My children’s heritage language, Nsyilxcen (Okanagan) is currently in a state of critical endangerment (as defined by First Peoples’ Language, Heritage and Culture Council, 2010, p.23). Presently, 60% percent of Indigenous languages in Canada (32 languages and 59 dialects) are spoken in British Columbia (FPHLCC, 2010). In 2001, it was estimated that in the Okanagan Nation there were “170 fluent speakers out of a population of about 5,000 where fluent refers to those who could converse all day with an Elder, without using English” (Cohen, 2001, p. 143). In the present day, in my children’s community, the Okanagan Indian Band (population approximately 1900 people), there are approximately sixteen fluent Elders remaining, which is considerably more than other communities in the Okanagan territory. For example, the Osoyoos Indian Band in the southern part of the territory has been estimated to have six fluent Elders (personal communication, Jessica Stelkia, March 28, 2014.) Moreover, the passing of fluent Elders means that this figure is in continuous decline.

1 In the present day “sama” is a general term used in the present day to refer to a settler person in Nqilxʷcən (personal communication, Bill Cohen). In the past the term “suyapix” would have been used to refer to a “white person” and sama was used to refer to “french speaking person” (Tiana Louis and Bill Cohen, personal communication, April 2014).

2 Nsyilxcen is also known as Nqilxʷcən, Nqilxʷcən, Nsyilxən, Nsyilxən, N’syilxən, Nselxən, Okanagan Colville, Salish, and means “the language” of the Sqilxw/Okanagan peoples. The multiple spellings and meanings reflect this vast territory and individual and dialectical differences. Nsyilxcen is an Interior Salish language that is spoken in British Columbia and Washington. In this thesis I have used the spelling that is most commonly used in the Okanagan Indian Band, the community where I live.
However, efforts to save languages from disappearing give hope for the regeneration of Nsyilxcen and other Indigenous languages across the world. According to UNESCO: “The most important thing… is to create favourable conditions for its speakers to speak the language and teach it to their children” (UNESCO, 2014). All over the world, the development of language nests and elementary school level language immersion programs is creating new generations of young children and school-age speakers who have varying levels of language skills. These programs create hope for the continued transmission of language and traditional cultural knowledge and practices, “ikl sqilxwtet” or the Indian way, “the dream way in a spiral way, the coming to pass or realization of dreams or visions” (Cohen, 2001, p.144).

From 2007 to 2009, my son Dempsey attended the Okanagan Indian Band’s first language nest project in the Infant/Toddler room at Snc'c’amalaʔtn Early Childhood Education Centre. When the nest ended prematurely due to multiple challenges, I became interested in how language nest programs are developed and delivered in Canada. At that time, it appeared that there were few language nests in Canada.

There is little research that exists on early childhood Indigenous language immersion or research during the development phase of language nest programs in Canada. I wanted to know how a community progresses from no awareness of a language nest concept, no cohesive group of concerned parents, no funding, no physical space, no infrastructure and no support – to running a quality early learning program.

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3 The term "language nest" is a literal translation of the Māori Te Kōhanga Reo language immersion programs for infants and children, up to five years of age (Hohepa & Smith, 2002:333)
language program for young children. I also wondered how language nest programs feel, sound and look through the eyes of administrators, educators, coordinators, Elders, and parents. I developed my idea into my research project which focuses on Indigenous language nests in the “early years,” that is, during the early years of program development and during children’s earliest years of life (ages 0-5).

The Nsyilxcen language is among one the 6,000 to 7,000 world languages that are fighting for survival (Skutnabb-Kangas, Maffi and Harmon, 2003). (According to linguist David Crystal, estimates of the number of world’s living languages have vary from between 3,000 and 10,000.) Within the next century it is predicted that only 600 languages with over 100,000 speakers are “reasonably safe” (Cantoni, 2007: vii). In response to this urgent situation, Leroy Littlebear stated: “We must quit endlessly lamenting and continuously cataloguing the causes of language death; instead, we must now deal with these issues by learning from successful preservation efforts” (Littlebear, 2007: xi). As recommended by activists and linguists at the 2007 Stabilizing Indigenous Languages conference in Arizona, my research encompasses: a) directing more research efforts toward analyzing community-based successes; b) fostering communication and partnerships between communities and organizations trying new approaches to maintaining languages; and, c) promoting heightened consciousness of the catastrophic effects of language loss both among members of language minority populations and members of the mainstream populations (Cantoni, 2007, p.2). I hope that my research will contribute to “fostering of new, innovative, community-based approaches” (ibid). Rather than focus on the causes of language death, my thesis shares insights, challenges and promising
practices for Indigenous language nests around the world. Since time is of the essence for language renewal, I hope that my research saves time for other local and global Indigenous communities that are in the process of mobilizing peoples and resources to develop a language nest.

The value of Indigenous languages

Indigenous languages are a rich repository of thousands of years of accumulated knowledge that has developed from intimate relationships with a specific land-base and local ecology, cultural rituals and practices, family, community and national systems, governance, physical, mental and spiritual knowledge of wellness (First Peoples’ Heritage, Language and Culture Council, 2010). Unlike Indo-European languages that are noun-based, many Indigenous scholars emphasize that their verb based languages are expressive of the dynamic relationships between humans, the natural world, all living beings and the cosmos (Cajete, 2000); “an external reality that is in a continuous state of transformation” (Battiste and Youngblood Henderson, 2000, p.76). Indigenous languages are the “DNA of cultures,” that is, “they have encoded the cultural knowledge that people have inherited from their ancestors” (Skutnabb-Kangas, Maffi and Harmon, 2003, p.17).

Western anthropologist and ethnobotanist Wade Davis has described the world’s languages as “a flash of the human spirit,” “an old-growth forest of the mind, a watershed of thought, an ecosystem of spiritual possibilities” (2003). Indigenous languages are a storehouse of knowledge endemic to the land from which they have emerged: “the sum total of all thoughts and dreams, myths, ideas and inspirations
and intuitions brought into being by the human imagination since the dawn of consciousness” (Davis, 2003).

Indigenous peoples speak about how their languages nurture relationships between all human and non-human living beings and the land, and how the decline of their languages is accompanied by a decline of valuable land-based practices (Armstrong, 2002; PRATEC, 2005). For example, in the Peruvian Andes the reciprocal relationships of responsibility and interdependency between humans, non-human beings and the natural world has been expressed as "criar y dejarse criar," meaning “to nurture and let oneself be nurtured” (Apffel-Marglin, 2002). Gonzales and Gonzales (2010) describe this mutual nurturance in the Andes as “the treatment of all entities as equivalent beings, with respect, empathy, reciprocity and joy. All living beings are considered equivalent persons that complement one another through acts of mutual nurture, manifested in rituals and daily dialogue” (p.83).

In the territory of the Sqilxw/Okanagan peoples in British Columbia Canada, Indigenous scholar and knowledge keeper Jeanette Armstrong describes the natural world as central to the identity of Sqilxw peoples and that “we are the living, dreaming Earth pieces” (Armstrong, 1997, p.35). The Indigenous language in Hawaii describes ways of caring for the land as “practices and consequences of aloha ‘aina (love of the land) and malama ‘aina (taking care of the land)” (Holmes, 1993, p.46).

Prior to Western colonization, Indigenous children around the world grew up speaking their own languages, and it was not uncommon for children to grow up multilingual (FPHLCC, 2010). Through their languages, Indigenous children learned the values and worldviews of their communities, as well as their roles and
responsibilities as “full members of their communities” and their relationships to the land and other non-living beings through their extended families (Prakesh and Esteva, 1998, p.77). In the Okanagan, aunties and uncles were as active in the nurturance and education of nieces and nephews as were parents (Cohen, 2001).

The Māori describe how grandparents “provided most of the personal instruction during the early years… passed on to them in stories the family and tribal history, mythology and folklore, and the values that accompanied these, and if a grandparent had a particular skills, that too was passed on to the grandchild” (Puke, n.d. p.2). In Mexico, young children (age three) begin to participate in activities in their community: “births, deaths, feasts, funerals and all the regular rituals of a rich cultural life, becoming part of productive, religious, or political activities” (Prakesh and Esteva, 1998, p.79). Language is the primary form of cultural socialization through which infants and children develop their perceptions of “human reality” (Fishman, 2007, p.72), and a “sense of identity and unique worldview. Language is the ultimate symbol of belonging” (Kirkness, 2002, p.18). It is not surprising then that knowledge of traditional language and “cultural continuity” has been linked to the health of Indigenous youth and community wellbeing (Hallett, Chandler and Lalonde, 2007).

The 6,000 to 7,000 Indigenous languages that are spoken in the world are extremely valuable “forms of life” (Krauss, 1996, p.15). The escalating dominance of the ten languages (Chinese, Hindi, Spanish, English, Bengali, Portuguese, Arabic, Russian, Japanese and German) spoken by half of the world’s population, presents a threat to the long-term wellness of all living ecological and human systems.
Linguistic diversity is declining at a much greater rate than plants and animals (Cantoni, 2007). As Western scholars become more aware of the mutual relationships between language, culture and biological diversity (Maffi, 2005), pockets of vast linguistic and biological diversity such as, for example, the Pacific Island of New Guinea, are finally being recognized as “wisdom hotspots” (Skutnabb-Kangas, Maffi & Harmon, 2003; Vizzoni, 2013). Species extinctions in the biosphere and language extinctions/endangerment in the ethnosphere occur simultaneously when the cultural habitats of Indigenous peoples are destroyed (Cantoni, 2007).

Indigenous language renewal is a critical struggle for basic individual human rights (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2004; Stuknabb-Kangas, Maffi & Harmon, 2003; UNDRIP, 2007). Given the emergent and newfound awareness of the role and value of Indigenous peoples’ languages and cultures in our planet’s maintaining complex and resilient living systems, language death should be of concern to all peoples across the world. Sadly this is not the case. The decline of language diversity has been attributed to the destruction of cultural habitat from economic development and the exploitation of natural resources, formal education in a dominant language, mass media, migration, economic or psychological incentives, lack of linguistic protection, and dominant language ideologies that lead to parents deciding not to speak their language to their children (Cantoni, 2007; Skutnabb-Kangas, Maffi & Harmon, 2003).

Indigenous peoples’ language rights have received some international recognition. In 2001, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) acknowledged cultural (including linguistic) diversity as “an
integral part of human rights and inseparable from respect for human dignity” (The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, 2001). In 2007, the United Nations acknowledged, affirmed and protected the unique contribution of Indigenous peoples’ to the diversity of humankind in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Article 8 of UNDRIP protects the rights of Indigenous peoples to be free from “forced assimilation or destruction of their culture” (Ibid); Article 11 affirms their “right to practise and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs” (Ibid), and Article 14 states that: “Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning” (p.10). Canada, New Zealand, Australia and the United States initially rejected UNDRIP and refused to sign. In 2010, the Canadian and United States governments finally endorsed the declaration, however, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada qualified this endorsement by stating that UNDRIP does not “reflect customary international law or change Canadian laws” (CBC News, 2010). This statement is indicative of the low status of Indigenous languages in Canada. The Northwest Territories is the exception to this “where Inuktitut (the Inuit language) and the Dene or Athapaskan languages have had status as official languages since 1990” (Ignace, 1998).

Although Indigenous languages are no longer overtly targeted for elimination, the continued failure to create government legislative protection signifies an ominous underlying satisfaction with their steady decline.

*The role of young children in language renewal*
Children have a critical role to play in the survival of Indigenous languages. According to Krauss (1996), endangered languages that are deemed to be “safe” are those that are spoken by children. In 2011 there were approximately 156,525 First Nations children under the age of five, of whom 17,630 children reported speaking an Aboriginal language most often or regularly at home (Statistics Canada, 2011). Full immersion in the first five years of life is a promising approach for reversing language decline because infants and young children acquire languages more easily than older children, youth and adults. Research on language acquisition confirms that “between the ages of 6–7 and 16–17, everybody loses the mental equipment required for the implicit induction of the abstract patterns underlying a human language, and the critical period really deserves its name” (DeKeyser, 2000, p.518-520).

Compared to adults, young children do not require “a high level of verbal analytical ability” in the technical aspects of language in order to achieve competence in a second language since they acquire abstract and complex patterns in language through “implicit acquisition processes” (DeKeyser, 2000). Being exposed to two languages from birth involves simultaneous language learning that is “seemingly natural and effortless” (Soderman and Oshio, 2008). By contrast, learning a second language after the first language is sequential bilingualism and this “occurs in a different part of the brain than that used for primary language learning” (Soderman and Oshio, 2008, p.301).

Research suggests that children need to be immersed in the target language from six to eight years in order to retain a language for a lifetime (Thomas and
Collier, 2004). However, even with prolonged exposure, second language learners
tend not to acquire “native-like levels” of production (Tedick, Fortune and Williams,
2011, p.6).

DeKeyser (2000) states that the ability of children to more easily acquire
language does not mean that second language instruction will be more effective
during elementary school than high school. Rather, the ability of children to acquire
language implicitly relies upon the methods used; namely children “require[s]
massive amounts of input, which only a total immersion program can provide”
(p.520).

Language immersion is considered the most effective way to produce fluent
speakers when there are not enough fluent speakers to rely upon for
intergenerational transmission to keep the language alive (Fishman, 2007).
According to Hinton (2008) “this level of intensity in language teaching may be the
only thing that works in turning around language decline” (p.8). No other setting
provides enough learning hours for children to acquire the language using natural
language acquisition techniques. This was certainly my experience as I witnessed
my young son Devon’s language learning through immersion during early childhood.

How I joined the struggle for Indigenous language renewal

In January 2001, shortly after moving to the South Okanagan, I met my
partner, Bill Cohen, a Sqilxw educator, poet and artist. Bill had just returned from
spending three weeks with the Māori in Aotearoa where he had visited the world-
renowned Māori immersion schools and language nest programs. He shared with
me his dreams to “move home” to his reserve in Vernon to develop a language
immersion school so that his kids would grow up speaking the Nsylxcən language. I recall his little girls excitedly asking us time and time again: “When is Dad starting the school?”

In 2004 we moved to the Okanagan Indian Band reserve. A year later, in 2005, he ran for Band Council and was elected with the mandate to lead an immersion school project into reality. The school opened seven months later in 2006, and two of my stepdaughters were among the fourteen founding students.

One year following the start up of Nkmaplqs I Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet the Education Department received funding from First Peoples Cultural Council’s new “Preschool Language Nest” program to start a language nest program in the community’s Snc’c’amalaʔtn Early Childhood Education Centre. The timing coincided perfectly with my son Dempsey’s entry into the Infant/Toddler Room at age one. I was excited about the opportunity for Dempsey to participate in the language nest project since my Nsylxcən language abilities were minimal. The nest project enabled Dempsey to spend time with two fluent Elders and a language apprentice for three hours every day. Becoming a mother at the same time that the language regeneration movement really took off in the community set me thinking about how to give my little boy a head start in language immersion learning. I started learning and using the language with him at home. It made sense to me that our youngest family member should have an opportunity to learn Nsylxcən from as early as possible, and ideally at the same time that he would be acquiring the English language.
I loved the idea of the daycare moving towards language immersion and I was sad for our son when the program ended after two years. Other parents and I talked about the idea of developing an early learning or early childhood education operated entirely in Nsyilxcən. I volunteered to put together a funding proposal on behalf of a group of parents from Nkmaplqs I Snmamayatn Kl Sqilxwtet to support the creation of a stand-alone language nest that would be separate from the pre-existing community daycare. Our proposal was initially unsuccessful.

In the meantime, I registered in my doctoral program. I was interested in the idea of doing community-based research and I wondered if other parents of Nkmalpks I Snmamayatn Kil Sqilxwtet would be interested to record our incredible stories of community people engaged in language renewal. I read the literature and wrote a comprehensive paper and my research proposal on Indigenous language immersion for elementary school children. I shared my research ideas with other parents in the community through face-to-face discussions and by e-mailing my research proposal. Although I attended numerous Parent Advisory Group meetings with the intention of describing my project, other issues were always more pressing. I examined my heart to explore why this might be happening and considered that perhaps the elementary school language immersion was not the issue on which I was supposed to focus my attention.

In 2011 the Okanagan Indian Band received funding to develop their first stand-alone language nest program. A group of interested community members came together to figure out the logistics, community members came forward to work as staff in the program, the group was disbanded and the language nest project
opened its doors in November 2011. Bill and I enrolled Dempsey, who was five years old. I provided administrative support to the language nest program, first as a volunteer and then as a contractor. My role was to communicate with the funder and to work on additional funding proposals. No additional funding arrived by end of March 31, 2012.

In the midst of all the community change, I worked steadily through my doctoral degree. In 2011-2012, when the language nest project began, I grew attentive to the growing literature on language nests. I saw how research on language nest programs could enhance community language engagement as well as advance language programs academically. I felt that by sharing individual and community experiences, that it would be easier for those who wanted to access resources by learning from those who had already gone through the process.

In February 2012, the Okanagan Indian Band passed a Band Council Resolution to approve my research proposal and shortly after, the University of British Columbia Okanagan Research Ethics Board followed suit. I passed my proposal defense in February 2012, and finally by April 2012, I was ready to start my doctoral research. From April 2012 to September 2012 I invited fourteen participants to the project, and I conducted research interviews with thirteen people.

In August 2012 the Band received funding for four language nest proposals. From October 2012 to March 2013, I took a break from my studies to conduct a pilot language nest as a Program Development Consultant. The five months that I had spent developing the language nest program left me feeling drained and exhausted. This was the most challenging project I had ever worked on, and certainly the most
emotionally exhausting. I was thankful for the encouragement from my little boy Devon who attended the program. Everyday my spirits and energy were raised when I heard him ask with a huge smile, “Is it language nest today!??” and in the summer months, “How come I don’t go to the language nest anymore?”

When funding ended again in March 2013, the project closed its doors and I returned to my doctoral studies. I resumed my research interviews and I wrote my first draft of my doctoral thesis in the summer. At the end of the summer the Band received more funding for the language nest program. With a renewed determination to finish my doctoral program, I offered to support the program as a volunteer. Volunteering enabled me to continue to share my skills and knowledge with the program, while providing me sufficient mental and emotional space that I needed to focus on my research and to follow up on conducting interviews and focus groups that had been on hold throughout my work contracts.

My experiences as a parent, volunteer and a consultant have informed my research on language nest development, however, my thesis is not about my personal experiences. While I consider my location and personal experience to be imperative to my methodology, my thesis is not an ethnographic participant observation account of language nest programs. My thesis focuses on language nest development literature and a thematic study of interviews and focus group data. My qualitative data from interviews and focus groups include discussions with twenty-one coordinators, administrators, staff, Elders, and parents from language nest projects.

As a beginner language learner
Since this research is about the renewal of Indigenous languages, it is important that I describe my own efforts to learn Nsyilxcen. Several years ago I was told by a Sqilxw fluent speaker from the South Okanagan that I have a responsibility to learn the language and use it with my children at home. At the time I was a beginner Nsyilxcen language learner but this statement served as great encouragement of my efforts and further increased my determination to support my children to learn their language. For two years (2006-2008) I attended weekly family language classes that were taught by two fluent Elders and I attended a three-week intensive class Nsyilxcen 1 of the Paul Creek Curriculum in 2011 (Peterson et al. 2006). The short periods of time that I have been immersed in the language with fluent Elders created valuable opportunities to practice everything that I have learned. In the present day, I can understand and can respond to basic commands and directives in short sentences, and I am extremely satisfied when I can understand bits and pieces of Elders’ conversations and prayers.

My efforts to learn and use the language at home happens in fits and starts, and tends to coincide with the emotional ups and downs of community language regeneration, the children’s enthusiasm for their language learning, as well as the extent of my active involvement in their language programs. I try not to compare myself to other learners who appear to learn faster and with more ease than my family members and myself. I use what I know and I marvel at every small exchange we have using the language. An example of this was in November 2013 when my two sons and stepson went out to a Chinese restaurant. Devon, my four year old who is in his second year at the language nest, called encouragingly to Willy and
Dempsey to get out the car, “cxʷuyx? Willy, cxʷuyx? Dempsey”, and then in the restaurant he began counting the glasses on the table.

Devon: Naqs, ?asíl, kaʔlís, mus, cilíst...
Mom: Tali píx p āxt Devon!
Devon: Stim axá?, (pointing to a cup)
Dempsey: Il pot.
(Willy, Dempsey and Devon point and talk about items on the table.)
Devon: stim axá?, mom? That means, “what is it”?
Dempsey: How do you know that Devon?
Devon: I know Okanagan language because I go to the language nest. They all talk Okanagan and I know what they are saying.

November 16, 2013

The moments that my children and I interact, use directives, encourage, or tease one another in Nsylxcen make all our efforts worthwhile.

Living between worlds

As a non-Indigenous “outsider” and the mother and partner of Sqilxw, coming into the language renewal carried no negative emotions. I initially found it easy to stay focused on the positive big picture and on the long-term rewards. I was not burdened by the many emotions connected to Indigenous languages: intergenerational grief, “anxieties, insecurities and hesitations about the value of their Indigenous language and culture…insecurities [that] must be addressed and resolved as an initial step before any meaningful action can be taken on a personal, family, or community level” (Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer, 1998, p.63).

I never doubted the benefits that our children would receive from learning their Indigenous language at an early age. I believe that language learning is important and value the cognitive development associated with bilingualism. I would
have enrolled my children in French immersion if Indigenous immersion were unavailable to them.

Three of our five children have now attended Nkmaplqs I Sn̓mamayət n kl Sqilxwtxwtet for a minimum of three years. My stepson is in his seventh and final year, and my six-year-old son entered grade one in Fall 2013. My two stepdaughters spent two to three years at the school. My two youngest children have both attended Snc’c’amalaʔtn Early Childhood Centre. Every day for forty-five minutes, Virginia Gregoire, a fluent Elder, teaches the children who learn numbers, colours, days of the week, the names of animals, the weather and other basic words and phrases. Children also learn cultural activities in the rooms and on fieldtrips. Programs are offered in a beautiful space and are delivered by caring ECE trained staff. My children have also attended all three language nest programs that have been delivered in OKIB since 2007.

From 2012-2013, my youngest son Devon was immersed in the language of five fluent speakers for a total of 165 hours. He is now in his second year of the language nest program, "E hee-a-thinaugh chekwook"tl"ap il skwook"tl"eelt I'll "tl"ghugh "tl"a hap,"⁴ (The sun rising over the hill on the fawn and old people) and has completed 135 hours of immersion. Three days after the start of this year’s program, Devon began spontaneously speaking Nsyilanxen at home. Within the first month his speech rapidly expanded and he began to spontaneously use most of the language that he has learned. He enthusiastically speaks the language without prompting, and

⁴ At the time of writing the five fluent Elders in Nk̓maplqs who named the language nest program were not using the International Phonetic System (IPA) used by learners in the Southern part of our language territory.
uses it to respond to questions in Nsyilxcen. He understands most of the basic repetitive phrases that the five Elders use with him on a daily basis (i.e. “come in Devon,” “take off your boots,” “take off your coat,” “sit down,” “are you hungry,” “go to the washroom,” “do you want some water?” etc.) His interest in using the language contrasts to my experiences with some of our other children who would get annoyed by my attempts to engage with them in Okanagan. Typical responses ranged from, “speak normal, speak in English,” “I don’t want to speak Okanagan,” “I’m not at school now,” to ignoring my attempts and simply responding in English. I attribute these differences to Devon’s immersion in the language at the early age of three, by contrast to the other children’s immersion at the ages of five, six, eight and nine years.

As a mother of Sqilxw children who are Okanagan Indian Band members, my doctoral thesis represents a choice that I made to not allow my anxieties about being an “outsider” prevent me from actively seeking ways to enhance the lives of my children as they inherit the struggle for Nsyilxcen language and cultural revitalization. Since I set out on this research journey, I have navigated many labels such as, “ally,” “outsider,” “insider,” “outsider-within”. My supervisory committee sees me as an “insider-researcher”. In my children’s community, some see me as an “outsider,” while other people tell me of my responsibilities to participate as a woman “married in” to the community. Sometimes people talk to me about the “old days” when Okanagan people traveled to neighbouring tribes in order to find partners and to foster good relations and trade networks with other peoples. Others simply say, “Well you’ve got Okanagan kids don’t you?” This is not my community. I am an
English woman. However I do live here and my children tie me to the community forever. From this position I have seen only two real choices: hold back and do nothing, or get over myself and join the struggle for language regeneration; a struggle that my children will surely inherit.

**Organization of the thesis**

I began this thesis by introducing the value of Indigenous languages and the important role of young children in language renewal. In keeping with Indigenous methodologies I also located myself and how I joined the struggle for language renewal in Nkmaplqs, (Head of the Lake, Vernon BC), the community where I live with my partner, two children and three stepchildren.

In Chapter Two I present the language immersion movement in early childhood on a global scale and the major issues that have emerged from language nest development. I draw on the Kahnawake Mohawk nest, Te Kōhanga Reo Māori nests, Pūnana Leo programs in Hawai‘i and other language immersion in early childhood immersion programs in Ireland, across Canada, the US and the Andes. The information presented is intended to satisfy the standards of academic rigor, while also providing a pragmatic resource for the practical purpose of supporting those involved in the initial stages of language nest development and delivery.

In Chapter Three I explicate my method of research as service in support of Indigenous language and cultural regeneration. I draw from the work of Indigenous scholars and orient my research within Indigenous concepts and frameworks. I raise some key issues regarding the potential roles of non-Indigenous academic and activist “allies” in supporting Indigenous language and cultural regeneration. I
explore how we may be theoretically positioned to do research of service with and for Indigenous communities and all of humanity. I also draw from and review the benefits and limitations of some potentially useful methodologies for community-based research, including Indigenous Methodologies and Participatory Action Research. I then provide a detailed description of the methods that I used to conduct this research, including an overview of the research questions, approaches for engaging participants, development of ethical approaches, and data analysis.

Chapter Four and Five present a thematic analysis of interviews and focus groups with over twenty individuals involved in language immersion during early childhood. In this data analysis section of the thesis my research findings contribute to the academic literature, to Indigenous global networks of language and cultural regeneration and provide practical and useful information for Indigenous communities involved in language nest development and delivery.

In Chapter Six I discuss my research findings within the context of the literature in order to present some insights and promising practices for the development of effective and quality language nest programs.

Lastly, in Chapter Seven, the final chapter in my thesis, I draw my research journey to a close with concluding remarks about the limitations and benefits of attempting to do research as a service to the language and cultural renewal movement. Throughout Canada people in Indigenous communities are engaged in extraordinary efforts to support community language renewal. I hope that my research supports these tremendous and ongoing community efforts.
Chapter 2. Indigenous language renewal during early childhood

A global review of language nest programs

In this chapter I present the literature on language nests and Indigenous immersion language programs. I have attempted to present language nest movements by region and when they emerged chronologically within a global context including Pacific Island, Kahnawake Mohawk, Māori Te Kōhanga Reo, Hawai’ian Pūnana Leo language nest immersion movements and two Indigenous language nest programs in British Columbia.


In British Columbia, ten language nests funded by First Peoples Cultural Council included programs operated by Chief Atahm School, Gitwangak Education Society, Lower Nicola Band, Nunwakola Cultural Society, Okanagan Indian Band, Qaquailas Day Care Centre; Seabird Island Band, Stz’uminus First Nation, Tl’etinqox-T’in Health Services, Xeni Gwet’in First Nation (FPCC, 2014). On a global scale, language nest programs young children also exist in the Isle of Man (Ager,
2009), Uqautchim Uglua Language Nest in Alaska (Bates, 2013), Sami government funded language nest programs in Finland (Welch, n.d.) and Forest Enets Language Nest in Potapovo, Krasnoyarsk Krai in Russia (Pereltsvaig, 2012). Lastly, early in February 2014, the Australian government announced $4.5 million in funding was being allocated to support the development and operation for five initial “Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests” in New South Wales, Australia (Gamilaraay Language Nest, Gumbaynggirr Language Nest, Bundjalung Language Nest, Paarkintji Language Nest, and Wiradjuri Language Nests (NWS Government, 2014).

In-depth and evaluative research exists on the Indigenous language medium preschool programs that are operated in Wales (Hickey, 2013; Jones and Martin-Jones, 1997), Ireland (Hickey, 1997; Hickey, 1999; Mhathuna, 1995) and Scotland (Stephen et al., 2011). Language medium preschools in these countries have not been included in this study due to the relatively the more secure language status (i.e. 2.8 million heritage language speakers in Wales, 3.5 million Irish speakers in the Republic of Ireland and 66,000 Gaelic speakers in Scotland (66,000) (Baker, 1997).

The right of Indigenous peoples to control and deliver their own education systems in their own languages is affirmed in Article 14 of the United Nations Declaration on the Right of Indigenous People:

> Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their own education systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning. (United Nations, 2007)

Early learning programs that are delivered in Indigenous languages using natural approaches to language acquisition, more commonly known as language nests, are
a direct expression of these rights (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2004). Since the 1970s the world’s Indigenous peoples have been exercising, asserting and reclaiming the right to control the education of their young children.

The emergence of language nests across the world appears to have happened simultaneously and it is difficult to follow the development of a coherent global “movement”. It would appear that a group of Samoan and Cook Island mothers may have set up the very first language immersion early childhood program in 1973 and that the nests rapidly expanded in the mid-1980s among the Samoan, Cook Island and Tokelauan (Utumpau, 1998, p.28). The language nest movement in Canada appears to have been led by Dorothy Lazore and Kahtehrón:ni Iris Staceyas in the Mohawk community of Kahnawake in the early 1980s (Hoover, 1992; Richards and Burnaby, 2008). The Te Kōhanga Reo in New Zealand first emerged as a concept in 1981, and the first nest opened in 1982 with funding from the Department of Māori Affairs (King, 2001). Inspired by these two movements and the “Canadian-French ‘super-immersion’ schools” (Warner, 2001), the first Pūnana Leo nest program was opened in Hawai‘i. Not long afterwards, in 1987, Kathy Michel and Janice Dick Billy opened the Secwepemc Ka nest in the community of Adams Lake in BC, Canada (Michel, 2012).

The emergence of language nests in Indigenous communities on a global scale has created strong networks and relationships that foster continued transformation at a local level as stories of revitalization are shared and encouraged. In 1989 Kamana, a co-founder of the Pūnana Leo traveled to the mainland United States to visit the Hualapai and co-founder Lucille Watahomigie. A couple of years
later, Kahnawake Mohawk nest founder Dorothy Lazore visited the Hawai’ians to provide support and expertise for curriculum development (Kimura, n.d.) as well as across Canada, delivering workshops and courses to inspire and inform other Indigenous communities, including the Adams Lake community (Michel, 2012). Kimura (n.d.), Wilson and Kamana (2008), and Kipp (2000) have also hosted Indigenous language regeneration activists or visited other communities to share their experiences of leading the development of language immersion programs.

The significance of the global Indigenous language movement cannot be overstated: awareness of and links to the global movement may inspire and motivate individuals to action, and bolster low morale during times of inevitable struggle. This review then becomes a part of this global network of sharing and is intended to support educators, administrators, parents and families in Indigenous communities who may want to learn more about language nests, advocate for or develop a language nest, or decide whether or not to send their children to an existing community nest program.

**Pacific Island language nests**

Over the last thirty years, a large number of Tongans and Samoans, (as well as other Indigenous peoples from the Polynesian Pacific Islands), have taken up permanent residence in New Zealand. The first Pacific Island language nest appears to have been started in 1973 by a group of Samoan and Cook Island mothers, “when they believed that other forms of preschool education were not meeting the needs of their children” (Utumapu, 1998, p.28). Samoan early childhood centres with language-immersion programs, called ä’oga ‘ämata, were initiated “to offer early
educational benefits to children” (Taouma et al, 2003). These programs had very close ties to the church, either through church support in their initial establishment or, “use of church facilities or the active involvement of church personnel” (Utumapu, 1998, p.74). Mothers and Elders played a significant role in the delivery of the programs: mothers helped teach the language and Elders “meet, exchange news and recite legends to children” (ibid, p.29). In the nests, children learn “respect, cultural pride; family dignity; self esteem; sharing and caring for others; Samoan language; art of singing and dancing; family member roles; the Samoan preparation and presentation of food; handicrafts; cultural games; Samoan way of hosting visitors; listening and obeying Elders” (ibid, p.32). Parents were at first, “opinionated and suspicious of the language nest movement, until they had actually witnessed themselves how the language nest operates and the positive results in their children” (Utumapu, 1998, p.86). Some language nests serve as a form of social support for parents, as parenting or mothering groups held at the nests enable parents to learn about, “health, budgeting, child development, domestic and child abuse” (Utumapu, 1998, p.87).

By 1996, 176 Pacific Island language nests had a total of 3,736 children in attendance; that is 38% of all Pacific Island children attending preschool institutions were enrolled in the nests. Samoan language nests are an interesting phenomenon since they are predominant in New Zealand as a diasporic Indigenous language and cultural regeneration movement that is not supported by the New Zealand Ministry of Education. In particular, Pasifika languages are omitted from the Ministry’s “goals
and strategies of participation in heritage language programmes” that currently characterizes approaches to te Reo Māori (McCaffery and McFall-McCaffery, 2010).

**Kahnawake Mohawk language nest**

In the early 1980s, the first Indigenous Language Nest in Canada was opened in Kahnawake territory as a “pilot project to use only Mohawk with English-speaking nursery school children” (Hoover, 1992, p.271). Few parents selected the program for their children in the beginning. However, confidence in the nest grew over the first ten years of its development and by 1992 over half of the community’s children were enrolled (Richards and Burnaby, 2008). Parental concerns over their children’s English language skills and related future opportunities were a large factor in the slow growth in attendance. Research showing that Mohawk language immersion was not at the cost of English language performance appears to have played a role in increased enrolment (Hoover, 1992). (At the time of writing, these unpublished evaluative studies were not publicly accessible for review (Genesee and Lambert, 1986; Holobow, Genesee and Lambert, 1987).

Very little published research exists on the Mohawk language nest program at Kahnawake, and it is challenging to separate out the language nest project from the information that is currently available on the language immersion schooling programs in the community. For example, Richards and Burnaby (2008) describe the yearlong preparation for the development of language immersion schooling project at Kahnawake prior to program delivery, but it is not stated if a similar process was undertaken for the language nest program.

**Te Kōhanga Reo**
A considerable body of research exists on the development and operation of Te Kōhanga Reo language immersion early learning in Aotearoa (New Zealand) (Fleras, 1987; Hohepa and Smith, 1982; King, 2001; Lee et al., 2013; McClutchie, 2007). Te Kōhanga Reo directly translates as “the language nest” (Hohepa and Smith, 1982, p.333). The first nest opened in 1982 (Fleras, 1987; King, 2001). The Te Kōhanga Reo concept appears to have emerged from an annual Department of Māori Affairs meeting in 1981 in response to Māori concerns for their language (King, 2001; McClutchie, 2007) and as an integral component of the Department’s “Tu Tangata (“standing tall”) philosophy as a blueprint for future Māori-government relations” (Fleras, 1987, p. 6). The Department funded the program from its very beginnings. The number of language nests grew dramatically, from one in 1982, to four hundred by 1985, and six hundred by 1998 (McClutchie, 2007). The nests became the first choice for twenty percent of all early childhood services and provided care for “between 1992 and 1995 [to] an average of 46% of those Māori preschoolers participating in preschool programs” (King, 2001, p.122). Moreover, it would appear that the programs attracted children who had previously participated in conventional early childhood education (King, 2001).

Fleras (1987) describes Te Kōhanga Reo as “a kind of childcare centre which fuses together the structural format of preschool and day care, and combines them with a Māori style of operation” for the purpose of “producing bilingual and bicultural individuals who possess the confidence and skills to achieve success in either world” (p.7). In the early years of the movement, Te Kōhanga Reo “cultural knowledge development across the curriculum did not exist, just the spoken language” (Stiles,
1997, p.253). Te Kōhanga Reo experienced considerable difficulties in the first ten years of establishment. Programs were staffed by a blend of fluent Elders and younger more energetic women. There was a need for Elders to share their language through context-rich environments using natural language acquisition, and for workers to improve their language skills. As a result, three-year training programs that cover the history and philosophy of Te Kōhanga Reo, Māori ways of knowing, early childhood education and administration were developed, (King, 2001). Content of the training is developed from within the whanau in which the individual is already working in a Kōhanga Reo. These training programs have enabled the Kōhanga Reo to become increasingly staffed by fully qualified early childhood educators who are proficient in te Reo Māori and Māori culture and customs with the support of fluent speakers and a unique community-based whanau governance structure.

Te Kōhanga Reo serve children between the ages of one and six years of age. Children may attend for six hours per day on weekdays, from 9am to 3pm; with most Kōhanga Reo offering thirty hours of program delivery per week (Lee et al., 2013). The programs are usually housed in a “Māori –owned premise such as a marae (Māori ceremonial complex) or, less frequently, at community centres or private homes (Interim Report on Te Kōhanga Reo, 31 October 1983)” (Fleras, 1987, p. 9). The number of children per nest may range from six to sixty, dependent upon the setting. Many Kōhanga Reo programs find it necessary to charge fees, as government funding is not entirely adequate. In 2000, Reedy claimed that Government funding contributions amounted to $40 million towards the “running of Kōhanga” (Reedy, 2000, p.159). However, the initial success and rapid growth of the
Kōhanga Reo in the 1980s was the result of Māori people “in time, space for the Kōhanga, and human effort” (Reedy, 2000, p.159). Most Te Kōhanga Reo are dependent upon volunteers: “Ten percent of the adults, teachers, and aides are paid. The majority of workers are volunteer parents and elders” (Stiles, 1997, p.254). In recent years, support for the Te Kōhanga Reo movement has begun to stagnate. Parent and family support and involvement have plateaued (G. H. Smith, personal communication, November, 8, 2010), and the number of centres and the number of children enrolled have also declined (Ritchie and Rau, 2006; C. Kerehoma, personal communication, November, 15, 2013).

‘Aha Pūnana Leo Hawai’ian nest programs

Pūnana Leo means “nest of voices” (Iokepa-Guerrero and de France, 2007, p.43). The Hawai’ian language nest movement was inspired by the Te Kōhanga Reo in Aotearoa. In fact, the founders of the Pūnana Leo visited the Te Kōhanga Reo in person (Stiles, 1997). In 1982, the Aha Pūnana Leo, a board of Hawai’ian speaking young educators incorporated as a non-profit society and opened the first language nest just two years later. The first Hawai’ian nest began with no sustainable funding and just a few private donations (Kimura, n.d.). This shortfall in funding was made up for with parental participation that included; “paying tuition (based on a sliding scale), providing eight hours of in-kind labour each month, and attending monthly meetings…and [a commitment] to study the Hawai’ian language” (Yamauchi & Ceppi, 2006, p.16). Within three years, two more nests were opened. By 1996, the Aha Pūnana Leo non-profit society had served 175 children in nine different programs (Kamana & Wilson, 1996).
In the early years of development, Pūnana Leo programs wove Indigenous family based ways of knowing with Montessori methods in early childhood education. Wilson and Kamana describe a “typical” program as providing service for ten to twelve children from ages three to five years. Children have “a school day from 7:30 to 5:00 Monday through Friday from September through July. The multi-aged group allows for the retention of a number of children each year who help transmit the language to incoming students” (1996, p.151). While children under age three are not able to attend due to state restrictions, the Hui Hi’l Pepe (Baby Embracing Clubs) welcomed mothers with infants to toddlers age three years, to “join with a teacher to learn Hawai’ian and simple teaching strategies in preparation for the children’s entering the Pūnana Leo” (2001, p.151). Parents are required to attend language classes on a weekly basis and support language use at home (Stiles, 1997).

Children in the Pūnana Leo language nests learn literacy in Hawai’ian from an early age due to the early establishment of an accepted orthography (Wilson and Kamana, 2001). The lack of available textual resources, however, necessitate the creation of Hawai’ian materials, such as books that were created by parents “for their children using photographs of the child pasted to construction paper with a few lines written underneath” (2001, p.152). Other materials were created by pasting Hawai’ian orthography on English children’s books.

**Cseyseten language nest, Adams Lake, BC**

The development of Cseyseten Language Nest has been briefly described by founder Kathy Michel in her doctoral thesis, in McIvor’s MA thesis (2005), and was
also shared with me in 2012 in person for this research. Kathy learned about the Māori language nest movement when she attended a conference in Vancouver. After meeting and chatting with the Māori, she became intent on creating a language nest in her home community. In 1987, she immediately moved back to her home reserve in Adams Lake and went door to door to talk to community members about starting a language nest. The Secwepemc Ka language nest program began in a “big bare room” in a log building and was run by Kathy and Janice Dick Billy. Initial challenges included a general, “lack of understanding, lack of awareness” at the community level (KM, September, 25, 2012, transcript). However, she avoided talking about daycare to explain what she was trying to do since, “what they were doing in New Zealand wasn’t what I would consider a daycare or early childhood program. I tried to explain to them that this was going to be a place that young children could come and Elders would speak in the language and they would learn the language” (Ibid). Indeed, Secwepemc Ka language nest was not modelled on early childhood education: the program was free, and parents were welcome to come along with their children, or leave their children off on a “drop-in” basis. Inspired by the Māori, Kathy asked the nest Elders, “what they remembered doing as a child” and a daily structure was created without toys. This approach left Elders “free to invent activities and to use the natural world as inspiration” and they “quickly helped set up a home-like environment that was nurturing and child-friendly” (Ibid). The Elders were critical to the success of the program. Their role was to “speak the language and to keep the children occupied” (Ibid) while the staff supported them by
changing diapers, cooking, and cleaning. By the end of the year, the program had seven children in attendance.

The Cseyseten Language Nest runs three days a week for children aged one to four years old. The program has accepted a five year old, but the language dominance of the English speaking child simply confirmed the need to start the nests with preverbal children, or those in the very early stages of English speech production.

Twenty-six years have passed since Cseyseten Language Nest first opened as Secwepemc Ka. The program has changed over the years to adapt to the personalities and interests of the program Elders. In the present day, the program Elders, “absolutely love a structured program” and Kathy mixes their love of structure up with what, “I like to call my ‘wild time”, when the children go, “outside and do something crazy and wild” (Ibid). Lots of time spent outside is a big component of the program.

The benefits of language nest programs

The Kōhanga Reo and Pūnana Leo language nest programs were designed to “feed” the language “into the ears and mouths of young toddlers by older Indigenous speakers” (Kimura, n.d, p.41). However, approaches to language nest delivery in sites across the world vary from small family home-based programs for several children (Dowdy, 2010) to large-scale total immersion early childhood education centers (King, 2001).

Learning an Indigenous language is unlike learning a Western colonial language. For the most part, Indigenous peoples do not set out to learn their
heritage language with the same mindset as, for example, a Westerner might set out to learn Spanish prior to visiting Central America. The Westerner learns the language to find ways to effectively communicate with the locals in a foreign place and to learn about their culture. By contrast, Indigenous parents may want their children to know the language in order to experience the benefits of reconnecting to the land, fluent Elders and other speakers, traditional stories, knowledge and culture.

**Remembering place**

Indigenous languages embody thousands of years of intimate knowledge of one’s territory, stories of place, genealogies, and relationships. Place is central to Indigenous peoples (Armstrong, 1997; LaDuke, 2006). All over the world, unique perceptions, values and beliefs of Natural Law that are critical to on-going healthy relationships with the land, all living systems and the human world are found within the unique Indigenous languages from the land (Apffel-Marglin, 1998). Indigenous languages represent place-based worldviews, and therefore relationships, words and concepts may not exist in the English language (Battiste and Youngblood Henderson, 2000). Consequently, Indigenous languages became a prime target for colonial policies all over the world as efforts are made to sever the ability of Indigenous peoples to relate to the animate and inanimate beings as relatives (Armstrong, 2002) and communicate with the land (Navarro, 2008). The responsibility to regenerate healthy relationships to land, place and living systems of local place(s) is at the heart of the language and cultural renewal movement. These relationships are expressed through Indigenous story systems, concepts and frameworks that are shared through language.
Reconnecting with fluent elders

For many, memories of time spent with fluent grandparents have sparked their commitment to the language renewal movement (Gokee-Rindal, 2009). Elders facilitate the intergenerational connections that are critical to language and cultural regeneration. As the keepers of the stories, Elders are often the link to the community’s collective memory that includes genealogies (Shenandoah, 2006), connections to place names, creation stories about places (Basso, 1996), and traditional ecological knowledge that is specific to place (Cruikshank, 1991). Consequently, many communities do their best to respond to the needs of their Elders. Program Elders are a cherished resource, and programs are designed around their availability, health needs, and their need to receive appropriate monetary compensation for their expertise in the language and as genealogists, traditional ecological knowledge keepers, and community historians (Navarro, 2008).

Successful Indigenous language immersion programs are often envisioned in collaboration with the Elders who are the “primary learning resource[s]” (Pease-Pretty On Top, 2004, p.21) and involve the regeneration of extended family ways of being and knowing. Fluent Elders are often consulted in the development of language nests, or in the naming of the nests or rooms in the building, as with the Southern Ute Indian Montessori Academy (Navarro, 2008).

Some language nests for infants and preschoolers are fashioned after gramma’s house where “ways of knowing and learning follow the household activities and traditional seasonal knowledge areas” (Pease-Pretty On Top, 2004, p.23). The Seneca language nest in Western New York State provides an intimate
glimpse of a family-based language immersion program for young children. In 2009, Sandy Dowdy, a fluent speaker of Seneca, started the program in her granddaughter’s home. Dowdy is an Elder and a certified early childhood educator in Montessori and Asher’s Natural Approach teaching methods, including Total Physical Response (Borgia & Dowdy, 2010). The Onodowa’ga: Wadehsaye Oiwa’sho’oh, or the Seneca Language Nest, began with four preschool children, three of whom were her great-granddaughters. Dowdy’s nest day includes spending time outside, activities that follow the seasonal cycle, environmental sustainability, and seasonal ceremonies (Borgia & Dowdy, 2010). Dowdy found innovative ways to include the children’s families in the language learning process through the production of a series of Parent Brochures. She connects with parents during drop off and pick up and through informal meetings. Families are also invited to seasonal ceremonies throughout the year (p.122).

Specific activities during the day at Dowdy’s nest follow a regular routine but she is also flexible to the children’s needs and other goings-on in the community. This approach enables the children to “grow and attend to activities when they are ready” and “to freely express themselves during free play situations” (Ibid, p.121). Throughout the day, language is reinforced through non-verbal gestures, TPR methods, repetition and flashcards. Children learn “about clothes, foods, numbers, pets, commands […] names, family terms, miscellaneous items such as questions and observations, songs and the Gano"nyok”, a daily Seneca recitation (Ibid, p.122).

The process of renewing active and daily relationships with fluent Elders involves recognizing the value in working through differences in generational
knowledge, methods and values. Creating healthy relationships between teachers and Elders involves acknowledging the challenges that are faced by Elders, including lack of energy, health and transportation issues. Programs support their Elders by adapting working hours (McIvor, 2005) so that they may experience the positive impacts that accompany spending some time in the language nest with the children.

**Reclaiming family-based ways of being and knowing**

The Kōhanga Reo programs are a family based approach to early language immersion. Some are located in family homes. For example, Te Ara ki te Reo ki Kuirau-Kuira (The Pathway to te Reo Māori) began in the home of Waaka and Rosalyn Vercoe (McClutchie, 2007). In the early 2000s, the program was registered as a charitable trust and eventually expanded to become a Total Māori Immersion Early Childhood Education Center. In 2003 the program was relocated to a newly constructed site that was built specifically for this purpose.

The Pūnana Leo language nests in Hawai‘i started as a family-based approach to language transmission during early childhood. Co-founders Wilson and Kamana (2001) state:

The original concept of the Pūnana Leo language nest was to recreate an environment where Hawai‘ian language and culture were conveyed and developed in much the same way that they were in the home in earlier generations. Parents were told that this was not a school in the *haole*, or Anglo sense, but a means to revitalize the language and to recreate, as much as possible, a traditional extended family in which children interacted with family members through Hawai‘ian (p.151).
The goals of the program were more difficult to actualize in terms of the re-creation of “traditional activities, the typical life experiences of Elders, in ocean and mountain areas” (Wilson and Kamana, 2001, p.151). Like the Seneca Language Nest, the first Pūnana Leo programs drew from Montessori methodologies, used natural materials as much as possible as opposed to commercial materials, and incorporated Hawai’ian, “family experiences, behaviors and values” (Ibid, p.151) into the daily routine. Darrell Kipp, founder of the Piegan Institute full day immersion school program, recalled his visit to a Pūnana Leo program in 1994:

We were brought to a one-classroom school where an older woman in an easy chair was speaking Hawai’ian to a group of children sitting around her on the floor. The beautiful sounds of the language resounded with seemingly every child speaking at once to the teacher. Off the side in a tiny kitchen was a middle-aged man preparing lunch in a large wok…The school visit reminded me of my years in a one-room reservation school and the beauty of the learning environment came back in an instant: “School at Gramma’s house.” (Kipp, 2009, p.3)

As Darrell Kipp reflected on his own full-day immersion program at the Piegan Institute, Kipp noted the important role of family and that the “important male role is part of the fabric of immersion schools. Our students’ fathers, uncles, brothers and grandfathers daily presence in our school makes for a graceful balance” (p.2).

Family-based approaches to language nest development and delivery are a promising approach for re-establishing emotional, mental, social and cultural connections between young children and older fluent speakers. Fluent Elders are an important life link to the language, the culture, and to the values, practices and ways of knowing that many of the younger generations may have missed out on learning from their own parents, now Elders. As my friend, Jennifer Leason, an Annishaabe
woman, explained to me: “In our culture and the learning/ life cycle, the child is to the east, the youth is to the south, adult to the west and elder to the north. The elder and youth are adjacent to one another- because youth learn best from elders and children learn best from adults. Just a little FYI… I guess that’s why we have a family based approach” (J. Leason, personal communication, April 17, 2014).

**Indigenous language proficiency**

In New Zealand, the renewal of reo Māori speakers has resulted in a leap from 20% in the 1980s to approximately 50% in 2006 (Gallegos et al., 2010). King describes graduates of Kōhanga Reo as “reasonably bilingual, with proficiency depending on the length of time the child has been in the Kōhanga Reo and the strength of the language environment the child is exposed to, both in the home and in the Kōhanga” (King, 2001, p.125). Te Kōhanga Reo language environment consists of “exposure and repetition in songs, conversations, prayers and playing”.

One Māori parent stated that “the kids aren’t taught how to speak Māori. They just sit around and listen to it and their little minds stretch and take it all in”. Another Kōhanga coordinator commented: “We aren’t in the business of teaching. No, we are in the business to provide an environment where learning can take place naturally” (Fleras, 1987, p.10).

Fleras has noted that, more recently, the language environment also includes technology (p. 10).

Informal and anecdotal descriptive assessments of Indigenous language immersion from the Pūnana Leo observe that children “begin to speak in phrases and continue to gain more fluency as the weeks progress” (Kimura, n.d. p.42) and “are using only Hawaiian in the Pūnana Leo within three to four months” (Wilson and Kamana, 2001, p.152). Consequently, Pūnana Leo graduates have been found to
have “strong Hawai‘i‘an communicative and behavioural fluency among its matriculating five year olds… further accompanied by personal self-confidence and a worldview that Hawai‘i‘an should be the normal language and daily culture of interaction for Hawai‘i” (2001, p.153). However, language proficiencies and academic performance of Pūnana Leo graduates may begin to suffer when they join elementary language immersion school programs that have high percentages of non-Hawai‘i‘an speakers. These challenges parallel the experiences of early French immersion learners described by Trescases (1996), as well as Mohawk children who are enrolled in language immersion from kindergarten (Fulford, 2007). A different kind of challenge may also emerge when immersion students become more advanced than their own teachers (Fulford, 2007).

Maintaining a focus on the target language acquisition is essential to success (FPCC, 2014). Immersion programs are better positioned to do so with younger children (infants to 3 years old) and in a space that is separated from English-speaking programs since preschool and kindergarten children with linguistic dominance in the English language may tend to use English in free play with one another, and in reply to staff and Elders (FPCC, 2014). Typically it becomes necessary to prohibit the use of English from school sites altogether and visitors may also be prohibited from using English (Kipp, 2007). This approach may be the only way to ensure that the target language remains the focus in all communications between staff, between children, and amongst themselves.

**Boosting self-esteem and academic performance**
Academic achievement is one of the benefits of language immersion (Collier & Thomas, 2007; Tedick, Fortune & Williams, 2011). Indigenous community-controlled immersion programs are increasing the self-esteem, academic performance and attendance, respect, trust, confidence and maturity of participating children (McCarty, 2003; Romero Little & McCarty, 2006; Wilson & Kamana, 2001). Early heritage language education has been found to increase the self-esteem of minority-language children (Wright and Taylor, 1995). Values such as family, respect, good work ethics and sharing that are cherished by the community are also nurtured within the language nests (PRATEC, 2007; Sing, Hunter & Meyer, 1999). Likewise, Te Kōhanga Reo programs are intended to impart Māori traditional spiritual values and practices, as well as “personal discipline and respect for hours… paying attention, following instructions and learning to get along with others” (Fleras, 1987, p. 10).

Language learning during childhood has been found to enhance the cognitive development of the brain, and bilingual children also tend to be more tolerant of differences and embrace diversity among peoples (DeJong, 1998). The experiences of Pūnana Leo language nest who graduate into competitive private schools also supports research findings that bilingualism fosters strong academic performance in both the first and second languages of children (Wilson and Kamana, 2001). These findings are consistent with a research analysis of the 2001 Aboriginal Peoples Survey that was conducted with Inuit, and First Nations children living on- and off-reserve in Canada (Guevremont and Kohen, 2012); “For First Nations children living on reserve, children who spoke an Aboriginal language, both those who were and
were not helped to learn an Aboriginal language by their schoolteachers were more likely to be doing well in school than First Nations children on reserve who did not speak an Aboriginal language” (p.14). Overall, this population-based study found that “speaking an Aboriginal language was associated with positive school outcomes for children” (p.15) and therefore was consistent with similar research findings by Demmert (2006).

**Increasing parental involvement in early learning**

Language revitalization is demanding upon parents and families and many rise to meet the challenge. In Hawai‘i, the ‘Aha Pūnana Leo language nests are usually opened when groups of parents gather together and “request a site at a particular location” (Wilson and Kamana, 2001, p.153). As parents open immersion programs, other parents emerge and networks of committed families’ pool resources, volunteer hours and skills set things in motion in ways that create changes within the community and in their own homes. The involvement of parents in language programs has been observed to result in the production of “new knowledge or expertise” and “new skills and patterns in the home” (Utumapu 1998, p. 7). Māori language nests are intended to immerse Māori children in the whanau extended kin group and parental participation in monthly whanau meetings are required as a condition for the child to participate in the program. Families are also required to speak Māori in the language nest. The whanau is not a strictly kinship based unit, rather it’s “the binding relationship is that of adherence to the kaupapa of Kōhanga Reo” (King, 2001). This kaupapa is based on involvement and speaking Māori I nga wa katoa, I nga wahi katoa (all the time and everywhere)” (King, 2001,
Consequently, Kōhanga Reo are considered to provide a form of social support for isolated parents (i.e., such as a single parents and parents who live in urban centres), as well as much needed childcare services that enable Māori parents to engage in employment (Fleras, 1987, p.9).

A critical accomplishment of increased parental involvement in Indigenous language immersion programs in early childhood is family language learning. Many programs accept children on the condition that their parents attend adult language lessons and may expect parents to participate rather than simply drop off their children (Wilson and Kamana, 2001). Children should not have to shoulder the responsibility for revitalizing the language; they require active support to practice their language skills and to see the value of the language and its relevance in daily life within their own homes.

If parents do not assist in reversing language shift, by either learning the language with their child or through using the language in the home, if the parent is a fluent or even semi-fluent speaker of course, most likely the gains in fluency made at Academy will eventually be lost. Research shows that the most important speech domain for an endangered language is the home. If the language is not being learned in the home language loss quickens. Because of this, getting parents actively involved in the language revitalization process will have to be a priority (Navarro, 2008, p.164).

For example, Te Kōhanga Reo efforts to produce new generations of fluent speakers are impeded by the low numbers of Māori families that are able to adequately support and nurture their child’s newly acquired skills in Te Reo Māori with a Māori speaking home environment. In response to the needs of families, the National Trust developed two language courses to support the language learning of
parents, however, this is an area that requires more research and supportive interventions.

Contradictions emerge when parents who speak the language continue to speak exclusively in English in their home even after their children have begun attending an Indigenous language immersion program. Parents also may speak English while volunteering at the nests or schools leading to Platero’s suggestion that “parents want the schools to teach Navajo [for example] to their children instead of taking the lead themselves” (2002, p.92). This tendency has also been observed of Indigenous children in Hawai’ian and Māori language immersion programs who come to see their Indigenous language as purely reserved for educational domains and not popular culture “because they have no societal context” for its more extended use in the home, community or Nation (King, 2001, p.126, Warner, 2001).

**Some challenges that face language nests**

The early years of a full Indigenous language immersion program for children is unlike the development phase of a dominant language program. Dominant languages have solid and strong geographic language domains and benefit from global official recognition as “legitimate” languages, government funding, endless supplies of curriculum and resources, and huge human resources of fluent speakers to draw from. Indigenous language immersion programs do not have these supports and also involve the intense emotional work of moving through multi-generational linguicide. Complex multi-layered issues of trauma and grief go hand-in-hand with the development of endangered languages programs, and therefore play a critical role in their viability to survive the first few years, as well as their potential for long-
long-term sustainability. Consequently, the development and delivery of language nest programs entails many challenges such as the lack of supportive legislation and funding support in Canada, state certification or licensing requirements, shortage of fluent speakers with training in immersion methods, and qualified staff with fluency levels.

**Legislation and funding: An international context**

Māori, English and New Zealand Sign Language have been the official languages of New Zealand since 1987. The United States and Australia do not have an official language and French and English are the official languages of Canada. Indigenous languages have no official recognition in Canada and there is no legislative support for the delivery of education in Indigenous languages. Federal funding is woefully inadequate for the monumental task of protecting and regenerating Indigenous languages. Funding opportunities are highly competitive and require annual application when only long-term funding would allow for the creation of life-span language regeneration initiatives.

In Canada, government funding in support of language and cultural programs became available for the first time in the 1983/84 budget “when $1 million was added on to Indian social and cultural development programs” (Fleras, 1987, p.24). In 1998, the federal government launched the Aboriginal Language Initiative (ALI) and made $232,470 available to communities across Canada. This amount was divided among provinces regardless of the uneven distribution of languages that exist in each region. However, in 2011, this amount was increased to eight million dollars and according to the Department of Canadian Heritage:
regional allocations for First Nations languages were revised to more equitably respond to the unique language needs within each region and territory... a base amount and additional funding [was allocated] according to the number of languages spoken within each region. In the case of British Columbia, this resulted in an increased allocation for First Nations languages of up to $818,228 annually. (Elaine Lavallée, personal communication, January 15, 2014)

In 2011 there were 232,290 Aboriginal peoples living in British Columbia (Statistics Canada). Therefore, ALI funding allows for approximately $3.48 per person, per year. (This amount is less than the $4.25 amount estimated by McIvor in 2005, p.6.) In BC, the funding situation for language nests has already suffered the freezing of the Urban Aboriginal and First Nations Aboriginal Early Childhood Development Reinvestment Initiative program. The BC Association of Friendship Centres administered these funds until 2013 when the contract was transferred to BC Childcare Aboriginal Society (BCAS). On their website, the Ministry of Children and Families state:

Since 2010, the ministry has provided an additional $5 million in ongoing funding each year towards early childhood programs for Aboriginal children. Funding is for projects focused on early child development for BC First Nations, Métis and urban Aboriginal children, from birth to six years old both on and off reserve.

Priorities include Language and Culture programming, enhancements to existing programs and services, minor capital, and service planning and capacity building. These priorities are updated on an annual basis. Many of the projects focus on intergenerational learning, working with Elders to incorporate cultural and language education into early childhood education, care programs and services. (Ministry of Children and Families, 2014)

The Ministry of Children and Families (MCFD) had five million in funding frozen from 2013 to 2014, and language nest programs lost the opportunity to apply for two funding amounts of $25,000 annually each (one amount for language and culture
funding, and one for service developments). In April 2014, MCFD announced a Call for Applications for six million in funding targeted for Aboriginal organizations “to support the provision of direct Early Years services to Aboriginal children ages 0-6 and their families” (Nadine Gagne, personal communication, April 24, 2014). Eligible multiyear initiatives may include “language and culture”.

British Columbia has benefited from an additional $3.5 and $4.5 million annually of provincial funding: “But that sum covers all aspects of arts, heritage and culture, not just language, and it is nowhere enough. FPHLCC estimates that documenting all of BC’s indigenous languages will cost at least $20 million” (FPHLCC, 2010, p.2). The only exceptions are in the North West Territories where the government has reported supporting 18 language nest programs (McIvor, 2005b), and in the Yukon where the Council of Yukon First Nations is currently in the process of setting up a large number of language nest programs as per their Nation language revitalization plan (Sean Smith, Yukon First Nations Council, Personal Communication). The lack of funding for Indigenous language revitalization contrasts starkly to the reported $2.4 billion that is spent annually on “official bilingualism” including “$900 million annually on minority [immigrant] language services” (Carlson, 2012). These figures demonstrate the low status of Indigenous languages in Canada, and the disadvantages that Indigenous peoples face in attempting to access support to learn their mother tongue.

Other international contexts provide a context for understanding some of the legislative and funding constraints that face the language regeneration initiatives of
Indigenous peoples in Canada. For example, Canada lags the United States where in 1990 the Native American Language Act (NALA) was officially declared:

> It is the policy of the United States… to preserve, protect, and promote the rights and freedom of Native Americans to use, practice and develop Native American languages [and to] fully recognize the right of Indian tribes and other Native American governing bodies, States, territories, and possessions of the United States to take action on, and give official language statues to, their Native American languages for the purpose of conducting their own business. (Hinton, 2008)

The Act addresses the rights of Native Americans to teach languages in the schools, allows for language programs to hire speakers who are uncertified, include Native American curricula, and grant credit for language courses (Hinton, 2008). One year later a grant program was established to support the intent of the NALA, and additional funding was created in 2006 through the Esther Martinez Native American Languages Preservation Act (Klug, 2012, n.p.):

> [F]or language nests and survival schools, master-apprentice programs, immersion camps, curricular development and teaching training, and language classes for the parents of students enrolled in such programs. This flexibility is crucial since different communities must be allowed to develop the language-learning arrangements that will best suit their specific resources and goals. (Ibid, n.p.)

In spite of the progress in recognition of Indigenous languages, Klug notes that policies of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) “contradicts” the Native American Languages Act and restricts the ability of communities to “incorporate their own language and culture” (Ibid, n.p.) through, for example, the certification standards that are required of language teachers and mandatory English-language assessments.

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5 The Act closely resembled a Hawai’ian language resolution that had been advocated by the founders of the Aha Puna Leo, William Wilson and Kauanoe Kamana.
While legislative and funding support may appear to create better conditions for the establishment of Indigenous language immersion programs, support may come with strings attached, including less Indigenous input and control over the long-term development, quality and effectiveness of the programs. Blackfoot educator and leader Darrell Kipp (2000) contends that in order to be financially sustainable, language immersion schools must be totally self-sufficient. There is no doubt that economic self-sufficiency is ideal for language revitalization. However, programs that rely upon community fundraising efforts are also faced with constant uncertainty. Kipp (2009) stated that for his small immersion school, “everything depends on the success of an annual fund drive to continue another year” (p.3).

Similarly, the Kahnawake language immersion programs rely upon the success of an annual quilt sale (Mushkeg Productions Inc., 2008). The Cseyseten Language Nest in Chase, BC, faced a similar situation in their early years (Kathy Michel, personal communication), but have since developed annual language teacher training workshops and conferences that generate some revenue for their nest and immersion school (http://www.chiefatahm.com). These events also create opportunities for administrators, educators and fluent speakers to network, share stories, and support and learn from one another.

The Hawai’ian Pūnana Leo language nests began as self-sufficient programs dependent on parental tuition fees, fundraisers that included Hawaiian music concerts, private donations, short terms grants, and funding for staff training (Warner, 2001). In 1990, federal funding of approximately one million per year finally became
available to the nests and in 1995 this amount was increased to four million and to be shared with the Kula Kaiapuni immersion schooling and university programs.

In the United States, some tribes are financially independent as a result of having control over mineral and gas resources, or vast gaming industries. The Southern Ute tribe, which has diversified funding with its "natural gas, gaming, tourism, real estate, construction on the reservation, and...numerous off reservation investments" is the only tribe in the United States to fully fund its own language immersion school (Navarro, 2008, p.138). Other US immersion tribal schools have charter or independent school status and are dependent upon external funding from the state or federal government and private foundations.

Over the past thirty years, the Indigenous language movement in Aotearoa (New Zealand) has been bolstered by positive changes in the national political climate. For example, in 1986 the Waitangi Tribunal\(^6\) made five recommendations that "acknowledged language to be an essential part of Māori culture" (Gallegos et al., 2010). As a result, the following year the Māori Language Act declared Māori as an official language (Durie, 2010), and established the Māori Language Commission as a regulatory body that could establish language policies, providing assistance in te reo revitalisation at a national level" (Gallegos et al., 2010, p.95). Māori language and culture in early childhood education was boosted by the development of a national early childhood education curriculum, *Te Whāriki* “translated as a woven mat for all to stand on” (May, 2010, p.11). *Te Whāriki* was “different to the traditional development curriculum map of: physical, intellectual, emotional and social (PIES) skills” served as a “political statement about children: their uniqueness, ethnicity and

\(^6\) The Waitangi Tribunal is a legal process that enables Māori people to pursue Treaty claims.
rights in New Zealand society” (p.12). In Te Whāriki, four dimensions that make up a balanced development include: tinana (physical development); hinengaro (intellectual/cognitive development); whatumanawa (the development which portrays the emotions); and wairua (spiritual development) (Royal Tangaere, 1997, p.48). Namely, “Te Whāriki provided a curriculum space where language and cultures could be in the foreground and not an add-on (Mara, 1998)” (May, 2010, p.12).

Clearly Indigenous revitalization movements in other parts of the world face vastly different political contexts. British Columbia is an excellent example of linguistic diversity and yet communities are almost entirely dependent upon funding from the First Peoples Cultural Council. First Peoples reports that “B.C. is home to 60% of First Nations language in Canada with 32 languages and 59 dialects” (FPLHCC, 2010, p.4). This amount of linguistic diversity results in sharp competition between Indigenous communities for small amounts of short-term funding that becomes available on an annual basis. Competition provides less encouragement for geographically separate communities to engage in building language and cultural revitalization strategies at a Nation level; communities that are separated by over an hour’s drive may find it prohibitive to share space, material or human resources in any effort to maximize funds.

A lack of legislative and funding support from the State places additional strain on community Elders, leaders, educators, parents and volunteers as they shift their efforts from resisting assimilation in mainstream educational institutions and reposition their efforts towards transformation in community-based language immersion programs. Faced with a lack of sustainable funding, fluent speakers may
be inadequately compensated, staff may have to go without pay, parents may have to pay tuition and do volunteer duties, and educators may be forced to de-professionalize. Within these conditions, adult language learning and professional development for staff and families may become strained and the documentation and evaluation of programs seem frivolous when faced with the serious question of how to sustain basic program delivery for children. Hinton (2001) encourages that even when funding dries up and language nest programs may be forced to end, “due to loss of funding, personnel or energy, it has not by any means been a wasted effort. It has surely been a positive experience for all involved and has left a legacy that can be used in future revitalization efforts” (p.17) [Emphasis added]. Within the context of the dire funding and legislative situation faced by language nests, these words are heart warming and need to be cherished in programs that are already suffering.

The language nest programs described above demonstrate that language immersion in early childhood is a tough undertaking for all involved. However, for those who have committed to transforming their children’s future and hearing their children speak the language is the reward and makes the struggle worthwhile.

**State certification and licensing requirements**

State certification and licensing requirements create imposing barriers to the development and delivery of language nest programs. In Hawai‘i, state legislation posited Hawai‘ian immersion programs as the only type of second language program (by contrast to foreign languages or English as a second language) subject to state regulation, and thereby subject to monthly health and safety inspections. In 1984, the Aha Punana non-profit society unsuccessfully lobbied the government to
afford Hawai‘ian languages programs the same status as private foreign language schools so that teachers would have to be licensed (Kimura, n.d.). It was argued that the Pūnana Leo should remain under state regulation because of the ages of the children and the length of the program days (i.e. up to ten hours per day). Lastly, state regulation was deemed necessary because language immersion was not considered to be, “a true method of language teaching” (Warner, 2001, p.136). In 1985, parents of the Pūnana Leo lobbied the government again. This time they were successful and the legislation was changed to exclude children under age five, thereby exempting the language nest programs. However, caregivers were still required to be certified in early childhood education that effectively made it impossible for older fluent speakers to participate as caregivers, and left qualified younger people with insufficient language skills responsible for transmitting the language (Warner, 2001). It was not for another year that this final legislative barrier was removed (Kimura, n.d.).

Similar challenges face language immersion programs in the US and Canada. Kipp (2009) notes that government accreditation and certification requirements have the effect of preventing communities’ from establishing the full-day language immersion for children.

The quintessential immersion program is one room and a fluent speaker teaching children in a day-long interchange. The optimal model requires a private school, or a school within a school, designed exclusively for full day immersion. Unfortunately, that means the immersion classroom likely will not have access to funds because of stringent regulations involved with federal, state and tribe funding sources. (p.2)
In the US, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) of 2001 defines the requirements for teacher certification levels (Klug, 2012), and individual State policies often hinder the effectiveness of the Native American Languages Act (NALA) and the Esther Martinez Act in exempting Indigenous language programs from these requirements (Klug, 2012). Across the world, Indigenous communities lack certified teachers and early childhood educators who are fluent in the language and uncertified fluent speakers are unlikely to meet state funding regulations. In the present day an exemption process that was established by the Obama Administration is addressing this issue, and to date 45 states have exemptions from NCLA requirements for teacher employment (US Department of Education, 2014).

A similar situation hinders attempts to develop full day language nest programs in British Columbia, Canada, where childcare licensing regulations stipulate that caregivers must be certified in early childhood education. This situation restricts the ability of fluent Elders to care for children and deems the linguistically-“unqualified” officially qualified to do so. McIvor (2005) shared the experience of one community that attempted to become a licensed program:

The other community gained formal ECE licensing approval many years ago when they first attempted a language nest program but is now running it on their own authority. They found in their first attempt (which involved formal licensing) that they had to hire from outside the community in order to meet the ECE credentialing requirement and ended up with caregivers who did not speak the language or have a desire to learn it. That first attempt at the language nest eventually folded, partly due to the fact that ECE licensing regulations did not work for the staffing needs of the program. Therefore in this community's resurrection of the language nest program they strategically avoided the ECE licensing option due to the difficulties it created when trying to staff their language nest program. This independent operation was made possible through self-sufficient funding and operating under their own authority. (p.66)
Obtaining a licence would enable language nest programs to charge daycare fees on par with other childcare centres and create eligibility for government childcare subsidies. Licensing therefore offers increased economic stability, as well as the opportunity to operate year round. However, as McIvor (2005) notes, language nest programs tend not to charge a daily fee for service. Moreover, to become licensed, ironically, “Elders would need training from Euro-Western oriented training programs in order to play with the children of their community” (p.67). These issues indicate that language nest programs tend to develop in spite of the challenges posed by state certification and funding requirements. Federal recognition of language nest programs therefore needs to involve legislative supports, including exemptions from childcare licensing requirements or the development of a culturally informed language nest licensing body that is governed by Indigenous peoples.
Chapter 3. Moving towards research as service

Working in between cultures

What values are reflected in the choice of the research methodology? How does the methodology reflect who you are – you as an individual, as a member of a family or community, as an Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal person? Maybe we have to ask, how is relationship reflected in the methodology? Maybe it is more – how are the multiple ways of relationships and understandings reflected? Can we separate method from methodologies, or methodology from being in the world? (Letendre and Caine, 2004, p.10).

Our research paradigms reflect our ways of being in the world, our values and our beliefs, and our ways of knowing. Our methodologies reflect the choices that we make about how we will engage with other people and communities through our research. This point was first made to me in 2003 when Henry, a participant in my Master’s research, patiently shared his ideas about research and my research relationships with Indigenous community. He told me: “You need to be doing this project from your whole self, with your core central beliefs. That’s why the whole academic paradigm has to change. It can’t be driven by academic curiosity. It has to emerge out of the community” (Chambers, 2003, p.18). Four years later and inspired by my children’s experiences of Indigenous language immersion, I enrolled in my doctoral degree program.

In the first year of my doctoral program I took courses on Advanced Qualitative Methods and Qualitative Enquiry, the History of Anthropology and En’owkinwixw (a traditional Sqilxw process to address and resolve issues of serious concern to the community). Simultaneously, as a mom in my children’s community I attended parent meetings and researched and wrote proposals in support of
language and cultural immersion programs for children. Watching me struggle to connect my academic experiences in my doctoral program with my life experiences on the Okanagan Indian reserve, a fellow graduate student and OKIB community member encouraged me, “stim aspus?” What's in your heart? Write your paper about this.

The valuable advice that I received emphasized the importance of locating myself in my research and locating the research in myself, that is, dedicating my time and energy to issues with which I have strong emotional connections. From the beginning, I was told of the importance of “putting myself forward” (Absolon and Willett, 2005) and doing “relationship based research” (Kovach, 2005) with the “potential to positively make a difference” for Indigenous communities (Smith, 2008, p.4).

In this chapter I share my journey through Indigenous Methodologies and Participatory Action Research to find approaches that reflect who I am, my values and my life experiences “in the border area” in between the non-Indigenous world that I am from and Indigenous worlds in which I live on the margins (Haig-Brown, 1992). I explore these methodologies fully aware of my contradictory standpoint as a white woman doing research that involves Indigenous peoples. This paradox guides my search for methodologies that truly speak “the language of participation and community benefit” (Kovach, 2005, p.24).

Haig Brown’s (2010) articulation of “deep learning” in her thirty years of fieldwork in Indigenous communities has enabled me to make sense of my own
feelings about how my life experiences have profoundly impacted my sense of self as a researcher. She explains:

> Interacting with Aboriginal people for whom persisting deeply held beliefs about knowledge structures continue to shape their discourses, a native English speaker may begin the process of learning what for them are secondary discourses, even eventually finding their fundamental world view affected. Over time, a secondary world view may be unconsciously acquired sometimes leaving the primary one fundamentally and irreversibly altered, even alienated. (p.937)

Since 2001 I have experienced “deep learning” about the negative impacts of research in Indigenous communities and this made me profoundly cautious to conduct research in the community in which I am living (Haig Brown, 2010). At the same time, I believed in the potential for research to be useful and beneficial. As I reflected on these issues, I took heart from the words of Cree/Metis scholar, Verna St. Denis (1989) who succinctly articulated my personal dilemma:

> Yet research is not inherently bad. It is those who pay for the research, those who conduct the research, and those who decide what “good” research is that have contributed to the negative attitude that Native people have towards research… Community-based participatory research suggests a way in which communities without socio-political power can use social science research to support their struggle for self-determination by gaining control of information that can influence decisions regarding their lives (Bopp & Bopp, 1985; Guyette, 1983; Hall, 1979; Stull & Schensul, 1987). (p.2)

St. Denis pondered these issues over twenty years ago and since then Indigenous scholars have written an entire body of scholarly literature on the perils and uses of Western research.

> This chapter replicates my own journey through methodologies beginning with Indigenous critiques of Western research practices in order to highlight attitudes and methods that I was anxious not to reproduce. This is not to suggest that all Western
research has been harmful to Indigenous peoples. Next I describe how principles
drawn from Indigenous methodologies (IM), Participatory Action Research (PAR)
and the Enowkinwixw process guided my approach to my own research. In the last
section of this chapter, I present the research design and the methods used
throughout my research process, including the research questions, participant
recruitment, data collection, transcription and data analysis. This chapter closes with
a reflective discussion on the limitations and benefits of my attempt to blend IM and
PAR in my research.

Indigenous critiques of Western research methods

Over the last eighteen years that I have lived in Canada, I have learned of the
many ways that Indigenous peoples have been “researched to death”, by
anthropologists and other Western academics with little or none of the benefit going
back into Indigenous communities (Deloria, 1969; LaDuke, 2005; Smith, 1999;
Steinhauer, 2002). LaDuke’s (2005) story of the "Head-Measuring Doctor" speaks to
the history of objectifying and dehumanizing Eurocentric research practices that
involved collecting, recording and preserving Indigenous peoples and ancestors as
Western anthropologists simultaneously anticipated and contributed to their cultural
demise: “Remembered for his odd requests to measure the breadth of a head, the
span across cheekbones, the size of the forehead, and then scratch the skin…His
data was used to categorize ‘mixed bloods’, whose land could then be alienated
under federal Indian policy” (p. 71). Smith (1999) tells a similar story of Western
researchers, “filling the skulls of our ancestors with millet seeds” to measure the
“capacity for mental thought” (p.1). Indigenous peoples represented new objects in
the study of human behaviour and over time became “a staple of the Eurocentric discipline of anthropology” (Battiste and Youngblood Henderson, 2000, p.30). Efforts to measure, assess, describe and define non-European cultures in scientific terms were done for the “benefit” of mankind, with seldom any benefit going to the Indigenous peoples themselves. The rite de passage of Western anthropology demanded periods of immersion in exotic places, the practice of participant observation of the customs of others peoples, and the assumed ability to capture the “native point of view” through ethnographic writing.

Of course, the discipline of anthropology and archaeology are just two of many Western intellectual traditions that have, intentionally or not, been complicit in the exploitation of Indigenous peoples and cultures. Western science has a long history of exploitation that continues up until the present day. Indigenous knowledge of the natural world and resources have been repeatedly acquired, patented, genetically engineered and privatized without benefit to Indigenous peoples (Battiste and Youngblood Henderson, 2000; Cajete, 2000).

Since the 1960s, Indigenous scholars and activists have spoken out against the deplorable treatment of Indigenous peoples and the conditions of Indigenous communities in North America. In 1971, Indigenous peoples pressured the American Anthropological Association (AAA) to adopt new standards of ethical conduct (LaDuke, 2005). The AAA has now formally accepted the Association of Indigenous Anthropologists, giving the Indigenous anthropologist members of the association the "right to comment on all papers – primarily research papers – that come before the AAA" (Reynolds, 2007).
In 1993, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples produced “Ethical Guidelines for Research,” and the Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics developed the “The Ethics of Research Involving Indigenous Peoples” (Ermine, 2004). This report emerged from the mandate of CIHR, NSERC and SSHRC to make the development of Section 6 of the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS) on Research Involving Aboriginal Peoples a priority. In 2010, “a framework for the ethical conduct of research involving Aboriginal peoples” comprised an entire chapter (chapter nine) of the TCPS. Information regarding the collection of Indigenous human biological materials is included. These changes indicate that the voices of Indigenous peoples are finally being heard in the establishment and that “new rules of engagement” are now in play (Ermine, 2004).

**Participatory Action Research**

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is an approach that has been noted to show promise for meaningful engagement with Indigenous peoples in the research process (St. Denis, 1989; Kovach, 2008). Since the 1970s, PAR has emerged in response to oppressive social and economic conditions in different places in the world simultaneously, although not as a coherent movement (Hall, 1997). In Latin America, PAR is essentially tied to the radical social and political liberation of peasants from the poverty and oppression and domination by global elites (Rengifo, 1998). The movement was vastly influenced by the critical pedagogy of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1982) and his work on popular education and adult literacy (Brydon-Miller & Maguire, 2009; Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Hall, 1992;). Freire advocated literacy and adult education as means to enable the masses to name
their world (2003). He proposed dialogical research with the people, “as researchers with me” (1982, p.30) in cycles of reflection and action in order that “the people have to think about their thinking and not only be the objects of my thinking” (Ibid, p.30). Freire advocated researchers and community people working together to “discuss the realities of the people with the people” (2003, p.33) and to support the emergence of a political consciousness of the reality of oppression (Freire, 2003).

Freire’s methods included discussions, or cultural circles (Rengifo, 1997) that continue daily for a week and do not involve discussion of a prepared list of questions. Rather, a general question may be asked, “What do they think about education in that area?” (Freire, 1982, p.33). These discussions were facilitated to elicit the people’s perceptions of education and one of the people may record and summarize these discussions, so that a collective may ensue in which the major discourse’s are analyzed by the people in concert with the intellectuals (Freire, 1982). Together, the people and the intellectuals draft a proposal for action, and the proposal is discussed at length and then put into practice.

To the extent that we put the programme into practice, we would be researching again in order to change the programme. The programme cannot be something static – this is a naïve perception of the problem. One cannot regard a programme abstractly and metaphysically – it was to be created as a result of reality and has to be changed, dependent on the reality. So, all the time the programme is in movement, it is something which is really dynamic (Freire, 1982, p.36).

Freire’s work on adult literacy brought international attention to the Latin American scholarly contributions (Hall, 1992). His alternative research methods of cycles of action and reflection profoundly influenced the development of what is commonly now known as PAR in Latin America. The dialectic praxis between the popular knowledge of the masses and the outside facilitators of PAR process was
thought to have the potential to transform the reality of the downtrodden (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). The PAR process involves human beings coming together to discuss and to know – that is to objectify and abstract - their world so that they might change that world. Indigenous scholars have acknowledged the contribution of Freire’s work to the conscientization of Indigenous peoples (Kirkness, 1997; Smith, 2008). Others have noted Freire’s focus on humanization and liberation through participation in the State through popular education and adult literacy rather than through Indigenous cultural affirmation (Rengifo, 1997).

In North America, the work of psychologist Kurt Lewin (Weiss & Fine, 2004; Kidd and Krall, 2008) led to the present day use of PAR as a tool of inquiry by educational practitioners for improving and transforming schooling. The initial diagnosis of a “problem”, a “question” or the “factors that contribute to the status quo” is intrinsic to the PAR process as educator practitioner research (James, Milenkiewicz and Buckham, 2008, p.16). The PAR process is situated in research methodology, most often as a mixed methods approach. Using a team approach, PAR addresses the complexities of a situation, puts equal emphasis on inquiry or research and action and follows a cyclical process that repeats the four steps of diagnosis of the “problem” or issue, action, measurement, and reflection.

In the present day, PAR tends to lack rigid guidelines for implementation. It is defined by its organic nature and its responsiveness to the social and cultural context from which a project emerges (Hall, 1992). A PAR team “set[s] the stage for the development of a research project” (Kidd and Kral, 2005, p.187) and may utilize fewer participatory methods to achieve the agreed upon research objectives and as
a catalyst for transformation. PAR does not prescribe method, and the “action” component may lead to any number of potential outcomes (i.e., community meetings, popular theatre, film and photovoice, surveys, curriculum, evaluation), that cannot be planned ahead of the process (Ditrano and Silverstein, 2006; Hall, 1992). For these reasons, PAR can be complex and time-consuming. It can “quickly take on a life of its own or take years to develop under profoundly challenging conditions” (Kidd and Kral, 2005, p.189). However disconcerting, the flexible nature of PAR creates opportunities for communities to engage in the research process and express their most pressing needs and priorities.

**Indigenizing PAR**

PAR projects often assume the existence of an “external agent” or “catalyst” and can require months or years of planning and consultations (Fisher and Ball, 2003). The defining features of PAR contrast with some characteristics of Indigenous peoples’ language immersion programs that have been developed and implemented for the most part by Indigenous people for Indigenous people. For example, Maori educators Graham and Linda Smith (Smith, G., 1998; Smith, L., 1999), Hawaiians William Wilson and Kamana (2002), Navajo educator Ruth Wheeler and her Anglo husband, Bob Rosessel (McCarty, 2002), Blackfoot Darrell Kipp (2009), Secwepemc educator Kathy Michel (2011), and Sqilxw educator Bill Cohen (2001; 2010) are Indigenous educators and activists who have mobilized people in their own communities into founding their own language immersion programs for their own children, grandchildren and community. Mobilization was made possible by these Indigenous educators’ awareness of and ability to navigate
the complex web of community relationships. Moreover, these projects are often
categorized by a “just do it” (Kipp, 2009) attitude and tribal methodologies that
have emerged from Indigenous intergenerational relationships between people, non-
living beings, the land and the cosmos. Upon noting these discrepancies, I
questioned the suitability and usefulness of PAR to engage Indigenous peoples in
language nest research. It appeared contradictory to me to impose PAR, an external
Western framework for analysis, action and reflection, in seeking to understand tribal
processes and ways of knowing.

In Latin America in the present day, we see efforts to Indigenize PAR and to
incorporate “the acquisition of deep knowledge”, that is, “physical, biological and
social realities…[and] the spiritual world” that are embedded in Indigenous ways of
knowing and relating to the human and metaphysical worlds, with different ways of
learning (COMPAS, 2008, p.7). Within these present day contexts various non-
governmental organizations are moving towards the indigenization of PAR, and
going beyond Freire’s vision of liberation through popular education and adult
literacy (Rengifo, 1997).

The development and work of El Proyecto Andino de Tecnologias Campesinas
(PRATEC, Andean Project for Peasant Technologies) in the Peruvian countryside
provides an example of the contradictions that Freireian PAR has presented to
some. PRATEC is a non-governmental organization that was created in 1987 by
Grimaldo Rengifo. Rengifo invited Eduardo Grillo to join him and, several years later,
Julio Valladolid. These three university-educated men from Indigenous peasant
backgrounds were determined to use their professional expertise to support
development in the Peruvian countryside, and they tried many different approaches to their work with peasant peoples. After many years, they realized that “within their professional perspective and constraints it was impossible to approximate peasant reality and therefore make development relevant to their lives” (Apffel Marglin, 2002, p.347). Subsequently, they de-professionalized themselves and dedicated the work of PRATEC to writing about what they had learned about the “distorting, if not blinding effects of seeing the Andean world through the lenses of the categories of professional knowledge” (Apffel Marglin, 2002, p.349). They also focused on sharing Andean peasant views of reality “from an Andean point of view” (p.50). PRATEC facilitates and implements PAR to create social change that is based on Indigenous knowledge, culture, and relationships between all human and non-human beings, the land and the cosmos (PRATEC 2007; www.pratecnet.org).

Founder Rengifo employed Freire’s method of popular education while working as a trainer at the Centro Nacional de Investigacio y Capacitacion (National Center for Research and Training) (Rengifo, 1997) over time he began to see his efforts to engage campesinos in critical reflection as involving an abstraction of reality in ways that were not relevant to the people with whom he worked (Rengifo, 1997). The present day work of Rengifo and PRATEC focuses on cultural affirmation in the renewal of Indigenous ways of knowing, traditional ecological knowledge and biodiversity using methods that represent an indigenized place based approach to PAR.

The work of PRATEC signifies a shift from a Freireian application of PAR through the application of an external catalyst in facilitating adult literacy and critical
reflection, to an Indigenous paradigm in which local knowledge and cultural affirmation replace participation in the State as a means to liberation and transformation. The Indigenization of PAR by PRATEC is exemplified in the “Children and Biodiversity” project that involved collaboratively working with peasant families and their children to “incorporate local knowledge into the school curriculum and to involve parents in school activities” (Ishizawa, 2010). Apffel-Marglin describes PRATEC’s approach as a, “radical critique and rejection of the cosmology of the modern West [and] consists of a reject of basic assumptions about nature, about the nature of humans, of knowledge, etc. It rejects evolutionary paradigms that lead to a utopian pursuit of “development” (1997, p.221). Siddhartha’s critique that Freire, “while expressing genuine solidarity with the underdog, did not question the basic orientations of the system,” being the allegiance to “the attainment of the proper material conditions” (2005, p.3)

Like Rengifo, Siddhartha perceives in Freire’s humanistic work a profound absence of attention to “community, ecological and spiritual values” (2005, p.3). He sees a need to move away from critical awareness towards the “deep subject”; “another kind of subject...[that] needs to be acknowledged, nurtured and enlisted into the spiral of praxis for its potential to enable us to connect with each other, the earth and the cosmos” (2005, p.3). In moving towards this “deep subject” (Siddhartha, 2005) or “deep learning” (Haig-Brown, 2010), the work of PRATEC and other NGOs who are engaged in cultural affirmation in Latin America, such as CEPROSI and AGRUCO, continue to employ some of the basic principles of PAR, including: dialogical inquiry, and cycles of collective reflection and collective action.
In many cases these initiatives continue to be facilitated by outsiders from the community (Escobar, 2010).

As a Western tool of educational inquiry for educators, teachers, and students, PAR assumes that by participating in group cycles of reflection and action, educators will become more critically aware of the problems that they face, and collectively be empowered to create innovative responses and solutions to overcome challenges from within the conventional structures of the state (James, Milenkiewicz, and Buckram, 2008). By contrast, Indigenous peoples who draw from traditional tribal epistemologies to create transformative change may not need methods such as PAR in order to gain “access to expert knowledge regarding research and political action” (Kidd and Krall, 2006, p.189) For example, in theorizing transformation in the Okanagan, Indigenous educator Cohen (2010) draws explicit parallels between the self-reflective spiral of PAR (Kidd and Kral, 2005) and the Syilx Captikwl story of Coyote and Fox:

The story of Nkmaplqs I Snmamayatn Kl Sqilxwtet development is very much like Fox bringing Coyote back to life, but in a community context that expanded to include others in the role of Fox. The gathering bits of Coyote corresponds to researching past and current schooling, connecting to strands of language and cultural learning experiences and methods. Fox breathing into the pile of bits – the research gathered – corresponds to talking about the knowledge and methods with parents, elders and staff, then trying to figure it out. Fox stepping over the pile of bits and then Coyote coming back to life metaphorically describes the ritualizing, transforming praxis, of the learning and teaching relationships that are ongoing action and reflection, a cumulative praxis. (Cohen, 2010, p.9)

Cohen privileges Syilx knowledge and group dynamics, and his research focuses on the cycle of action and reflection that he has set in motion. Cohen’s perspective of PAR parallels the way that PAR has evolved in Latin America, “as
research methodology but also a philosophy of life” (Savin-Baden & Wimpenny, 2007, p.333); ways of knowing and being in the world.

In the present day, many Indigenous peoples all over the world are involved in cultural affirmation and renewal. Teachers and parents are setting up their own classrooms in their own communities to engage their children "in the transformation of the unsatisfactory conditions (i.e. actually getting involved…in the day to day transformative struggle" (Smith 1998, p.33) and cultural enrichment through the renewal of their own languages, knowledge, and traditions (Apffel-Marglin, 1997; Hinton and Hale, 2001). Graham Hingangaroa Smith has developed Freire’s model of change to represent his own people’s experiences of resistance and transformation within the Māori context. Linda Smith explains:

In the Māori context, however, Graham Smith has argued that participation in struggle can and often does come before a raised consciousness. Smith’s research has shown that people often participated in struggles more as a solidarity as friends and family, or some other pragmatic motivation, than as a personal commitment to or knowledge about historical oppression, colonialism and the survival of Māori people… Struggle, then, can be viewed as group or collective agency rather than as individual consciousness. (Smith, 1999, p.200)

Kaupapa Māori is a “set of transformative elements” that “calls for multiple approaches, in multiple sites and applied by multiple respondents” in response to “multiple oppressions and exploitations” (Smith, 2003, p.12). In contrast to Western conceptualizations of transformation as a linear experience, Kaupapa Māori theorizes individuals and communities entering the cycle of conscientisation, resistance and transformative praxis at any stage. To illustrate his point, Smith cites “the case of a parent taking their children to Te Kōhanga Reo (because it was the only early childhood option in town), and this later led to the parents becoming
‘conscientized’ about the politics of language revitalization and highly active participants in resistance movement” (2003, p.13). Moreover, according to Smith, “all Māori can be plotted somewhere on the circle… whether they like it or not, whether they know it or not” (Ibid). Smith defines conscientisation, resistance and transformative praxis:

**Conscientisation** (revealing the reality): the concern to critically analyze and de-construct existing hegemonies and practices which entrench Pakeha-dominant social, economic, gender, cultural and political privilege. Kaupapa Māori critique and analysis correlates with established critical theory instruments and approaches which develop critical consciousness…

**Resistance** (oppositional actions): the forming of shared understandings and experiences to derive a sense of a “collective” politics. These collective politics coalesce around two broad themes: Reactive activities – collectively responding and reacting to the dominant structures of oppression, exploitation, manipulation and containment. Proactive activities – collectively resolving and acting to transform existing conditions.

**Praxis** (reflective change): the undertaking of transformative action to evolve change. Praxis is both reflective and reflexive in respect to theory and practice. The notion of emancipation is important here in that it provides impetus to praxis. Thus praxis is not merely about developing a critique of what has gone wrong, it is concerned to develop meaningful change by intervening and making a difference. (Smith, 1998, p.33)

Similar to cultural affirmation work of PRATEC in the Peruvian Andes, Kaupapa Māori involves a decentering of the colonizer and colonial practices and a refocus on Indigenous cultural aspirations evident in Smith’s six principles that are “the crucial change factors in Kaupapa Māori praxis”:

1. The principle of Self-determination or Relative Autonomy.

2. The principle of validating and legitimating cultural aspirations and identity.

3. The principle of incorporating culturally preferred pedagogy.

4. The principle of mediating socio-economic and home difficulties.
5. The principle of incorporating cultural structures which emphasise the
‘collective’ rather than the ‘individual’ such as the notion of extended
family.

6. The principle of a shared and collective vision/philosophy. (2003, p.8)

Consequently, Smith differentiates between research that is focused on
achieving transformation “both as a ‘process’ and as an ‘outcome’” (Smith, p.18) and
that which is simply “‘researcher voyeurs’ of the crisis” of language and cultural
decline (Ibid). Somewhat like Rengifo and the work of PRATEC, Smith sees “organic
intellectuals” as those who “stand and speak with ‘the people’ in advocating and
creating positive outcomes in the regeneration of Indigenous peoples languages and
cultures” (Smith, 1998, p.29). In his self-described ‘co-option’ of Gramsci’s terms,
Smith argues that “organic intellectuals” must develop “legitimate ‘counter-
hegemonies’ which are intended to provide for a more human existence for those
who are marginalised, oppressed and exploited” (Smith, 2008, p.30).

My journey to PAR took me full circle back to Indigenous Methodologies. While
initially attracted to PAR as a transformative practice, I was uncomfortable with the
idea of imposing an unfamiliar process on the participants in my research and
intuitively I felt that doing so would create additional barriers to engagement. For
example, how would PAR support me to engage elders in my research? As Kovach
acutely notes, “regardless of whether research emerges from a positivist,
constructivist, or transformative paradigm, it is still ‘researching’ Indigenous people,
and it is still deeply political” (Kovach, 2008, p.29).

*Indigenous methodologies*
Cultural affirmation in the Peruvian Andes and Kaupapa Māori in Aotearoa (New Zealand) transcend Western linear approaches to individual change and emphasize community transformation. “Community” includes relationships between humans and non-human beings, including spiritual entities, whole ecosystems, and the innate energies of all of creation that have no place in Western research methodologies. Many Indigenous concepts and frameworks involve connection to, what Cajete has described as, the "metaphoric mind," “our oldest mind,” that, “encompasses the perceptual, creative, and imaginative experience of his or her inner world" (2007, p.28). Cajete describes this "nature mind" or "Earth mind" as ancient, deeply intuitive and embedded in ecology, rather than alienated from the natural world.

In reconnecting to Indigenous peoples, Andean scholar Grimaldo Rengifo came developed an understanding of the Andean worldview and relationships as "criar y dejarse criar", translated as "to nurture and to let oneself be nurtured" (Apffel-Marglin, 1998, p.1). This was the experience of Néstor Chambi, an Aymara agronomist who “pioneered cultural affirmation” (Ishizawa and Rengifo, 2010). He recalled one of many visits to his parents and elders in the 1980s:

We talked the whole day. I took coca leaves, and some bread with me and we spent the whole day conversing… He said: How have I longed to tell these things and no one would listen. My children do not care, my grandchildren care even less… I thought I will die with all I know… He asked: who has sent you? Surely someone has sent you. I always remember that he said that I was being like a balm, a medicine, helping him get rid of a load that prevented him from speaking. I felt likewise.

We talked for three days, and I thought that I would be bothering him so I proposed to come back later. He replied: Now I can die in peace. I was deeply moved and his words have always given me strength and determination. (Chuyma Aru: 2006 in Ishizawa and Rengifo, 2010, p.4)
The relationship between Chambi and the Elder represents this “reciprocal nurturance” in research relationships (Rengifo Vasquez, 1998). In Indigenous Methodologies, the vision for quality research is measured by the creation and nurturance of reciprocal relationships with participants, families and communities. Responsibilities begin to shift and research focuses on pressing concerns, needs and realities of Indigenous peoples at community levels.

In Decolonizing Methodologies (1999), Linda Smith asks a number of critical methodological and ethical questions regarding research involving Indigenous peoples. Who benefits from the research? Can the researcher actually do anything useful? Is his/her heart clear? According to Smith, decolonizing methodologies include reclaiming, reframing, restoring, returning, celebrating, connecting, networking, naming, protecting, negotiating, discovering, sharing and creating Indigenous knowledge, culture and language. Many other Indigenous scholars have further developed and defined Indigenous methodologies, paradigms, ethics, and praxis (for example, Archibald, 2008; Cajete, 2007; Ermine, 2007; Castellano, 2004; Harris & Wasilewski, 2004; Kovach, 2008; and, Wilson, 2008). Indigenous peoples’ own research priorities meet the needs of their unique communities and have their own theory and research methods (Cajete, 2007; Harris and Wasilewski, 2004; Weber-Pillwax, 1999). Many have articulated their thoughts in scholarly writings as a means to ensure that Indigenous projects by and with Indigenous peoples should be grounded in the realities of Indigenous peoples’ lives, languages, knowledge, relationships, and connections to each other and to their territorial ecology and cosmos (Meyer, 2003; Smith, 1999; Steinhauer, 2002; Wilson, 2001; Wilson, 2003).
Indigenous methodologies seek to restore the dynamic balance between all living things through research as responsibility to the collective, protocol, ritual, or ceremony (Harris and Wasilewski, 2004; Wilson, 2008). Carolyn Kenny, a Choctaw educator and one of my supervisors for my Master’s degree, has described nurturing her research through "ritual practice" (Kenny, 2000), and Wilson describes "research as ceremony" (Wilson, 2008). Stages of Kenny’s ritual practices include: 1) Knowing who I am, where I come from, appreciating all of my ancestors, and knowing my strengths and limitations as a person; 2) Engagement or enactment when my focus is clear and my consciousness is able to bear witness to the experience of my participants, to learn from them, to accurately record their stories, to honour them; 3) Validation if and when the enactment is recognized and appreciated by others; do the participants recognize the report I've created? Have I succeeded in honoring their experiences, describing their situations, reporting their words? Do they have a good feeling from reading my report? Do they feel seen and heard in a good way? Do they agree with the conclusions I've drawn? Do they think this work can be used to benefit their communities and themselves as individuals? 4) Transformation and renewal if the research findings are used wisely, positive change will come to the participants (Paraphrased from Kenny, 2000, p. 147-148).

In the present day, my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Tirso Gonzales, nurtured my progress throughout my doctoral with similar advice on how to do research from the heart and in a good way. The roles of non-Indigenous researchers remains unclear but some Indigenous scholars see possibilities for us to work as “allies”. Kovach offers some general guidelines for how we may do this work “in a good way”
(Kovach, 2008): Support indigenous research and scholarship; know Indigenous history with the academy and the necessity for trust-building; move beyond “the Indigenous Exotic”; grow Indigenous scholarship through mentoring Indigenous students; evaluate Indigenous research and scholarship with the lens of Indigenous Methodologies; and lastly, do the relational work necessary to engage Indigenous peoples and communities (2008, p.171).

Others have described the ways that non-Indigenous researchers with strong “bi-cultural” skills may be able to participate in research projects under the direction of Indigenous peoples, and as members of their research teams (Bishop and Glynn, 1992). However, working within Indigenous teams of researchers necessitates a change in attitude on the part of non-Indigenous researchers. We must become cognizant of the values that underscore their research practices if we want to work as allies with Indigenous peoples. The sharing of Indigenous knowledge with non-Indigenous researchers opens up possibilities for the appropriation of knowledge, intellectual property, misappropriation and misuse of the stories, metaphors and concepts, and many other problems (Kovach, 2008). However, these challenges may be outweighed by a growing sense that there is an urgent need to share powerful and transformative Indigenous knowledge for the survival of humankind. Armstrong (2005) explains:

Our Elders have said that unless we can "Okanaganize" the other folks around us, we’re all in danger! Although it can seem to be an overwhelming task, I’ve also seen that some of the things that seem everyday and obvious to us also make sense to more and more of the people I meet…There are more and more people who understand how we need to be with each other in order to be the way we need to be on the land. Imagine a future in which the human has attained its fullest potential. (p.17).
As the numbers of Indigenous scholars continues to grow, the sharing of Indigenous knowledge, concepts and frameworks with non-Indigenous peoples dislocated from their ancestral land base will no doubt increase. As relationships with Indigenous peoples deepen, the roles of non-Indigenous peoples in supporting Indigenous language and culture regeneration will continue to change. However, as Haig-Brown (2010) asks, can (and should) we ever feel confident in our attempts to connect to Indigenous worldviews, knowledge and language? As non-Indigenous peoples engaged in research involving Indigenous peoples, can we ever offer more than “surface learning and surface talking”? (Ellen White cited in Archibald, 1997, p.68).

My journey through IM and PAR has brought me to distinguish between a working method that is used by scholars to “empower ’Others,” or let silenced voices be heard (as in the PAR implemented by Debbink and Ornelas, 1998), towards Indigenous Methodologies and possibilities for non-Indigenous peoples for doing research as an act of service to the transformation of oppression. Ultimately, moving through PAR and IM with a focus on Indigenous aspirations led to an increased awareness of the value of tribal epistemologies (Kovach, 2008). So here I am right back where I started, in Okanagan territory, still hoping for clarity on my role and responsibility as a non-Indigenous researcher.

The Enowkinwixw process

Enowkinwixw, or the Enowkin process, is a traditional model of clarification that was imparted to the Sqiíxʷ peoples through the captikwl, the Okanagan story system (Cohen, 2001). I first learned about Enowinwixw from the scholarly writings
of Okanagan educators Jeanette Armstrong (2005) and Bill Cohen (2001). Some years later I learned about Enowkinwixw in an undergraduate class that was facilitated by Sqilxw scholar and traditional knowledge-keeper, Dr. Jeanette Armstrong, and shortly afterwards, several students and I were honoured to have the experience of co-facilitating Enowkinwixw with Jeanette in a community school setting. In teaching the Indigenous Studies class, Enowkinwixw, Armstrong tells a condensed version\(^7\) of the story How Food Was Given. I have heard this story told in other settings, through written text in Kou-Skelowh/We Are The People, A Trilogy of Okanagan Legends (1999), and through a creative puppet show written, edited by and presented in Nsyilxcen by the school children (including two of my own) of the Okanagan Indian Band’s language and cultural immersion school, Nkmaplqs 1 Snnamaytn Klsqilxwtet, at their Christmas concert in December 2008.

In the world before this world, before there were people, and before things were like they are now, everyone was alive and walking around like we do. All Creation was talking about the coming changes to their world. They had been told that soon a new kind of people would be living on this earth. Even they, the Animal and Plant people, would be changed. Now they had to decide how the People-To-Be would live and what they would eat. (Okanagan Tribal Council, 1999, p. 8)

In her class, Armstrong tells how Kwulencuten, the Creator, told the Four Food Chiefs, Skmxist (Bear), Ntitiyix (Spring Salmon), Speetlum (Bitterroot), and Siya (Saskatoon or Service Berry) of the coming of the People-To-Be to this world. He instructed them to meet, and talk to and to listen to one another for four days in order to make a decision about what they would give to the People-To-Be so that they might survive in this world. After many meetings, Skmhist, Ntitiyix, Speetlum

\(^7\) Traditional knowledge keeper and fluent speaker of Nsyilxcen, Herman Edwards has stated that it would take a full week to tell the full story of How the Food Was Given (Cohen, personal communication, February 2008).
and Sia, “agreed to give their lives and bodies to the humans so that the new people could survive and flourish on the land” (Cohen, 2001, p. 142). All of the People-That-Were had a contribution to make as they addressed the question, “what can you do for the “People-To-Be”?” As Cohen explains, in order for the process to be sustaining, the Animal and Plant people had to figure out a way of coming back to life so that they may give their lives again and again (Bill Cohen, personal communication, January, 27, 2008). After Skmhist lays down his life, the other Animals and Plants sing songs to try to bring him back to life.

That was how they helped heal each other in that world. They all took turns singing, but Skimheest did not come back to life.

Finally, Fly came along. He sang, "You laid your body down. You laid your life down." His song was powerful. Skimheest came back to life. (Okanagan Tribal Council, 1999, p. 24)

Armstrong emphasizes, when Xexmalth, Fly, an unwelcome and annoying creature keeps on coming forward to sing his song, he gets pushed away by the other Animals and Plant people. Finally, though, he comes forward at the end, and as the story shows, it takes his song to complete the healing process of Skmxis. In singing their songs, the Animal and Plant people offer their breath, spirit and creativity to Skmxis, and it is the creative process and dynamic balance of all of their songs together that bring Skmxis back to life.

In Enowkinwixw, there are no experts. Everyone has important information to share and no one is excluded. The privileging of Sqilxw knowledge in this paper shows how Nsyilxcen is replete with powerful metaphors, concepts and frameworks.

The word n’awqn comes from the high language of the SilxW people and has its origin in a philosophy perfected to nurture voluntary cooperation, an essential foundation for everyday living. The term is based on a metaphorical image created by the three syllables that make up the word. The image is of
liquid being absorbed drop by drop through the head (mind). It refers to coming to understanding through a gentle integrative process (Armstrong in Cohen, 2001).

In n’awq’nwxw everyone involved has valuable knowledge and insights to share towards collective understandings.

When the community is faced with a decision, an elder asks the people to engage in En’owkin, requesting that each person contribute information about the subject at hand. What follows is not so much a debate as a process of clarification, incorporating bits of information from as many people as possible – no matter how irrelevant, trivial, or controversial these bits might seem – for in En’owkin, nothing is discarded or prejudged.

The process is deliberately designed not to seek resolution in the first stage. Instead, it seeks concrete information, inquiring how the decision might affect people and other things in both the long and the short terms. Although persons with good analytical skills or special knowledge and spokespersons for individuals or families are usually given opportunity to speak, anyone is welcome to speak, but only to add new information or insight (Armstrong, 2005, p. 14).

As the four Food Chiefs listen and talk in their meetings as a collective over four days, no one view may dominate. Everyone gets a turn to speak. The Four Food Chiefs bring to the meeting all of the issues of the collective that they represent. They come with limited knowledge about their world, as they only know about the world from their own perspective.

In her class, Jeanette Armstrong describes Enowkinwixw as a useful framework for understanding research. As a Sqilxw methodology, Enowkinwixw highlights my understandings of research as a service to future generations. My concerns about appropriating Sqilxw knowledge led me to a decision not to explore Enowkinwixw as a central methodology for conducting this research. However, the Four Food Chiefs story has remained a guiding narrative in the back of my mind throughout this research journey. It is from this position that I began my own doctoral research process, perhaps not quite with my “hands overflowing”, but most certainly listening with both ears wide open (Archibald, 1997).
Research questions

Drawing from the principles learned in PAR, IM and Enowkinwixw, I developed my research questions with a mind to generating information that would be useful to individuals involved in mobilizing people and resources to develop a language nest. Key issues included: visions of language nest programs, challenges experienced, better practices and the role of research in supporting the development of language nests. These key issues were the central thread in various iterations of “research questions” that emerged at different phases in the doctoral process. These issues were included in the interview questions that were posed to research participants. My approach throughout my research has been to embrace what Edwards et al. describes as, “the dynamic nature of the community-academic research environment” (2008, p.17). It was important to me that the questions have “ethical validity” as defined by Levin and Greenwood (2001): “The credibility/validity of research knowledge is measured according to whether actions that arise from it solve problems (workability) and increase participants’ control over their own situation” (p.105 in Edwards et al, 2008, p.19). Moreover, I wanted my research questions to simply make sense and have meaning for participants.

This description of ethical credibility/validity is in keeping with Indigenous research paradigms that demand research to be of direct benefit to Indigenous communities, relevant and useful, and “grounded in an Indigenous epistemology and supported by the Elders and the community that live out this particular epistemology” (Wilson, 2007, p.195). After continual refinement, I considered the following five
research questions to have ethical credibility and validity, within the context of the crisis of Indigenous language endangerment.

1. What are key questions and issues that emerge in the development of community language nest programs?

2. What are some of the challenges that communities may encounter in the development and implementation of language nest programs?

3. What are some promising practices for the development and implementation of community-owned language immersion programs for children?

4. How can catalysts and advocates of language renewal be better supported to actualize roles and responsibilities in language nest development?

5. What role may research play in the development of language nest programs?

While the guiding “issues” remained the same throughout the research process, I consistently revisited the wording of the research questions as I considered how effective they would be in generating data on language nest development that would be relevant and useful to Indigenous communities throughout Canada as well as to other researchers considering community-based research approaches.

Ethical Consent

In January 2012, I presented my request to conduct research in-person to the Education Committee of the Okanagan Indian Band Chief and Council. My request was approved in February 2012, and the Band Administrator for OKIB wrote me a letter of permission to be included with my ethics application to the Board of Research Ethics, UBCO. This was submitted along with a letter of support from
Okanagan Nation Alliance. Shortly afterwards, I received ethics approval from the University of British Columbia Okanagan.

All potential participants were given a Letter of Invitation that outlined the purpose of the research and an informed consent form titled Letter of Reciprocity and Commitment prior to their participation.

Participants

Purposeful sampling (Patton, 1999) was used in selecting participants for this study. Purposeful sampling involves studying information-rich cases in depth and detail. The focus is on understanding and illuminating important cases rather than on generalizing from a sample to a larger population. Rigor in sample selection involves explicitly and thoughtfully picking cases that are congruent with the study purposes and that will yield data on major study questions… The problem is not one of dealing with a distorted or biased sample, but rather one of clearly delineating the purpose and limitations of the sample studied – and therefore being extremely careful about extrapolating (much less generalizing) the findings to other situations, other time periods, and people (Patton, 1999, p.1198). Consequently, only individuals directly involved in language nest development were invited to participate in the study. Individuals involved in language nest development changed over the period of two years that spanned data collection.

Twenty-one individuals participated in semi-structured interviews:

3 coordinators of language nests;
5 Fluent Elders of 3 language nest pilot projects;
2 Parents of language nest children;
3 Early Childhood Educators of language nest programs;
2 staff from an agency that funds language nest programs;
2 language nest program administrators
1 language nest assistant
1 cultural worker
1 language nest volunteer helper
1 teacher impacted by a language nest program

My changing involvement with the Okanagan Indian Band language nest projects served as a barrier to data collection, since I was anxious not to get engaged in conflicts of interest. For the periods that I was employed in the language nest, I ceased all participant recruitment, which resulted in long delays to every stage of my research. An additional constraint was the unpredictability of funding to the language nest projects, which meant that I was unable to effectively plan ahead. A good example of this was an attempt to set up a focus group in the summer of 2012 for staff at Snc’c’amaltn Early Childhood Education Centre and Nkamlpqs I Snmamaytn Ikl Sqilxwtet. I informed staff in person and then left sign-up sheets at both facilities for several weeks before picking them up. In the interim, the Okanagan Indian Band received funding for several proposals and I applied for the contract to support language nest development. I was a Band employee by the time that I returned to pick up the focus group sign-up sheets: just two employees signed up, as well as another individual who was not a staff member and therefore not within the intended sample. In consideration of my dual roles as a researcher and an employee, I decided to abandon the focus group and to not to proceed with data
collection until my contract was finished. This resulted in considerable delays to my steady progress through my doctoral program.

The first six interviews were conducted in April-May 2012 following the end of the 2011-2012 language nest project. Six more interviews were conducted in September 2012 prior to the start up of the 2012-2013 language nest project. Eight additional individuals participated in interviews and one focus group in April, September and November of 2013 when I was no longer working as a contractor on language nest development. An exception to this, was one written contribution sent to me by E-mail in November 2012 that I had solicited two months earlier.

Interviews were conducted in a place of the participant’s choosing. Extra efforts were made to accommodate requests; for example, when nest Elders told me that they would like to be interviewed in the language nest house, because it’s “like home,” I made a request to the Education Manager for us to use the premises for this purpose. As it turned out, some delays to our Elder focus group meant that we convened in the very first week of the 2013-2014 language nest project when the language nest house was back in operation anyway.

All interviews and one focus group were conducted in a relaxed manner and were presented as an opportunity for participants to discuss Nest programs in which they were involved and to share perspectives and stories of language nest development. Questions were open-ended and followed main themes as pertaining to the research questions. Different sets of questions were used for different groups; (i.e. parents were not given the same questions as administrators). All interviews were audio taped with permission.
Data was transcribed either by me or by a transcriptionist. I typed up the first three interviews myself and then I decided to hire a transcriptionist. I verbally discussed the ethical requirements of research with my transcriptionist, and she signed an Oath of Confidentiality. Participants gave consent for their data to be typed up by a transcriptionist. (I typed up seven interviews in total, and the transcriptionist typed up fourteen). Once I received typed transcripts, I reviewed each one carefully while listening to the digital audio recording and made any revisions that were necessary.

All twenty-one participants were provided a copy of their transcript as means to further ensure accuracy. They were informed that they would be provided a copy of their interview transcript to review and to freely edit as they saw fit. Some participants made minor revisions, such as deleting “ums and uh”, but no major changes were made. The majority of participants did not request any changes to be made.

I strove to keep my requests to a minimum while I nonetheless informed participants that they could also participate in an advisory capacity if they had the time and the desire to do so. Nine participants took an active role in informing the project throughout the course of the research beyond the research interview or focus group. One additional participant provided useful suggestions regarding protocols during the interview. The table below summarizes the scope in which participants contributed to the research process over and above participating in an interview or the focus group.
### Table 3.1. Participant’s Contribution to Research Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Names (alphabetical)</th>
<th>Contribution to research process</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aliana Parker</td>
<td>Provided information about government policy and funding. E-mailed Canadian Heritage to clarify information shared in interview. Read thesis manuscript and made suggestions. Invited me to review and provide suggestions to the draft FPCC Language Nest Handbook.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>Clarified appropriate spelling of Sqilxw words. Provided encouragement of the research. Read the literature review and later read the thesis manuscript.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah Virtue</td>
<td>Participated in E-mail discussions throughout the research process and provided information or clarification.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>Provided me with much needed encouragement throughout the research journey. Shared insights and knowledge based on her own experiences as a doctoral student. Read a draft thesis manuscript and provided feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly Terbasket</td>
<td>Engaged in-person, E-mail and telephone discussions about my research, in particular about my participatory methodological approach. Kelly expressed an interest in reading my thesis in the future when she has time. She invited me to present my research at ONA’s Aboriginal Early Childhood forum in March 2014.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin Ned</td>
<td>Discussed the purpose of the research and research ethics with me in the early stages. Clarified that the Education Department had a need for language nest research. Provided me with information regarding the process of asking for Band ethical review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K'i'səmtkw - Pauline Archachan</td>
<td>Discussed and clarified Sqilxw terms. Provided continued encouragement for my research. Discussed the issues involved in holding a focus group for fluent Elders and encouraged her siblings to participate. Read the findings section of the draft thesis manuscript.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacey Gregoire-Gabriel</td>
<td>Discussed the issues involved in inviting her Papa (a fluent Elder) to participate in an interview. Offered to conduct the interview herself if he was uncomfortable with me as the interviewer. (Eventually he participated in a focus group with four other fluent Elders.) Read the draft thesis manuscript and provided feedback.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.1. Participant’s Contribution to Research Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Contribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michele K. Johnson</td>
<td>Involved in a series of telephone and group E-mail discussions with myself and Kelly about common issues facing language nest development. Reviewed thesis manuscript and suggested revisions to sections pertaining to her experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel Marchand</td>
<td>Suggested that I ask an Elder about the use of specific terms in my Letter of Invitation and Consent Form. I consulted a fluent Elder and subsequently revised both forms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramona Wilson</td>
<td>Read thesis manuscript and provided some verbal feedback.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I knew nineteen of the twenty-one participants in this research prior to their participation. Participants included very close friends, relatives of my eldest stepdaughter, fellow students, friends, and associates. My relationships with participants consequently had many dimensions that ebbed and flowed throughout the duration of the time it took for me to complete my doctoral thesis.

Data analysis

The issue of how to interpret information within a research project that crosses cultures and “ethical spaces” (Ermine, 2004) within an Indigenous paradigm requires considerable sensitivity to the relationships with participants. Wilson (2008) describes an Indigenous approach to data analysis as involving:

…our whole lifelong learning leading to an intuitive logic…It just can’t be thought of in a linear or one-step-leads-to-another way. All of the pieces go in, until eventually the new idea comes out. You build relationships in multiple ways, until you reach a new understanding or higher state of awareness regarding whatever it is you are studying… So if we try to use an Indigenous paradigm in analyzing the results of our research, the importance of relationship must continue to take precedence. The question then is how to do this. If you use relational accountability as a style of analysis, the researcher must ask how the analysis of these ideas will help to build further relationships. What relationships help to hold the ideas together (p.117-119).
In consideration of Wilson’s observations and of the centrality of relational accountability to Indigenous methodologies, an appropriate analytical approach would need to be sufficiently flexible in order to embrace an Indigenous paradigm. The Enowkinwixw process (described earlier in the chapter) served as a guiding principal for my thematic analysis. Armstrong translates n’awqnwixw:

- n - enclosure; within an enclosed group/area
- βaw - used as a metaphor of water dripping ever so slowly, infiltrating, spreading out
- qn - the point, the top of the mountain, or figure as in the head. The apex, the peak, where everything culminates
- w - more than one person
- ixw - between people

Moreover, the idea of no one person being expert appealed to me as I pulled together the data and attempted to make sense of the large amount of information that had been shared with me by the twenty-one participants.

As a method of analysis, thematic analysis complements these guiding principles. Thematic analysis offers the flexibility necessity to meet these needs and is not theoretically bound (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It is a form of analysis that is used for identifying dominant themes that emerged from field texts, such as interview transcripts. Thematic analysis with a phenomenological focus facilitates the analysis of content to seek “an in-depth understanding in pursuit of the essence of experience”, or more simply, “what the story is about” (Hunter, Emerald & Martin,
Thematic analysis is described by Boyatzis (in Hunter, Emerald & Martin, 2012) as a pattern found in the information that at a minimum, describes and organizes the possible observations, and at a maximum, interprets aspects of the phenomenon. The data of thematic analysis are the “words, actions or other observable aspects of a person’s life” (p.117). Braun and Clarke (2006) state:

Qualitative analytic methods can be roughly divided into two camps. Within the first, there are those tied to, or stemming from, a particular theoretical or epistemological position. For some of these – such as conversation analysis (CA; e.g., Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998) and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; e.g., Smith and Osborn, 2003) – there is (as yet) relatively limited variability in how the method is applied, within that framework. In essence, one recipe guides analysis. (p.78)

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a flexible approach that also “provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data” (p.78).

Thematic analysis contrasts with approaches that focus on form, that is “the internal structures of language” or function which “investigates what the storytelling achieves in a communicative or interactional sense, both in terms of the identity of the storyteller and relation of the teller and audience” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.113). The thematic analysis in this research considers the way that the participant’s ideas about language nest development intersect with the language renewal movement, and the practical application of language renewal at a community level.

Inductive thematic analysis may be complementary to Indigenous Methodologies that emphasize respect and reciprocity through the emphasis on identifying themes that emerge from the words of the participants themselves: “It is
the task of the researcher to interpret the meaning after obtaining the findings and to construct a theory after the discovery of the results” (Hunter 2013, p.118). Semantic or manifest themes are complementary in a similar way by “recognizing only the explicit or surface meanings to the words that people use” (Hunter 2013, 118). This approach contrasts with the interpretation of themes and investigation of the “assumptions and ideologies that underpin what is in the data” (Ibid, p.118). For the purpose of this project I chose to position the words of participants “as a straightforward reflection of reality, motivations, and experiences” (Ibid, p.118), as from my location as an outsider, an interpretative approach would create power dynamics in meaning making as I select and identify themes.

An inductive approach that identifies semantic or manifest themes does not interpret participant’s words and make meanings from them: “the analyst is not looking for anything beyond what a participant has said or what has been written” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.84). A semantic approach complements my location in which I acknowledge that my experiences as a non-Indigenous woman would necessarily apply a cross-cultural filter inadequate to fully comprehend the culturally constructed life long context in which the meanings have been made. The Western critiques of thematic analysis for lacking “rigor” as an analytical tool may in fact further enhance the attractiveness of the approach within a community-based research project; put simply, the notion that “anything goes” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.78) in its explication opens up more room for culturally-informed approaches to analysis.

**Writing up and dissemination of the manuscript**
Writing my thesis involved creating many draft manuscripts that were shared with almost all of the participants in this research. In my original consent form I had stated that participants may request a copy of the thesis manuscript. However, by the time I was at the writing stage it only seemed right to give every single participant an opportunity to review a draft thesis. Consequently I contacted all twenty-one participants, either by telephone or electronically, to offer a draft manuscript. Twenty of the total twenty-one participants requested a copy, and seven participants read a full draft or the findings sections.

The first draft of this manuscript was shared with participants who had expressed great interest and involvement throughout the study and had offered to review and provide feedback. Suggestions and changes were made to the document and another iteration (a long three-hundred page draft) was shared with more participants. Feedback that was received was continually worked into the manuscript. The remaining participants to receive the manuscript were individuals who I had not been in contact for some time, or for whom I had to print a copy. I worked hard to the page numbers down in order to make the document more palatable to read. Moreover, printed copies were distributed to many of the participants in an effort to make the document more accessible. The distribution of the thesis was uneven simply because I found errors and revisions to do every time I printed the manuscript.

In March 2014, this research was presented at the Aboriginal Early Childhood Development forum hosted by Okanagan Nation Alliance in Osoyoos, BC at the request of Kelly Terbasket (who was also one of the participants). Those in
attendance in the forum included four Fluent Elders, one early childhood educator and one consultant who had participated in my research, along with many other individuals involved in early childhood education in the Okanagan Nation. Consequently, this presentation was provided a natural closing to my research, and my participation created an excellent opportunity to verbally share my project with some of the participants.
Chapter 4. We talk Sqilxw that’s all the children are going to hear

Research findings

In the following two chapters, I present the research findings from qualitative interviews with twenty-one participants. The findings are presented in relation to “thematic groupings,” that is, the patterns observed along with my efforts to “make sense of those observations” and extensive quotations from participant interviews as a means to ensure that the voices of participants can be heard in their own right (Kovach, 2008, p.131).

The validity of the findings was ensured through member checks and the sharing of the manuscript with participants who responded that they would like to review a draft. Participants who reviewed manuscript drafts confirmed that these findings made sense of their experiences and were a contribution to knowledge on language nest development. The findings are limited by the types of language nest that were represented by the participants; in particular, interviews with individuals involved in a Gramma House style nest tended to be longer and more descriptive than those involved in an ECE approach, either in an Early Childhood Centre or in a stand-alone nest. This limitation of the findings is however offset by the diverse range of language nests that were extensively reviewed in the literature review presented in Chapter 2.

Participants held different visions for a language nest. However, overall a language nest appeared to be a place that children could come and elders would speak in the language. The extent to which these visions could be realized depended upon the participant’s awareness of other language nest programs in the
world, availability of fluent Elders, goals of the coordinators or workers, and lastly, the kind of physical space available wherein to run the program. The various configurations of the above factors raised challenges that were often navigated by the development of innovative approaches of those involved. These visions, promising practices and challenges are grouped thematically in the next two chapters. These tentative findings represent an exploration into a topic that requires more qualitative research, and in spite of the limitations presented by the sample, this research suggests some patterns that may become a focus for other future researchers studies.

A place that children could come and elders would speak in the language

“Language nests” are a new phenomenon in Canada and this was clearly reflected in my research. Many participants grappled with “this kind of mysterious language nest thing” (Aliana Parker, Language Revitalization Program Specialist, FPCC, November, 23, 2013, transcript), that exists somewhere between family and traditional Indigenous based approaches to early learning, home based daycare, language early learning interventions, and formal early childhood education.

In British Columbia, First Peoples Cultural Council (FPCC) provides a small amount of competitive funding for “Pre-School Language Nest Programs” to ten language nest programs, up from seven in 2012. The funding is intended to foster increased Indigenous language learning of young children: under half of these programs offer 100% full immersion programs in the target language, while the remaining supplement the language content of pre-existing English-dominant early childhood education centers. The amount of Indigenous language that is used in
FPCC funded language nest programs in BC is limited by the availability of fluent Elders and proficient teachers from the younger generations. Two Language Revitalization Program Specialists for FPCC described to me the different kinds of approaches that communities are taking towards language nest development and delivery:

I think people get scared off and really feel restricted when they get caught up in the Early Childhood Development requirements… but really the true spirit of a language nest is taking care of your kids in non-English. A group of people getting together and doing the daily activities in the language… I just get a house and come over to my living room, and we are going to spend three hours a day and doing life for three, five or seven hours a day just living life in the language… just really small, and sort of grassroots…

_Hannah Virtue, Former Language Revitalization Program Specialist, FPCC, September, 27, 2012, transcript_)

That is a tricky question to answer… because it requires some definition around really what a language nest actually is, and when does an early childhood language program become a language nest and is there a difference between them? _Aliana Parker, November, 23, 2013, transcript_)

FPCC define a language nest as 100% full immersion in the Indigenous language, however, Aliana and Hannah acknowledged the incredible challenges that may face communities that attempt to implement an immersion model.

Three 100% full immersion language nest projects in British Columbia that are funded by FPCC in the communities of Tsartlip, Adams Lake and Okanagan Indian Band (OKIB) were inspired by the Māori and Hawai’ian grassroots language nest movements, and just like the nests in New Zealand and Hawai’i, approaches to program development and delivery vary. According to a 2012 Aboriginal Childcare Society newsletter, there is just one remaining fluent SENĆOTEN Elder in the Tsartlip community in Brentwood Bay. The Tsartlip Language Nest is operated in a
formal early childhood education center and is staffed by early childhood educators who have a mixed range of language proficiencies (Fox, 2012). By contrast, Adams Lake’s and Okanagan Indian Band’s (OKIB) nest programs lean towards more informal family-based approaches to early learning led by fluent Elders. In keeping with this approach, these two programs are staffed by fluent Elders that are supported by advanced and intermediate speakers, and are operated in ordinary houses in the community that include several rooms (washrooms, kitchen and an eating area).

The Cseyseten nest in Adams Lake began twenty-six years ago in 1987 as Secwepemc Ka. Kathy Michel, who was not raised on her home reserve at Adams Lake, returned as an adult to her community to start the language nest. She began her mission by knocking on doors in the community to ask for support and she clearly remembers the confusion of community members when she explained her idea for a language nest.

The biggest barrier at that time was just lack of understanding, lack of awareness of what we were trying to do. There were no models that were available; it was a brand new idea so there was nothing that people had... they had no framework of what language nests were, they didn't... even if I said, “language immersion,” if I said anything that I felt was gonna try and explain what we were doing, I don’t think they had any clue about what I was talking about. They had an understanding of what daycare was, had an understanding of what pre-school was, but that is something that I shied away from using those terms because I knew what they were doing in New Zealand wasn’t what I would consider a day care or early childhood program that was existing in those days. So that was the biggest challenge, I think, was to just get people to understand what it was that I was trying to get going on the Reserve here. *(Kathy Michel, September 25, 2012, transcript)*
In the early years, Secwepemc Ka and the Kahnawake language nests survived on community fundraising efforts and events, and Kathy recalled some very tough times:

We only had one [Elder], we barely fund-raised for three months worth of salary and then would say, “Ok”, and then fund-raise again to get another three months… sometimes we would be fortunate to have two [Elders]… right now we have two. *(Kathy Michel, September 25, 2012, transcript)*

Secwepemc Ka first opened their doors, a small amount of provincial funding finally became available to support language nest programs. The new Pre-School Language Nest Program fund initiative was developed in 2006 through a partnership between the New Relationship Trust, the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, and the First Peoples’ Cultural Foundation from a trust that was established by the Ministry of Children and Family Development. In 2008, FPCC stated that the goals of the Pre-School Language Nest Program were to “help preschool children and their parents to become fluent in their original languages” *(FPC News, Fall/Winter 2008, p.10)*. This new wave of Pre-School Language Nest funding was based on research and reviews on promising language revitalization practices in other parts of the world, and was developed alongside other new initiatives that included the Master Apprentice Program, (now Mentor-Apprentice), the Language Camp Program and the Language Authority Program. Hannah Virtue explained that the intention of the new funding was, “to shift focus onto programming that was really going to create new speakers rather than just fund language classes [that]… didn’t really work out” *(September 27, 2012, transcript)*.

In 2006, community awareness of the language nest concept appears to have shifted only minimally since Kathy first began her quest to transform early learning in
her community back in 1987, and even the funding agency was breaking new ground in Canada. Consequently, while the new funding represented a positive and potential boost for Indigenous language revitalization in Canada, communities had little or no access to information on language nests or what the development of a language nest may involve in terms of community development. Aside from a few community people who had heard of the Māori and Hawai‘ian movements through Indigenous global networks or through post-secondary education, the concept was entirely unfamiliar to roughly half of the participants in this research.

Today the situation has barely changed, and information on language nests remains largely inaccessible at the community level. First Peoples Cultural Council’s Aliana Parker succinctly captured the perspectives that currently prevail in response to Pre-School Language Nest program funding opportunities.

So for the programs that are doing full immersion, they were started by someone who said, “We need to get our kids speaking the language. I have heard about this language nest idea; I am going to go out and research it, I am going to figure out what the heck it is, and then I am going to work at it to make it happen in my community.”… The other programs that are not yet achieving full immersion I believe have started from a case of, “well, we need to pass some language onto the kids so we should bring language into the current day care program”. So the language nests that are really achieving 100% immersion are where the program started by… from scratch I guess… creating an environment for the language as opposed to bringing the language into an existing environment (Aliana Parker, November 23, 2013).

Even in the present day, the Māori and Hawai‘ian language nest movement does not have a presence on the Internet, and consequently information on nest programs is largely limited to academic journal articles, conference proceedings and book chapters. Nonetheless, Indigenous global networks are strong and the language nest movement has spread across the world through word-of-mouth by family,
friends, colleagues, acquaintances, at conferences and site visits, and between advocates, leaders and communities. These informal networks have created opportunities for people in Indigenous communities in Canada to learn from one another and to witness endangered languages being spoken from the mouths of babes.

**The power of witnessing others living their language**

Research participants described witnessing other Indigenous peoples living their language as a powerful catalyst that generated motivation and enthusiasm to make changes in their own community. Seeing, touching, feeling, and hearing the language come alive in the nests of the Māori or the Hawai’ians inspired many of the research participants. Walking into full immersion language nest involves bearing witness of all that Indigenous languages and cultures have to offer the children. In so doing, participants experienced, perhaps for the first time, the transformative power of reclamation in action.

Lacey Gregoire-Gabriel, an Early Childhood Educator and assistant in the Okanagan Indian Band’s 2011-2012 language nest program, shared her initial thoughts about a stand-alone full immersion nest starting in the community:

> I work for the daycare and we didn’t use a lot of Okanagan…we tried to have one at the daycare and that didn’t really work out, so I didn’t know what to expect at all. *(Lacey Gregoire-Gabriel, April 19, 2012, transcript)*

Consequently, a visit to Cseyseten Language Nest in Adams Lake made a huge impression on her:
We went to Chase and I was just like, “wow”. It was the first time I actually saw a real language nest and I was like, “wow, how are we going to do this?” (Lacey Gregoire-Gabriel, April 19, 2012, transcript)

Lacey’s comments reveal the power in witnessing language renewal in action and the impact of the Indigenous global networks of sharing in reimagining transformation at a community level.

Fluent Elder K’i’səmtkw also shared her initial uncertainty about what a language nest would involve and what her role would be. She stated:

I should have went to that language nest... you know, when they went to visit in Chase... I thought I would see how they are doing it. (K’i’səmtkw - Pauline Archachan, May 04, 2012, transcript)

K’i’səmtkw did not visit Cseyseten Language Nest with Lacey in 2011, and she wanted to learn what was happening there.

Ramona Wilson, an early childhood educator, was one of OKIB’s strongest advocates for a language nest program. (Ramona is from the Lower Similkameen Indian Band and is married into the Okanagan Indian Band community.) Ramona and I became friends shortly after I moved to OKIB with my husband and children. We often visited at our home and talked about quilting, children and other shared interests. During these visits Ramona would tell me about the Cseyseten Language Nest at Adams Lake, and she liked to regularly give Bill and I a hard nudge saying something like, “we really need something like this here. It’s the young people, the young families that really need to advocate for it, and to get it going. I’m too old.”

Over the years, Ramona’s not-so-subtle hints and her enduring passion for the language nest concept was impossible to resist, and I found myself on the Internet
searching the term "language nest" on many occasions out of curiosity. Indigenous networks are closely related, and I first met Kathy Michel in 2001 when I worked as a Co-op student for the Forest Extension and Research Partnership (FORREX) supporting the development of a conference called, “Linking Indigenous Peoples Knowledge and Western Science in Natural Resource Management.” My supervisor and I had been in Adams Lake for a work meeting, and we stopped by at Kathy and her husband Rob’s house for supper. Years later, Ramona liked to talk to me about Kathy Michel’s amazing nest project in Adams Lake, and I finally met Kathy again through Bill many years later. During an interview, Ramona described what inspired her about Cseyseten Language Nest:

I like the natural program that Chief Atahm have that... the children arrive... and they actually stagger their arrival times so that they do not arrive all at the same time. When they first start offering the program, everybody does not start off on the same day. They do a gradual entry, which is interesting. And they also do various ages; they are not all the same age. And another thing is that they do a lot of walks throughout the community, and as you walk, the language is all about what you see, and who lives over there, and “that’s your grandma,” or “this is so and so driving down the road,” and “this is people fishing,” and it’s all done in the language, which is really what I think, rather than just sitting in a classroom just drilling them with words, we need to bring them back out on the land.

The programs that they run at Chief Atahm are very bare, very minimal because what they are trying to do is pull one box of toys out and sit there for quite a long time with just one box of toys, and they say the same thing over and over and over again. Just like you teach a baby. You know, you don’t give a baby twenty toys... You give a baby one, or two toys, and you say the same things over and over and over again... *(Ramona Wilson, September 17, 2012, transcript)*

Ramona has been an early childhood educator for almost thirty years. During that time she has worked steadily through her Bachelor's Degree, and she has researched natural language acquisition and Indigenous language revitalization
movements on a global scale. However, it was close to home in Chase, BC, where Ramona’s dreams for language learning for young children were sparked by the power of witnessing the Secwepemec children, adults and Elders living their language in a tiny little granny’s home that housed their language nest program.

I can clearly recall my own visit to Cseyseten when I was a parent volunteer supporting the development of the 2011-2012 OKIB language nest project. Cseyseten made a powerful impression on me and filled me with hope for my children’s language and community. It was an emotional experience to watch the fluent Elders playing with the little ones, constantly engaging them while the children dressed and undressed dolls. Repetition, repetition, repetition... Those children had fun while they heard the same kinds of commands and phrases over, over, and over again: simple sentences like, “put on the hat”, “take off the shirt”, and “put on the skirt.” I clearly remember thinking: “This is possible! We can do this! Our little children can learn their language.” Ramona had told me about Cseyseten time and time again; finally, I understood why she had bugged me so much to go visit myself, and then finally after having seen it with my own eyes, I wanted everyone else in my children’s community to go and see Kathy’s program. Just like Ramona said in her interview, a language nest isn’t rocket science... in theory, to re-create a similar program just requires a tiny house (and Kathy would agree that theirs is very, very tiny), some willing fluent Elders, and a support person who can consistently and gently encourage the Elders to interact with the children. Kathy’s enthusiasm and “go-get” attitude was contagious and watching her in action made anything seem possible.
The power of bearing witness to Māori Indigenous language revitalization and the infectious spirit of language renewal in action was what set Kathy’s dreams on fire back in the 1980s. Inspired by the idea of creating a full day language immersion program for young children, Kathy returned to her home community and doggedly set about sharing the Māori experiences with her fellow community members.

In December 2000, almost thirty years later after the Māori ignited Kathy’s dreams in Vancouver, Bill visited the Māori as a part of his Master’s in Education program at Simon Fraser University. Eight or nine years later, after he moved home to the Okanagan Indian Band, he had another opportunity to go back to New Zealand with other members of the Okanagan Indian Band and staff, including Kevin Ned, the Education Manager. Kevin and Bill shared their impressions of the Te Kōhanga Reo language nest programs with me:

I’ve seen it in other [Māori] communities, their goal is for it to be in a family setting, maybe the family is 10 people, ten houses, and I hope we will be able to run a similar program in a day to day function of 100% immersion within their family groups... and also our infants who would learn the language and who find it a lot easier to continue learning the language, which may motivate some of our Elders who speak it, and some of our membership who understand it and be able to start speaking it... it’s to grow the language and to get the passion back that our Elders have with the language... it’s got to come from the parents who have infants and toddlers... (Kevin Ned, April 23, 2012, transcript)

Bearing witness to the Te Kōhanga Reo sparked a language nest as a long-term goal for Kevin in his role as Education Manager at Okanagan Indian Band (Kevin’s home community is the Upper Nicola Indian Band, a member community in the Syilx Okanagan Nation). By contrast to Kevin, Bill visited other kinds of Te Kōhanga Reo
programs, and combined, their comments illustrate the wide diversity of approaches that are taken by the Māori:

Some of them were like our daycare, except the whole staff was speaking in immersion. Some of them were in people’s garages with a little playground outside. Some were little language nests where the staff was not fluent but they were doing their best (Bill Cohen, personal communication, August 27, 2013).

In 2006, Bill was leading the development of the Nkmaplqs I Snmamayatn Kl Sqilxwétxet school project and was an outspoken advocate for language regeneration through education. During the first year of the school’s development, Bill visited and consulted with the Chief Atahm School for support, and he visited Kathy and was moved by the successes of Kathy’s language nest program. When a call for proposals to the Preschool Language Nest Program was posted by First Peoples’ Cultural Council to provide three continuous years of support for language nest programs, inspired by the successes of the Māori and Kathy Michel, and encouraged by continuous and gentle nudges from Ramona, the OKIB Education Department put in a bid to FPCC to attempt their very first language nest project.

Kevin, the Education Manager explained:

So a proposal was drafted by Mr. Cohen…I think our school had provided a proposal, but I remember at one time that we couldn’t house according to the requirements, so we had to let it go, and then we did do it but we couldn’t continue it… I remember Ramona was asking us to do this but we couldn’t continue it because… but I think they [FPCC] changed some of their requirements that enabled us to put in an application and do a language nest. (*Kevin Ned, April 23, 2012, transcript*)

Bill’s, Kevin’s and Ramona’s separate and unrelated experiences of witnessing and learning about the Māori and the Secwepemc living and sharing their languages
the nests had converged in the Okanagan Indian Band community to generate enough enthusiasm and motivation to attempt a language nest project.

The first language nest project ran out of the pre-existing Snc’c’amalaʔtn Early Education Centre with the full support of principal, Lorraine Ladan, a non-Indigenous ally for language revitalization in the community. The project ran for two years from 2007-2009 at which point the carefully considered administrative decision was made to decline further funding and to discontinue the program due to challenges in meeting the requirements of the funder. Although the project ended, Lorraine continued to support Indigenous language learning for young children. She stated “I believe in starting with one and two years old… because I think that is their ability to learn the second language is better at that point… sooner the better I think.” Although the project ended prematurely, Lorraine remained supportive of the dream for a community language nest.

I was always emphasizing that this should be looked at as a pilot project… I mean we are learning and why would you continue doing something if it’s not working well, and I think it’s good to be open, yes, you are trying, and you would like things to be successful, but it’s important to be honest and open about… well maybe this part doesn’t work so well, and maybe this part worked really well so… you know, let’s not be afraid to change things as we go on… year after year. (Lorraine Ladan, September 27, 2012)

Lorraine has visited several language nest projects, including the Splatsin Indian Band’s Granny’s Project that is located in their early childhood center as well as Kathy’s Cseyseten Language Nest. These experiences may have contributed to her pragmatic willingness to support future attempts to develop a language nest.

In the following year, the idea for a stand-alone language nest were kept alive by Ramona who repeatedly shared the experiences and the successes of the
Cseyseten Language Nest. Ramona’s tenacity sparked me to initiate conversations with individual parents from Nkmaplqs I Snmamayatn Ki Sqilxwtet about the possibility of creating a stand-alone language nest. Bernice was one of those parents; just like Kathy, Bill, Kevin, and Ramona, Bernice shared with me a vivid memory of bearing witness to children speaking their language and watching the language come alive.

When we moved to Vernon, it was this amazing moment in my life when I seen (girl) do her presentation for the Okanagan Miss Nkmalpqqs, and I heard her speak for the very first time using Okanagan, introducing herself and then singing the Okanagan song. I was amazed with what the [OKIB] Immersion School was doing and I said, “That’s it, my kids are going to do immersion and language nest, and anything else I can get them in so that they can be fluent in the language”.

I didn’t grow up having the language myself because my parents were in the residential school, so then seeing my kids and how well the other kids can learn it, I was amazed. *(Bernice Jensen, April 24, 2012)*

In 2009, Bernice and her husband were one of nine couples that wrote letters of support for Okanagan Indian Band’s first proposal for a stand-alone, 100 percent full immersion language nest project.

The power of bearing witness to language renewal in action continues to shape the development of language nest projects in the Okanagan Indian Band community. Program consultant for the 2013-14 OKIB Language Nest, Eric Mitchell described how a “short video of Māori teachers and parents that come over to an Indigenous Language conference in Vancouver in 1987” has inspired his vision for a language nest. Of course, the conference described by Eric is the same conference that inspired Kathy’s vision back in the late 1980s for the original Secwepemc Ka
program, now the Cseyseten Language Nest. Like Kathy, Eric was intrigued by the Māori approach for creating a nest in the “family way”:

Their idea was to get the moms, dads, aunties, uncles, and the grandparents and the cousins and their kids and bring everybody from the babies to the Elders all together in one room and she said, “eventually somebody has to talk to somebody, and that’s how you start”…

And her idea was everyday things… you don’t need “things”… cause like she said, we are people; we need to eat, we need to breathe, we need to laugh, we need to... you know, we have five senses… use them and introduce things that are in your culture, and whether it’s traditional culture of today, and according to her it doesn’t matter what you use, as long as you can use it to create language with this child, and have them understand what you are doing. Start with that, and then if there is toys and things that can be brought in, then, not just to be used as a distraction... That’s the difference between, not so much what the toys are... That doesn’t matter... it’s what you do with them. (Eric Mitchell, October 4, 2013, transcript)

The six participants in this research described experiences of having witnessed language renewal in action in other communities, having watched transformation happen, and of experiencing the dreams of Indigenous people become reality. The power in bearing witness to transformation is phenomenal, and as we can see, the sparks of enthusiasm that are generated spread like wildfire through Indigenous networks, through conferences, sites visits and word of mouth from person to person, until at some point, these energies converge, and then imaginations explode, people get busy and transformation happens again, and somewhere else, reality shifts.

Living old-time ways at granny’s house

Many of the participants in my research were aware of and had been inspired by the Cseyseten Language Nest in Adams Lake that was started by Kathy in the
The Cseyseten Language Nest was the first nest program to be developed in the Province. Kathy Michel, coordinator of the program, thinks of the program as “a family” that is modeled after “an Elder’s home”:

If you walked in without the children there you would be hard pressed to realize that it was actually an early childhood center... you are wanting to feel like children are coming into the grandmother’s house, and the grandmother’s house does not look like the daycares I see... say, ok, let’s just model this after granny’s house and put the furniture in place and realistically make a few changes that make sense and then other than that is basically where they eat... need a lower table... a little sofa, [and] we have such a small space that everything is small. (Kathy Michel, September 25, 2012, transcript)

A Granny’s House approach was described as a domain where fluent Elders surround the children in natural conversational language and share old-time teachings and “big time stories” with one another and the children. Kathy and Eric shared their understandings of the Māori approach to creating the nests:

Take out everything, strip out and say well we don’t even have access to that stuff anymore... I don’t need them to always be busy because we want to change the way children are... we want them to listen to Elders again... So those are the kinds of things that change the way... the climate so that it is a little more conducive to learning in our way. (Kathy Michel, September 25, 2012, transcript)

You get a room and you take all the toys out of there, and all the pictures... a bare room... just chairs and maybe even close the curtains... you know, no distractions... And you put the Elder’s in there... and bring everybody from the babies to the Elders all together in one room and she said, “Eventually somebody has to talk to somebody”... Them little guys they got hands and feet, they need to go the bathroom, they need to eat, they need to play... all them things that people do are things to talk about and those are real practical things and so the toys... they can come later. (Eric Mitchell, October 4, 2013, transcript)

Mona Tronson, a cultural worker at the Snc’c’amalaʔtn Early Childhood Education Center in the Okanagan Indian Band community has not visited Cseyseten, however
her vision of a language nest was very similar to Kathy’s home or family traditional approach to learning.

It should be just like your regular home environment, like a family, you know, you could have two Elders… I would start with a few children probably in the same age… maybe three year olds, [and] two year olds even… run it like a regular day… Like if you are cooking, have the kids involved and the Elders right there with you. Um, using the language with everything… not like the Elders over there and the kitchen staff over there, and the kids playing over there… focus right in the kitchen even while you’re preparing your meal… They could actually even help… have the Elders right in the kitchen, and do that every day, kind of repeat it. Repeat it… keep repeating, hearing the same thing over, and over… in a school system you are rushing and that is not our traditional way… our traditional way is to, like you know, relax, enjoy what you are doing…

(Mona Tronson, April 04, 2013, transcript)

In these very similar visions of a language nest, children (and adult staff) are forced to refocus their attention on the Elders. With no toys and no distractions, these two coordinators envision the Elders and their old-time ways and stories as the seed from which the program grows. Stripping everything away leaves the space and silence for intergenerational interactions, old-time relationships and understandings to emerge.

The 2013-14 OKIB language nest is located in a cozy house in the community. For three afternoons every week up to six children spend time with five fluent Elders. Nistah-cee, a volunteer helper in the 2013-2014 program, and the daughter and niece of the five fluent Elders, described a language nest as a home family environment.

Cozy like the atmosphere of everyone just being themselves. Not rigid… ok “we are going to do this” “then we are going to do this” “we’re gonna do...” like… sort of let things flow in the nest…ya that flowing-ness that works … and with the kids too because they got their ideas of how they want to be there…so I feel like we go along with how they feel too and
with the Elders so it’s like they are flowing like salmon together. I know that's how I feel and relaxing ya - that's what I think and just the warmth-ness of being around Elders. They are so patient and they are so... funny. They laugh a lot.... the kids laugh and they look.....ya it's like old times... mmmm hmmm that's how I feel like it should be.... that's what I think the nest should be like... old times... old time teachings... old times actions of how you bring your kids up because they have that...they carried that through their lives and they pass it on to these little children in a gentle way you know... because they raised...they helped raise me too... and I remember the old ways. (Nistah-cee, November 29, 2013, transcript)

The participants in my research described how for several generations the adults have “hidden” the language away from the children in community. A Granny’s House approach creates opportunities for adult learners to support Fluent Elders to unlearn protective practices of “shooing away” children from the language. In fact, in Granny’s House style language nests relationships and language are front and centre as children and fluent Elders relearn how to spend time with one another in the language. Participant stories described how fluent Elders gain confidence as they are increasingly surrounded by the love of infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

When I interviewed fluent elder K’i’səmtkw in 2012, she had not visited any other language nest programs when she began working for an OKIB language nests program. However, she assumed that her job simply would involve “being a grandmother” for babies, infants and toddlers. However, K’i’səmtkw did not know what to expect when discussions began about developing a language nest that would be separate from the pre-established daycare program.

I thought we would just sit and tell stories to the kids, that’s what I thought... Well, at first I thought it would have babies and stuff like that, along with the three year olds... (K’i’səmtkw - Pauline Archachan, May 4, 2012, transcript)
K'i’səmtkw envisioned her role in a nest just “to be a grandmother”. Most of the participants in this project envisioned language nest programs to be a place where children from infants to four or five years of age would come and Elders would speak in the language.

Formal early childhood centers are a very recent phenomenon in First Nations communities in British Columbia, and in many places formal daycare was not available until the 1990s and early 2000s. Prior to this, young children of mixed ages tended to be cared for in the family home by grandparents, and older aunties or uncles while the parents worked outside the home. For example, Eric, a language nest consultant in his sixties, shared his own experiences of growing up.

If you were from a large family then the daycare wasn’t somewhere else, it was in the home… It was the old people in the home left behind, or grandma or mom just down the road… it was either in my generation or my kids’ generation that daycares happened… where they could pay a stranger to look after their children. (Eric Mitchell, October 4, 2013, transcript)

The stories that Eric shared with me illustrated how the fairly recent institutionalization and colonization of early childhood that has taken place on reserve communities in British Columbia has radically transformed community and family child development practices. Consequently, the development of full immersion language nest programs may involve the reclaiming and embracing of past practices of family-based caring and sharing that may have only been experienced by older people in the community.

**Training their ears to imitate the sounds**
Most of the fluent Elders, language nest consultants, coordinators, administrators, language activists, and early childhood educators that participated in this project passionately shared a vision of a “language nest” as a program that immerses young children, ages zero to four or five years, in the natural language and conversation of fluent speakers. Most participants agreed that children needed to be around natural language; “the younger the better” (Lorraine) especially because babies, infants and toddlers learn language so fast:

(Two year old girl)… she is like a parrot and they are hard words that they say to her sometimes and she says it right away really quick. (Nistah-cee, November 29, 2013, transcript)

Fluent Elder K’i’səmtkw Archachan believes that the immersion of young children in Nsyilxcən is essential for the long-term regeneration her language.

If we want our language to come back we’ve gotta talk Sqilxʷ wherever we are at, whatever we want to talk about, we gotta talk about it in the language, and when we are here with the kids that’s what we have to talk about. Everything that we look at, everything that we touch, and we are not teaching the kids, we are talking but the kids are learning as we go along… (K’i’səmtkw - Pauline Archachan, May 04, 2012, transcript)

K’i’səmtkw emphasizes surrounding the children with natural language and the talk is all around, even if not always directed at the children.

We have a good time with the kids. I didn’t really spend too much time with them but I am there...I didn’t interact with them but you know I am here, and they are listening to our stories, me and Virginia... we never run out of stories... we always got something to say... good or bad...but we’ve always got, you know... always talking. (K’i’səmtkw - Pauline Archachan, May 04, 2012, transcript)
Her sister-in-law Virginia agreed: “When the kids are here, straight Okanagan, you really learn how to use your hands” (Sqʷulmtxanálqs – Virginia Gregoire, October 14, 2013, transcript).

According to the five fluent Elders, full language immersion in the natural conversation of fluent speakers is a straightforward common sense way to have young children learn their Indigenous language. Using “straight Okanagan” involves simply talking with one another and having talk all around the children. K’i’səmtkw and Sqʷulmtxanálqs’ feelings of the importance of the language being all around the children resonated with a story shared with me by fluent Elder, Adam Gregoire, who participated in the OKIB language nest projects from 2007 to 2009 and 2013 to 2014.

The old people would say… Q’aspi, a long time ago when the old people tell these big time stories, still kids sit there like watching a show, like a movie in town or TV. We got TV nowadays, but q’sapi, well we would sit there and go right to sleep right there on the blanket (pointing on the floor). (Adam Gregoire, October 14, 2013, transcript)

Eric, OKIB’s language nest consultant for 2013-14, shared a similar story of surrounding children in the stories through the language. He told of how his grandfather Sam would be taken by his dad over the mountain to visit his grandpa:

My step grandma met him at the door and grabbed his arm and led him in to the middle of the floor and sat him down on a cushion and so in the room, all around the room, there must have been 20-25 Elders, men and women and they told him just sit there. For three days and he said not once did those people talk to him. They talked around him and they told stories of long time ago of how people dealt with certain and things that came up and the hardships they went through and things they learned and different stories and for three days they would talk to each other. He said that he would fall asleep and he would wake up… They would still be talking all through the night and all through the day and “ok, we’re done,” and his dad took him home. (Eric Mitchell, October 4, 2013, transcript)
Adam nostalgically recalled the “good old days”:

There are so damn many [stories] I heard, I don’t even have one that I remember all the way through… geez… that was… all of us did. I don’t know how my dad, my dad would tell stories before the moon came…

(Adam Gregoire, October 14, 2013, transcript)

Fluent Elders K’i’semtkʷ, Leonard Gregoire, and Adam Gregoire talked about how the issue of how to share the stories with the young children who do not understand the language and Leonard emphasized that the stories need to be told in “straight Indian”.

*K’i’semtkʷ:* The kids will learn because they hear it, we talk Sqilxw, that’s all they are going to hear and they will remember it. They will remember it.

Leonard: It’s best if you talk your language to them and tell them the story in Indian and that’s it… if they want to learn it, learn the language and then you will know the story, “that’s a real good story he’s telling,” and they will want to know… they will think…

Adam: Yeah I guess so.

Leonard: You don’t talk English to them. No if we are talking all Indian here then why tell them an old story with English and Native, Indian, whatever you want to call it. No good. If we are going to go that way it’s gotta be straight Indian. (October 14, 2013, transcript)

The way of the fluent Elders is not to teach the children the language, but rather to share and live the language.

No use sticking Sama words in there. It wouldn’t be unique if we stuck Sama words in there. No Sama. If you are gonna stick some in here and there, well… forget it. (K’i’semtkʷ - Pauline Archachan, May 04, 2012, transcript)

Adam suggests that perhaps the Elders should maybe use some English words to make it easier for the children to understand: “Once in a while we should that, you know” to make the learning “quicker”. Adam’s concerns and ideas may be shared
with others that are involved in language nest delivery and raise questions including: How will English-speaking children learn when they are immersed in the natural language of fluent Elders? What are the benefits of using a “straight” full immersion approach to language acquisition? Is there a place for some English language in the program? Rachel Marchand, Coordinator of the 2011-2012 language nest, also saw a value in setting aside some time for the elders to use English with the children to share knowledge that they would otherwise not have access to “I think it would be more helpful to have Leonard speak English in that time and share a story”:

[I]t would be neat to have the stories that he might have about the area or whatever and utilize more like that and make it really relevant. Or maybe he has stories about parents or… I still think it would be neat to have from this time to this time or half an hour of English or something because you can also bridge a lot… and then they [children] had a sense and then we made pictures up for them and then we had him and Pauline or somebody sit down and talk about the story (in Nsyilxcen) and then we picked it up it would be neat then they could maybe, “yeah I hear that word,” “yeah, oh”, right so kinda of like build it like that… (Rachel Marchand, April 25, 2012, transcript)

All of the participants in this research supported full immersion for children as the optimum approach and these ideas were presented as ways to accelerate the children’s acquisition of language and culture. Participants also described needing to use English to occasionally deal with behavioural issues of the children or to support a child in distress, but this was usually done away from the larger group.

Four of the fluent Elders in this research preferred the children to learn by sticking to “straight Okanagan”. They did not express any concerns that the children would not be able to understand full immersion:

It’s good. When we are talking, when I am talking to them and then they will tell me, “Well why do you speak Okanagan all the time?” so I just tell
them… “Kʷu Sqilxw, lut Sama,” (I am Sqilxw not Sama) but I think that they will figure it out what I am saying. (K’leemeetkw – Cecilia Gottfriedson, October 14, 2013, transcript)

Since 2006, K’i’səmtkw has worked as the fluent Elder in Nkamplqs I Snmamayatn Kl Sqilxtet partial immersion elementary school and she and the other Elders have witnessed how quickly children can learn the language through 100% full immersion.

The successes of Nkamplqs I Snmamayatn Kl Sqilxtet resonated in the interviews of other participants, and the school’s seven years of producing Okanagan speaking children has clearly created immense confidence in the “straight Indian” language immersion approach.

Well I think time will speak for itself. The one fact is that however it is happening, right or wrong, dysfunction or chaotic, them kids are learning. You look at the immersion school… you can criticize them all you want but the fact is kids are learning. Something is being done right and the biggest something right is that they are close enough to the language to be able to learn that eh. (Eric Mitchell, October 4, 2013, transcript)

Mona also talked about Nkamplqs I Snmamayatn Kl Sqilxtet, stating: “I like what is happening up at the Immersion School right now… it seems to be, the kids seem to be pretty good.” Eric also drew parallels between the full immersion approach of modeling fluent language and old time ways of learning and sharing knowledge:

Actually my brother shared with me, he said, “You know that’s how it was in the old days, if you wanted to learn something like to be a cattle rancher or a logger or whatever it was that people were doing eh, then you would go to a family of somebody that you know and live with them and go with them.” That’s how my dad learned to be a rancher. (Eric Mitchell, October 4, 2013, transcript)
Among most of the participants in this research, the most effective, intuitive and old time way to create new speakers involved immersing the children in the natural speech of fluent Elders. However, Kathy cautioned:

Even if they are in the language sometimes Elders will start talking to each other which is great to do once in a while but if you’re… if it's maybe 15 minutes with the children and you are in a 15 minute conversation with another Elder, the children are not being connected to, not being communicated with, or expected to communicate with you, so language is not being learned by the children. They actually could be just like I did, you know with my parent’s who were fluent speakers, you just learn to tune out the language. It’s not enough to have language in the vicinity of the child… you have to interact with them… you have to actively engage children in speech and get them responding to what you are saying and understanding what you are saying, so the Elders need to play with and engage with and communicate with (the) children. (Kathy Michel, September 25, 2012, transcript)

Indeed, Kathy’s memories of tuning out the language as a child were also described by other participants who grew up hearing the language but not being spoken to directly or engaged in the language by their families of fluent speakers. Other participants described how they struggled to engage fluent elders in conversations with the children. Rachel shared a story of how this situation sometimes played out in the nest:

Michele wants her (elder) to do like filler-in language, almost like, describe it more, I think that’s how, you know, if they’re talking about something, yeah and then almost to have that fluency… so then (elder is) more like, "so what do you want me to say"… right so she feels like I don’t know what I’m supposed to – what you want me to say, and so then she won’t say… (Laughing). That’s what I’m thinking. I don’t know. (Rachel Marchand, April 25, 2012, transcript)

Consequently participants had developed some strategies to support the elders to focus on sharing the language with the children. For example, Rachel drew on her experience and education in Early Childhood Development to:
If it’s an elder and a person and you’re sharing 3 kids each and you gave an elder a task and said, “sit here while they are playing this activity, the children can figure it out on their own, right” like it’s play dough or its, you know, the goal is to observe what they are doing but it’s basically when I’m teaching kids how to work on speech and language in school, it’s sports announcing. All your doing is sports announcing, “oh you picked up the…oh you’re moving it”. “say thank you, pass it to your friend. ’ So sports announcing…. (Rachel Marchand, April 25, 2012, transcript)

Likewise, drawing from his cultural knowledge of fishing, Eric talked about bringing in nets for the elders and children to look at and talk about. He recalled how a Māori woman had shared her philosophy:

we are people... we need to eat, we need to breathe, we need to laugh, we need to... you know we have five six senses ... use them and introduce things that are in your culture, and whether its traditional culture of today and according to her it doesn’t matter what you use as long as you can use it to create language with this child and have them understand what it is you are doing. (Eric Mitchell, October 4, 2013, transcript)

Eric emphasized that, regardless of the approach, the adults in the nest use the language to talk “to them” “around them” and to “do things” with the children.

Nisah-cee, a volunteer in OKIB’s 2013-14 language nest, shared her ideas about how the children are able to understand what the Elders are saying in Nsyilxcan even before they have learned much language.

When my dad is talking to me and my aunties are talking to me, I know what they are saying. I don’t know exactly what they are saying but then [when] they speak they use body language and they use their facial expressions and that’s what life’s about. That’s how we learn off of people and how you are feeling. So it’s a lot of body language that helps out with the meaning. (Nistah-cee, November 29, 2013, transcript)
In addition to learning how to infer meaning through the feelings and body language of the Elders and workers, Nistah-kee also noticed that young children develop strong listening skills at the language nest.

They’re not really teaching it. It’s just like you and me talking. Paying attention and listening is the biggest thing. We don’t learn how to listen... you know our kids aren’t listening to anything we are saying these days... they are listening to the computer or listening to all that and when they are here they are listening to people... (Nistah-kee, November 29, 2013, transcript)

Rachel also observed this of young children that attended the Family Night sessions for the 2011-2012 language nest. When one of the parents seemed worried when his one-year-old daughter played with toys instead of joining in with the circle or other group activities, Rachel described the magic of language immersion.

So finally I had to say to (the dad), “ok (dad’s name) let them play, they are listening.” So that’s the difference right with the little ones, they are just hearing me and you and everyone sit and talk, they are just not going to have the patience to sit and watch us. So they are hearing and learning it so I said, “so, we are singing the Colour Song and you are going to sing it because you’re the one who if you learn it you can bring this home and repeat it. (Rachel Marchand, April 25, 2012, transcript)

Rachel discovered that even though the five-year-olds sometimes pretended to ignore the workers and elders, even they were listening. One child in particular “always proved us wrong that he could stand and jump and turn around in a circle and you could totally call him on it and he’s the first one to answer you” (Rachel, April 25, 2012, transcript). Rachel also described the five-year-old children as becoming “more respectful” and “[t]hey paid attention more” (Rachel Marchand, April 25, 2012, transcript).
Other participants also described the language nest program as contributing to the emotional development of the children. The old time ways of speaking and being teach the children sensitivity to feelings and body language, listening skills, respect for Elders, and to pay attention. In addition, Mona Tronson, a cultural worker at Snc’c’amalʔtn, projected that spending time with the Elders at an early age will positively impact the pronunciation of the youngest children’s accents. “Ya, they will pick it up, but the more the little ones hear it the better – they will have the tongue twisters… that’s what I have always heard” *(Mona Tronson, April 04, 2013, transcript)*. In her observations of the youngest children in the language nest, Nistah-cee found these ideas to ring true. She described how one two-year-old girl liked to announce her arrival by calling, “Way’ Tupaš” to the lady Elders.

She is so cute, she wants to say it, you know, and they will say a word to her and she can say it clear just like speaking English... she is a sponge and the smaller they are the more they are learning. *(Nistah-cee, November 29, 2013, transcript)*

Nistah-cee’s observations affirm the extraordinary ability of young children to absorb the language and repeat the sounds that they hear. Her experiences of being immersed in the language emphasize the importance of fluent Elders using body language and other cues to indicate the meaning of what they are saying.

The five fluent Elders’ ideas about the best way to share the language with young children overlap with the views of some of the research participants who are familiar with theories of natural language acquisition. For example, Eric Mitchell also echoed the importance of full on “straight Okanagan” immersion in the language nest however, by contrast to the Elders, Eric drew extensively from his knowledge of language acquisition theory in order to explain it to me. He shared his interest in the
work of world-renowned language acquisition expert James Asher, as he described to me how babies acquire their first language:

You know, he takes it right back to the basic way that anybody learns any language, and so as a baby in the womb the first thing that when it comes to language is that you hear, you know, you can’t see anybody, you know, as in the womb you hear it and you are immersed in the sound of language by the time you are born. And so if you are born into any language is the first thing is that you are listening and until you can decipher one sound from another you cannot make words. And so he said that is the first thing, the listening and the training your ears until you do that, then the next step is that you can begin to imitate those sounds because if you can’t hear a sound, you’re not going to be able to imitate it, right. (Eric Mitchell, October 4, 2013, transcript)

In the Spring of 2012, language activist and Sqilxʷ researcher Michele K. Johnson (Sʔímlaʔxʷ), an adult Nsyilxcen learner, drew from her vast experience as a learner, intermediate Nsyilxcen speaker and Nsyilxcen teacher to explain the importance of not using English words in the language nest, including English names. Michele learned Nsyilxcen through studying and teaching Paul Creek curriculum, including hundreds of hours of Elder recordings, and 1,000 hours of class time, and described the process in her doctoral dissertation (Johnson 2013). Michele felt so strongly about 100% full immersion that she wanted the children, staff and fluent Elders to use their Okanagan names, if they had them. If the children did not have a name she suggested creating temporary names to use in the classroom, such as animal names or a simple description of the child's characteristic. These temporary names are a common practice in the South Okanagan. Michele started the practice of using the Elders’ Nsyilxcen names, so that the children would hear them. Some of the children, including my own son Dempsey, did not yet have Okanagan names. We chose not to use temporary names in the nest. In our interview, Michele reflected on
her three-month experience working in our language nest program with six five-year-old children. She explained the reason for using full-immersion and using people’s Nsyilxcen names:

You are speaking Nsyilxcen, and then you use these English names and it just sounds wrong. It’s jarring. And for me, staying in the language is important. I know it’s important, and every time I have to say a name in English, I’m breaking the rule. (Michele K. Johnson, April 19, 2012, transcript)

Michele described to me some of the challenges of sticking to Okanagan when the children do not have Okanagan names. She saw the Nsyilxcen names as an opportunity to increase “comprehensible input” for the children, words they could understand and that had meaning to them, and a way to reclaim knowledge of the Elders’ names that had not been used publicly for decades. In the classroom, she always used her own name, Sʔímlaʔxʷ, which is a family name from Nkmaplqs and thereby proudly recognizes her kinship ties to the community. Kinship ties and names are a very strong part of being Sqilxw.

At the end of my focus group with the five fluent Elders, I asked them what they would like the children to learn about being Sqilxw at the language nest. By this I had hoped to encourage discussion on the uniqueness of their language nest as compared to English-speaking daycare or, for example, other language nest programs. My choice of wording, however, confused the Elders and Leonard’s response succinctly captures the straightforwardness with which the fluent Elders see the purpose of learning the language, the language nest and of their roles as grandmothers and grandfathers to the children.
Well, I said that in the first place… I said it's the only thing, it's just one, one word, and the English people come along and make so many words out of the thing. You know, that's right. You are going to teach them what their language is and that's it and nothing else. (Leonard Gregoire, October 14, 2013, transcript)

However, in separate interviews with Eric and Nistah-cee, the issue of what the children would learn about “being Sqilxw” in the language nest emerged naturally, and they both affirmed that the children will learn to be proud of who they are, to be themselves, and to feel good about being Sqilxw.

It's a different way, so it's a different feeling. You know I think it's all about the feeling, you know, and that is what our life is all about, our feelings right. It is how we feel, how proud we are. If we are proud, we are proud. So we are proud and we clap when they say a word. They will clap so [a two year-old little girl] will get into that, so she starts singing her songs, she starts singing [sings a song] and after she's done she goes [claps] and everybody starts clapping and after she bows. I am like, “oh my gosh, she is so cute”. (Nistah-cee, November 29, 2013, transcript)

Nistah-cee shared a story about my own son Devon that highlighted a benefit of the high adult to child ratio that is a mandatory requirement of language nest funding:

One of my aunties in there said that she notices a difference in Devon when he is here he is more relaxed compared to where he is at the school. Maybe too many kids… You know they are so special... We get to let them know they are special because there is just a few here... That's what it is, your time with them is more and that's what they need. They love the attention. They love it. (Nistah-cee, November 29, 2013, transcript)

These valuable stories of children’s language learning experiences are heart-warming and uplifting, and describe many benefits of language nest programming that will foster positive self-esteem, social development, emotional intelligence, speech development and language skills.

Uplifting the fluent elders with the language
Up until just two or three generations ago, the older people in Indigenous communities traditionally were the primary caregivers of young children in the community. Siblings and cousins of all ages tended to gather in the homes of grandparents, aunties and uncles and other older family members while their younger parents worked to support their families. Families tended to be larger with couples having eight to twelve children. Eric Mitchell recalled the hustle and bustle of growing up among extended family.

After my mom dies… my mom had a big family and so all my uncles and aunties and grandparents and dad’s friends would all take turns looking after us while he was off working, and then when I was out at my grandpa Sam’s in Lillooet, well they had a dozen foster kids in the house you know, and the foster kids weren’t other kids, they were just the next house next door’s kids or his nieces and nephews kids or something like that. *(Eric Mitchell, October 4, 2013, transcript)*

The roles of older extended family members in the early learning of young children have been drastically diminished since early childhood education centers and daycares opened in Indigenous communities in the 1990s. Furthermore, in the present day in BC, licensing regulations have created barriers for the active participation of Elders and other extended family members. Kelly Terbasket, a Sqilxw educational professional, explained:

There are so many restrictions that prevent us from implementing a culturally relevant program, and some examples of that would be traditional foods, getting out on the land, all the things you need, and then making all the people need criminal record checks even though we know our own community generally and we know who is safe and who isn’t, and who should be around children and who shouldn’t. But if you have, say an uncle that is willing to take the kids out to check out some traditional plants, or maybe he just got a deer and you want to show or have them see how he tans, skins the deer or whatever, well did he get a criminal record check? *(Kelly Terbasket, September 20, 2012, transcript)*
While several participants pointed to the necessity of ensuring that anyone working in a language nest program provide a criminal record check. The five fluent Elders who participated in this research described wanting a language nest program to be “straight Indian” from the language being “straight Okanagan,” 100% full immersion to the food: not, “little sandwiches and stuff – we didn’t want that. We had our own kind of food” (K’i’səmtkw Archachan). By contrast, Kathy Michel describes an early learning language program that is fashioned after Granny’s House as “definitely an Elder’s lead program”. She explained:

I certainly had no language and had no concept growing up, you know, the way they did traditionally or within the language so I totally backed away from this idea that I was going to plan the day. I stated quite up front when we had Elders that I will cook and I will do the diapers and I will do any of the cleaning that I can do but your job would be to speak the language and to keep the children occupied and they said, “well don’t you have a plan?” Because at this point they had sort of been acculturated into this mainstream paradigm where you have a structured day, you have centers, you know, reading time, and you have this time, and you have nap time, and you eat, and you have all these different structures in an early childhood setting and some of these people were familiar with that, and I think it was really odd for them to say, “ok you want this, you know, you work so hard and you don’t know what you want?” (laughing) and I said, “no, I don’t know. No. I know what I want but I don’t know how to do it,” and I said, “That’s why I’m giving you the reins to figure this out.” So I said, “one of the good ways to figure this out is for you to remember what you did as a child.” So I got them thinking, “ok what did I do, what toys did you have, what kind of experiences did you have?” And so I think one of the best things that we ever did was start with an empty building. And start with that, sort of that leadership being handed over to the rightful leaders in the community, the Elders. (Kathy Michel, September 25, 2012, transcript)

Handing control of the language nest program over to the fluent Elders involved creating a comfortable environment and accepting that the “rhythm and pace” of the program was different than in a daycare program. Kathy describes remaining alert to the tendency in mainstream settings for Elders to be pushed to the sidelines. She
continually asks herself critical questions about her own practice in facilitating the leadership of the fluent Elders: “Are they the front and centre in this or are you somehow pushing them aside and taking control and dominating the structure of the program?” (Kathy Michel). The five fluent Elders who participated in a focus group for this research had very strong ideas about how their language nest program should look. They described enjoying their roles working with children and described improvements to their quality of life.

It’s a lot of work. It’s good work. We feel good, we get tired but we feel good after we leave from here. I do anyway. We have a good time with the kids. (K’i’semtkʷ - Pauline Archachan, October, 14, 2013, transcript)

Several other participants noticed that the program had a positive impact on the fluent Elders. Eric and Nistah-cee tended to repeatedly use words such as “relationships”, “emotions” and “feelings” in sharing their ideas about a language nest.

[I]n our language there is no word like in English for “love” because really what is it? You can’t really explain it. You can’t ask our Elders: “What is the word for love?” Because really what you are asking them is “what’s the word for kindness? “What’s the word for gentleness? Because love means such a broad thing in English… we don’t have a word for that because we live it… we show our loved ones every day that we do that, that we have that, we have that bond, that feeling, that commitment to them… And so with the hardships that we have had through Residential School, and alcohol coming into our community, and the loss of our freedom and our land and laws against us, we have become jaded to survive and the kids don’t know that… (Eric Mitchell, October 4, 2013, transcript)

Nistah-cee also talked about the hardships that have been experienced by the fluent Elders as they fought to keep their language.
It’s kind of emotional for me because I um remember my dad telling me that they were put down for their language… and you know all the Sqilxw people have been put down for the language, you know the government can give us millions and millions of dollars but that’s not gonna bring our language back. If they want to put any money towards us, put it in the language, bring that back, they stole it away, they rung us out and I see joy in Okanagan language, I see everyone always laughing… *(Nistah-cee, November 29, 2013, transcript)*

Other participants in this research shared stories of fluent Elders learning how to, as Eric puts it, "become gentle again", having fun, laughing and singing with the children and fluent Elders talked with joy of sharing their language with the children. Participants recognize the pride of fluent Elders as they share their language and old time ways, and observed an overall increase in the wellbeing of fluent Elders as a result from their participation in home-like language nest programs.

In talking with the fluent Elders about the language nests sometimes it was easy to forget that they are in their late seventies and early eighties. However, the Elders that participated in this research are, as K’i’səmtkw likes to put it, "old people". As such they require support to share their language with the children in the nests. Participants described the importance of taking good care of them: purchasing comfortable chairs for them, providing them good food, and encouraging them to interact with the children. As a daughter and niece of these Elders, Nistah-cee strongly emphasized how she sees her role as a volunteer helper in the nest:

Like they are always laughing and they are telling stories about people they knew back in the day ....brings up memories for them when they are all together to and that positive energy they have just flows and it's like... you just want ... you know I got it all in here and all in here and it's not going to leave me cause I get this chance to be around them and respect them and anything they want they are gonna get it from me... you know, whatever they say to me I am listening.... and I told them that and I got up and I stood up and I said... "you know what I am here... anything you gotta tell me I am listening... I am not gonna, not gonna say... "I am not
going to listen to those Elders. No”... and that’s one of the good teachings for these little ones to respect their Elders, that’s number one, when you go in there you respect your Elders and that is a good environment where they can learn that... (Nistah-cee, November 29, 2013, transcript)

Lacey also observed that working in the language nest positively impacted the fluent elders. She stated that it “really changed our home life, it really did. Even my Papa started to warm up. Having kids around him just made him happy” (Lacey Gregoire-Gabriel, April 19, 2012, transcript). Eric shared the positive effects from the perspective of the elders:

Like Leonard and Pauline shared with me is that they learned from them kids to be loving and gentle, because that is what they shared with me. “I really like being with these kids.” Leonard really likes being with them kids and Pauline said, “I learned from them. I am not as harsh as I was.” (Eric Mitchell, October 4, 2013, transcript)

The positive impact of language nest programming on the wellbeing of fluent Elders is an important issue that requires more research. In his role as the program consultant for OKIB’s 2013-14 nest, Eric wanted to explore ways to nurture the fluent Elders to share their knowledge and life experiences with the children. He talks about the value of having the little ones building relationships with the fluent Elders and getting to know who they really are within the context of their unique lives. He explained:

The one thing I want to do with these guys and maybe start with Leonard... because to the little ones, the question is for me is do they know them old guys... do they know that Leonard has spent the last forty years racing horses and winning... so you know, try to get to know them enough so that them kids can understand who they are and that they are not just them old people over there... they each lived a long life they must have had something there, what’s important to them? What did you do in our life that you want the kids to know about? That’s why I want to have pictures in there of their families and then pictures of the kids’ families so that when you say, “in lid?” “that’s my dad”, “that’s my brothers”, “that’s
my sisters”, so that they can talk about it, they can talk about it… I want to see them all up. So family is important and trying to find ways to instil that in the kids. Those are some things to think about. (Eric Mitchell, October 4, 2013, transcript)

Kathy shared in her interview how her “Granny’s House” approach to language nest programming can return the fluent Elders to their rightful roles as leaders in the community and value the contributions of each individual Elder. She explained how the program is modeled after natural family-based relationships between young children and the older generations.

And children are very adaptable at that age… you would love a grandmother that was nice and quiet and loved to knit, and you would love a grandmother that was always busy and always berry picking and doing things and keeping busy, always doing very energetic things, so I think there is… it’s not… to me, there is no sort of judgment that one is better than the other cause I think that it is really up to that center and the Elders at the time to dictate how everybody is going to be behaving within that. (Kathy Michel, September 25, 2012, transcript)

K’i’səmtkw’s thoughts about language nest programming demonstrate this as she had a tendency to respond with “I don’t know” or “we wouldn’t have any ideas” when I initially interviewed her and asked her about her vision for a language nest. However, after some encouragement she became thoughtful and suggested that the Elders need to “get together and talk about it… maybe Leonard has his ideas, Baby Anne has her ideas” (K’i’səmtkw - Pauline Archachan, May 04, 2012, transcript).

Rachel observed a similar warming up process in the 2011-2012 language nest program. She shared that “at the end with Baby Anne she came out of her shell kinda of like Lacey. Baby Anne would be, she’d be more apt to be… “Yeah lets talk about” and they’d come to her and she would be more, “oh that’s the colour”, or “pass it’ (Rachel Marchand, April 25, 2012, transcript).
The fluent Elders really came out of their shells and became highly animated when they gathered together in a larger group. They would talk about the “good old days” in order to explore ways of doing things with the children in the language nest program.

Yeah, ‘cause when we had that meeting... boy their interaction was just flowing back and forth and back and... and they all were talking and that’s what the kids need to see and hear you know. It’s too bad that they are broken up down to two because they have a hard time I think to keep the conversation going. (Eric Mitchell, October 04, 2013, transcript)

Eric’s observations of how much the fluent Elders come alive when they gather together led to a collective decision for the 2013-2014 language nest program to run for just three hours in the afternoon with all five of the fluent Elders gathered together.

Mona attributed the continued participation of high numbers of fluent Elders to the program “taking care” of them. This research found links between increased social support for fluent Elders and mental health, family relationships and intergenerational healing. Eric shared with me that many people became “jaded to survive” generations of colonization and oppression and he recognized potential for the language nest program to create healing.

Yeah, ‘cause I think in the end you know, uh, the most important thing other than the language and language is the way to get it... is to uplift the people. These Elders here, bless their hearts and everything, and a few years ago they said they are ready to do this [share their language with the community], and they see themselves as having at least ten years and then from there they are not so sure... so that was ten years ago or that was five years ago... (Eric Mitchell, October 04, 2013, transcript)
Fluent Elder K’i’samtkʷ talked about the children as a “joy to work with” and described having fun being with them (*May 04, 2012, transcript*). As a parent I can see the joy in their faces when I ask the Elders about the language Devon is using. When I occasionally pick up my son from the program I often remark to the five fluent Elders how well, happy and young they look after spending time with the children. Consequently, I am starting to wonder if there may be links between this language nest program, intergenerational healing, increased social support, healthy living and longevity.

A major theme that emerged in the findings related to the success of the “Granny’s House” approach was the need to take good care of the fluent Elders. Many of the participants talked about the need to provide a comfortable environment and others discussed the need for elders to receive adequate monetary compensation. Kelly explained that sometimes communities can begrudge payment for Elders to do this kind of work:

> [P]eople are like, “They shouldn’t be expecting to be paid, that’s their role to work with the children,” but everybody needs to make money, so there’s that argument going on in the communities. (*Kelly Terbasket, September 09, 2012, transcript*)

The issue of how much is appropriate to pay the remaining fluent Elders in the community is, however, a very sensitive issue as it implies an evaluation of the worth of their valuable skills and knowledge. This raises the issue of how it is possible to adequately compensate fluent speakers who have retained their language in spite of sustained and concerted efforts by colonial governments to wipe it out. The fluent Elders in this research described themselves as professors in regard to their expertise and knowledge of their language, and yet as Kelly explained: “They should
be paid well... they deserve it but usually by the end of the day the budget is all
gone” (Kelly Terbasket, September 09, 2012, transcript). Appropriate compensation
may however be critical in order to coax fluent Elders out of their homes and out of
retirement because, in the words of Kathy, “You can’t ask a 65, 70 year old, ‘What
do you want to do?’ … ‘Uh, I want to stay home and knit” (September 25, 2012,
transcript). Communities may need to carefully consider these sensitive issues in the
planning stages of language nest programs in discussion with fluent Elders. Efforts
to uplift the fluent Elders may need to be balanced with the unfortunate reality that
language nest funding may be small and inadequate. In situations where funds are
lacking, how do administrators and coordinators encourage fluent Elders to come
out and share their language?

Healing through language

Participants in this research described the language nest programs having a
significant role to play in the intergenerational healing of individuals, families,
communities and nations. Language learning may be a catalyst for healing and
transformation from the inside out.

It feels good when you know a little bit... even when you know a little bit
you are so proud of yourself...you are like oh my god I know my
language.. oh my goodness... and I think they are going to feel like that
too.. yeah... it's beautiful, I am glad I am there, that's where I have been
wanting to be for a long time... around my Elders, my family. (Nistah-cee,
November 29, 2013, transcript)

Throughout this research journey, participants expressed common sense
understandings of the emotions that are connected to Indigenous language
regeneration. The intensity of the emotions may heal or hurt. The challenge for
language regeneration programs, such as language nests, is to not become paralyzed by hurt feelings and negativity, or what Eric calls, “the dark side of language”. In Canada, there is very little legislative and funding support for the development and delivery of language nest programs. The systemic societal challenges to just getting started are demoralizing. Efforts to create language nest programs therefore happen in spite of these challenges and because of a profound belief in the power of language to heal the community’s youngest generations; put simply, our future. However, past and present experiences of genocide and linguicide that have damaged Indigenous peoples sense of selfhood and relationships to family and community can become the greatest challenges to language revitalization, and everyone involved in the development and delivery of language nest programs are therefore faced with a continual uphill challenge to look for ways to uplift others and remain focused on positive transformation. Eric described some of these dynamics to me in a good way:

...so to a lot of people that I grew up with, like half of my family, they believe that the white man is right in everything and that being Indian is no good... the other half of my family is totally the opposite....they got not much use for white people and they are just gonna live their life the way they are gonna live their life... some were beaten right down and they got nothing left... Others managed to still stand up straight and be who they are... And so unless you know how people are feeling about that then you are going to run into problems... knowing that is I think is a big help because then how you approach people, how you approach what you are doing...basically as long as you do it in a kind way and an up lifting way for them. (Eric Mitchell, October 04, 2013, transcript)

Language continuity and the retention, learning and sharing of language is expressed through individual and community resiliency that has defied and continues to resist historical and social systemic efforts to extinguish the Indigenous
rights and relationships of individuals, families, communities and nations. Programs that survive and move through these many external and internal pressures may be rewarded with the beautiful experiences of hearing the laughter and stories of the fluent Elders, or young children’s voices as they repeat words “like a parrot” (Nistah-cee) or burst into song using their newly acquired language skills.

Language nest programs provide opportunities for young children to be surrounded by the language of fluent Elders, and watch and experience the joy, love and laughter that fluent Elders share in conversation with one another and children in spite of profound and rapid social change. Fluent Elders are therefore positive role models to young children of resiliency and personal persistence in the face of inevitable change.
Chapter 5. Moving towards language immersion in the early years

A full language immersion “Granny’s House” with fluent Elders may be an optimum vision for a language nest in some communities. However, in other places the population of children, fluent Elders, younger speakers, or qualified staff is not large enough to support a language nest as a stand-alone program in addition to pre-existing daycare. Furthermore, some communities may not have any available empty spaces that are suitable in which to set up a separate language nest program for young children. Other communities may view an optimum nest program as occupying an available and suitable space in a pre-existing early childhood education centre. In any of these circumstances, the cost of operating a full immersion stand-alone language nest for approximately six to eight children for fifteen to twenty hours a week could run anywhere from $40,000 to $100,000 annually, dependent upon the numbers of fluent Elders and staff that are hired. This amount of funding on a continuous basis is likely to be prohibitive for many, if not most First Nations communities in British Columbia.

Depending upon all the unique circumstances that face individual communities language nest programs may look like Kathy’s vision of a “Granny’s House”, a pre-existing early childhood education center, daycare, Head Start, or Preschool program staffed with language speakers, or as one participant observed first-hand in New Zealand in the last chapter some were run out of “people’s garages with a little playground outside… little language nests where the staff was not fluent but they were doing their best” (Bill Cohen). Seen from this perspective the definition of a “language nest” is best based on the aspirations and intent of the program.
Given the dire status of many of British Columbia’s Indigenous languages, the development and delivery of a language nest program may present many complex questions.

In 2012 Kelly Terbasket, a Sqilxw consultant, was contracted to restructure a pre-existing early childhood education program to include language nest programming. The community in question was small and there were fluent Elders and qualified staff available to support a language nest program. Consequently, Kelly was faced with many challenges and questions as she considered how to proceed with nest development: What is a language nest? How do the children learn the language? Do they interact with fluent Elders, or do early childhood educators engage in intensive adult language learning so that they can continue to be the primary caregivers? Is there a curriculum, or do the children learn through adult role modeling and natural language acquisition? What kinds of job descriptions need to be developed? How many hours a day will the program run? Will it be licensed or unlicensed, and what are the subsequent implications? How can we support fluent Elders to work in Early Childhood settings? What is the role of the Nation in supporting individual communities to develop language nest programs? How can we evaluate language nest programs?

Many of Kelly’s questions emerged from the context of her twelve years of experience as the Provincial Head Start Advisor for which she had traveled extensively to Indigenous communities all over the province. She emphasized the diversity of Indigenous communities in BC, especially the small populations of many rural and remote communities where the numbers of young children are barely
sufficient to fill pre-existing Head Start and daycare programs. Drawing from her experiences, Kelly warned, “people that are super passionate about, 'We gotta get to the language nest stage.' ‘You gotta do full immersion.’” may be too much, too soon for many communities. In a research interview with Kelly, she noted:

One of my concerns is that if you have a bar that is too high, people might you know, community members might just say, “forget it, that is just so unrealistic I can’t do that. It has like stages of development. I would love a book that says “this is the strategy, a possible strategy, and also say ok you can’t go that route then and this is what you can run… so maybe some options like for stages as you progress toward full language immersion”. It might be more encouraging. (Kelly Terbasket, September 20, 2012, transcript)

The creation of any kind of language nest program is a monumental undertaking that has the potential to create considerable stress and confusion for everyone involved. Participants in this research identified a number of critical factors that contribute to decisions to take a chosen strategy for a language nest:

- The emotions connected to language.
- The roles and relationships of staff and fluent Elders in program delivery.
- Staff attitudes towards language, levels of motivation and support for staff language learning, and language proficiencies of staff.
- Ages and stages of children and their responses to the language.
- Levels of parental involvement.
- Willingness to reflect and review and revise strategies over time.

These factors ultimately gave shape to their program’s “stage of development” as they moved towards full language immersion. These key issues that emerged may be interesting and useful to other Indigenous communities that are contemplating or engaged in the development of a language nest program.

Understanding the emotions connected to the language
Community Indigenous language regeneration through children’s early learning involves reclaiming the right to shape the children’s development, the language they speak, the stories that they hear, the environment in which they are nurtured, and ultimately, visions for their future. For many, oppression, legislation, shame and hurt has blurred many memories of healthy, extended family-based early learning. For research participants in their 40s, 50s and 60s, language was often not spoken directly to the children. In fact, in many families language was hidden away from children in an effort to protect the younger generations from shame, hurt and pain.

Eric Mitchell shared how the language was only shared with the oldest children in his parent’s generation, and as time passed, the parents made a decision to no longer share the language with the younger children in the family.

The oldest one or two kids were fluent, the rest of them have nothing. And it was decided that they were given such a hard time being Indian and speak that language that they didn’t feel it was going to help them kids. They didn’t want them to go through the hardship they went through because of the language and so that’s why they quit giving it to them, and so it became a secret, and the kids were shooed outside when the adults talked, eh, and so they weren’t able to hear it… weren’t able to learn it, and they felt at the time that it was the best thing for the kids… And so that is sort of the dark side of it. (Eric Mitchell, October 04, 2013, transcript)

Eric reflected on the “dark side” of language, and the fun, positive hunger for the language. Because “language is a delicate thing for people,” he advised:

[Probably the biggest thing that any community has to consider about starting any kind of language program, you need to get a handle on how the… what emotions are connected for people to the language. (Eric Mitchell, October 04, 2013, transcript)
Indian residential schools in Canada targeted Indigenous languages for elimination. Extended family based ways of knowing were also targeted. Children were separated from their parents, grandparents, aunties and uncles, siblings and cousins. Once in the schools, children were stripped of their Indigenous identity and culture. These stolen generations were directly subjected to multiple human rights violations and linguicide. The elimination of Indigenous languages was a central objective of Indian residential school policy and the school system did irreparable damage to Indigenous peoples intergenerational relationships around languages; consequently, language has an emotional “dark side” for many people that can trigger intense feelings of guilt and shame involved in speaking. In spite of this, the Federal Government has failed to acknowledge the tremendously damaging intergenerational impact of linguicide on the language decline and regeneration in the present day. As he reflected on his Indian residential school survivor compensation money, Eric observed:

> It was an insult what they gave us… it should have been enough for me to be able to pay somebody like them [fluent elders] for 24-hour service for two years of something you know, and then work at learning the language. (*Eric Mitchell, October 04, 2013, transcript*)

In terms of damaging people’s relationships to their Indigenous languages, Indian Residential School policy was, however, just one among many oppressive policies that targeted Indigenous family and community ways of knowing and being. The accumulation of generations of colonizing practices and interactions were felt by perhaps every member of families and communities, including those who did not attend the schools. As a result, gradually more and more parents and extended family members stopped teaching the language to the children. Fluent Elders
Leonard and K’i’səmtkw talked about their own children and grandchildren, and the decisions that they made about language.

We can’t go and tell Baby Anne, “how come you didn’t go and teach your kids that,” “Adam, how come you didn’t do that?” (Leonard Gregoire, October 14, 2013, transcript)

When [daughter] was little, when she was born we always talked Sqilxw to her, both me and [daughter], but when she went to school she got confused… she got confused… the teachers couldn’t figure out why she was confused. It was because we talked Sqilxw, she knew some English because she played with [cousins] and them but you know… But she would do things backwards and so we had to… leave it alone. (K’i’səmtkw - Pauline Archachan, October 14, 2013, transcript)

What Eric poignantly described as the negative side of language, the associated hurt and pain, continues to negatively impact community efforts to regenerate Indigenous languages. Feelings of being lonely for the language came out when fluent Elders talked about how many speakers in the community no longer use their language in conversation with one another.

He likes it when I see him and we talk Indian, and he says, “I don’t talk to nobody else but you… Nobody talks to me… The other guys I see them, they talk English… as soon as I see him in Indian and sit down and talk… every time we meet I talk Indian to them and because that’s the only time they talk… They said other people don’t talk it no more. (Leonard Gregoire, October 14, 2013, transcript)

The decline in using the language in public was also described by Eric.

[O]n the other side… and one thing I witnessed to myself and others noticed, that as soon as people started talking language they would laugh… there was laughter and the people lit up… it was obviously something good, eh. And so in a way, so they shunned it from us kids and their own kids, but they got hungry for the language and they really liked coming together with people they knew they could talk it, and boy, they would just have fun with it, and that was a positive thing. (Eric Mitchell, October 04, 2013, transcript)
An image emerges from the collective descriptions of the participants of the language in retreat from active use in public, to being “hidden” from the children, to leading to communication breakdowns between adults and children, to eventually even a declining usage in public use in the community among adult speakers. In the present day then the language seems to be hidden from view. Nistah-cee explained: “It’s an ancient language I suppose and we want to preserve that and it is very, very important for the Elders to have that preserved, not changed…it's like changing their past… it's like when they pass on we have to respect them…. all our relations.”

Mona, a cultural worker at OKIB ECE Center, shared a glimpse of her emotional struggle to fully engage in language learning in the present day, and helps provide insight on why few adults express an active interest in working in language nest projects.

I keep thinking about that myself. Why haven’t I learnt more? What’s stopping me…? for one, our own people will laugh at us and make fun of us, I mean you get it all the time, for trying, for saying it wrong you know… and that is one thing that stops a lot of people… being laughed at… and they shouldn’t laugh. Yes, it probably does sound funny to them… they are trying ‘cause I heard a comment and I didn’t like that comment… “wanna be speaker”, you know and that should probably be wiped out of there… but I think that is what stops my generation. It is so hard for us to get the tongue twister dialects right. I almost think going maybe to a different community and studying with people, other people, maybe that is the better way to go. (Mona Tronson, April 04, 2013, transcript)

Mona showed great courage in sharing the emotional challenges in language learning. Her insights and those of the adults in her generation are important to understand in order for communities to engage these future Elders in language learning and mentorships within language nest programs. Mona also reflected on
what’s stopping other people in their 50s and 60s from getting involved in language nest programs:

Yeah, I asked my cousins. They should be all here. They grew up with their children… they grew up with the Elders children. They should be out. I have no clue… It’s hard to get me to come out. And it all has to do with, I don’t know how to word it… I wouldn’t know how to word it in a good way. Because our community is separated and there are different families, different… there was always Head of the Lakers against Six Milers, White Man’s Creek against Six Mile or whatever… that is what we grew up with… (Mona Tronson, April 04, 2013, transcript)

Eric, who is now in his sixties and in the same generation as Mona and her cousins, also had insights about emotional barriers that prevent others from engaging in language learning and regeneration project such as these.

It all depends on how damaged the person [was] and how well that they got through that…some were beaten right down and they got nothing left, and others managed to stand up straight and be who they are. (Eric Mitchell, October 04, 2013, transcript)

Eric’s comments provide critical insight to some of the huge emotional barriers that currently impact language nest development and delivery. Many people have a strong desire to regenerate their language and reclaim extended family-based ways approaches to early learning, but generations of hurt and pain has created a pervasive “negative” or “dark side” to language. Language nest development may be impacted by these issues in a number of ways, including efforts to find adults who are willing to work in language nest projects, the numbers of children whose parents support attendance at a nest, as well as the motivation and involvement levels of parents in language learning. Eric stated that the development and delivery of a language nest involves accepting and moving through these challenges.
Not all of them are willing to bring their kids. Not all of them value traditional ways or think that the language has anything to offer and you have to accept that and look for the few that think it is valuable and think that it has something to offer and teach ourselves, and learn how to express that in a positive way so people can see the value in who we are… that we can still be that today. *(Eric Mitchell, October 04, 2013, transcript)*

Eric reflected on positive strategies for moving through these emotions that are connected to the dark side of language. His suggestions focus on communicating the potential for these projects to create good emotional feelings about the language among the children.

I think in the end, you know, uh, the most important thing other than the language, and language is the way to get it... is to **uplift** the people.... You are an Indian person and it’s a **good** thing ... it’s a **good** thing because... learn how to express that because being Indian people we need to feel good about it, not ashamed of it... if they feel that it is a shameful thing to be Indian then it’s pretty hard to get them to know otherwise, but then the opportunity is here to let these kids know that it’s a good thing to be Indian person, to be Okanagan... walk around with your head up, don’t be looking down... *(Eric Mitchell, October 04, 2013, transcript)*

The dark side of emotions connected to the language can provide insights on resistance to language nest development and delivery. However, Eric’s insights into the negative emotions that have impacted the decisions of the past and present generations of families to speak the language to their children also moves into understandings of the potential for language nest projects to connect with people who recall and long for reconnections to positive emotions and memories that are connected to the language.

And so getting a handle on what emotions are connected to the language for people because until you find that out then you are gonna not really understand the resistance that is there and you are not going to really understand how to overcome that and so it is a delicate thing talking...
about language... so that is sort of the dark side of it... on the other side... and one thing I witnessed to myself and others noticed that as soon as people started talking language they would laugh... there was laughter and the people lit up... it was obviously something good, eh. And so in a way so they shunned it from us kids and their own kids, but they got hungry for the language, and they really like coming together with people that they knew could talk it, and boy they would just have fun with it and that was a positive thing. *(Eric Mitchell, October 04, 2013, transcript)*

The insights of Mona and Eric regarding the delicate emotional issues connected to language demonstrate the tremendous potential for community engagement in healing through language nest programs. Eric described the potential to “uplift” the people through language. Perhaps more significantly, their insights illustrate the important role of Language Nest programs in creating positive emotions and memories around language for the children, sharing the “fun” side of language, and connecting the children with fluent Elders who have a hunger to speak, tell stories and laugh together in the language.

**Creating a shared vision for a language nest**

Community development and organizational change is challenging and can be a strain for employees in any organization under any circumstances; however, language nest development involves moving through the negative emotions, hurt and shame connected to intergenerational experiences of linguicide, colonization and oppression. The creation of a stand-alone language nest or the integration of language nest programming into a pre-existing daycare structure in an Indigenous community may therefore be overwhelmingly stressful for anyone and everyone. Given the mixed and intense emotions connected to language, the comments of participants in this research emphasized the critical need to create a shared vision in
the early stages of language nest development, as well as to nurture positive and healthy relationships and communication between everyone involved prior to project delivery.

Ramona, an outspoken advocate for full language immersion for children, explained the situation that faced her in 2007 when OKIB attempted to integrate language nest delivery into the Infant/Toddler and Head Start rooms at Snc'c’amalaʔtn Early Childhood Education Centre.

I was a little surprised that it was kind of plunked into our laps, so to speak, and it was a challenge at times... I think sort of it would have helped a little bit would have been having the dialogue a little bit before they [fluent Elders] arrived instead of while getting plunked into the dance. The more discussion ahead would have been a good idea, but I know that’s hard when all of a sudden you get some funding and there’s an idea, and “oh, let’s just go and do it,” and I know that most of the time that this is a good idea. Even a little more of a head’s up is good. (*Ramona Wilson, September 17, 2012, transcript*)

Other participants shared feelings of wishing for more involvement in the planning stages of language nest projects, and Lorraine, principal of Snc’c’amalaʔtn, acknowledged that planning time is an essential and yet often missing component.

I think there should be planning time and time for staff to learn the language in daycare, unfortunately that is very hard to do because the children are here from 7:30am to 5:30pm... and we have to staff the program for that amount of time... there just isn’t time... I mean even having regular staff meetings is a challenge because people are tired. (*Lorraine Ladan, September 27, 2012, transcript*)

These participants described needing planning time for everyone involved in order to create opportunities for issues to be addressed, and to figure out everyone’s roles and responsibilities.
Participants also described language nest programs needing planning time in order to establish and nurture positive relationships between staff and Fluent Elders. A lack of planning time can place extra strain and confusion among all those involved. K’i’səmtkʷ, a fluent Elder with OKIB 2011-12 language nest project, shared her expectations when she started the project:

To be grandmother... I didn’t know that I had to correct the people that were trying to talk Sqilxw, but I found out...

I didn’t know what our role was. Just sitting there and telling stories until I asked, I did ask, what are we supposed to be doing? What is our role? (K’i’səmtkʷ - Pauline Archachan, May 04, 2012, transcript)

Without planning time, extra pressure is placed on younger workers to volunteer and get everything ready for the children, leaving less opportunity to build a team approach and engage Elders in the critical early stages.

I had nothing to do with it [setting up the language nest]. I just walked in. I hate to say it, but yeah, I just walked in and it was all set up and everything. It was a lot of work for the other girls and I wondered how they were going to make out. Yes. But they did pretty good. (K’i’səmtkʷ - Pauline Archachan, May 04, 2012, transcript)

Planning time also is necessary to enable everyone involved to share individual visions and goals. Rachel, the coordinator for OKIB’s language nest program from 2011 to 2012, explained:

[W]hen we started the program I thought the goal was that I was going to be the program planner but then we learned quick that we’d have to adapt because I knew I couldn’t be there full-time. That was a big reflection for me so then I think we went from having one, of course, the language right, that’s the number one goal but it’s… changed. So instead of having it one, it’s like each person has their own goal. So it starts off with one, then it’s divided into two, and then even now it’s divided into three because with the family… (Rachel Marchand, April 25, 2012, transcript)
The language nest program start-up happened at the last minute when a small amount of unexpected funding suddenly became available for the Fall of 2011. Consequently, challenges involved finding individuals willing and able to work in the program at the last minute, identifying a space to house the program, and finding children to participate. This particular program was OKIB’s second attempt to create a language nest and was the result of an interested group of parents supporting a proposal to FPCC. However, over a year lapsed between the application and the resulting funding opportunity, during which time the target group of children grew from approximately three to five years of age. The language nest funding opportunity almost entirely missed the “early years” of this group of children; and, by the time the program opened its doors in November of 2011, families had already enrolled them in the community’s English language Kindergarten program. Consequently, the language nest program had the unfortunate effect of negatively impacting Kindergarten and creating competition for a small group of five-year-old children. Tanya Saddleman the kindergarten teacher at the time is now Head Teacher for the community’s elementary school for grades 1-7. She explained how a lack of planning time created challenges for her:

It definitely did impact the kindergarten program. We were never consulted about children being pulled out of our classroom, we were just told it was going to be offered to our children and that it would be happening... I also read that it was expected that we would ‘catch up’ the children who decided to participate in the language nest program on the work that they would miss. This could not and did not happen and I made it clear to Lorraine that it wasn’t reasonable. What did happen was that I couldn’t teach anything new to the other students on the afternoons that the language nest was running. On these days we would work on some art, [activity] centres and extra review. As a head teacher now I can see...
how the extra review for students who stayed at kindergarten has helped their reading and math skills.

I think the only real questions I had was [sic] how much thought was put into this language nest. To me a language nest program could be beneficial to our community without negatively impacting existing programs. (Tanya, November 23, 2012, E-mail)

Tanya’s comments provide important insight into how a lack of opportunity for group planning and discussion with everyone involved unintentionally created difficulties for pre-established programs in the community. Nonetheless, these challenges are difficult to avoid given the short six month time periods in which funding becomes available to run programs. Without year round sustainable funding or any means to support the program past fiscal end, administrators are placed in a repeated situation of having their language nest programs start from scratch every Fall. This situation creates barriers to efforts to build on previous experiences or to nurture improved communication and relationships between all the people involved. Moreover, given emotions that are connected to the dark side of language, communities are in desperate need of group planning time prior to project delivery and throughout the program. By contrast, in the present day programs are forced to choose between planning time or program delivery.

Drawing from twenty-six years of language nest program delivery, Kathy Michel had developed some strategies for navigating these challenges. Cseyseten Language Nest shares some staff members with Chief Atahm School for grades 1-7. Kathy explained:

We figure it out by saying okay this is what Chief Atahm school needs for teaching… we share teaching, we share a bunch of things… like everyone is part-time here and part-time there and stuff and so we… that’s why we started a month later is because all of that has to sort of
Consequently, Kathy emphasized that because of all these mitigating factors, the language nest program is unable to be set up in ways that are responsive to parents' needs for convenience. However, instead of expressing frustration over the timing and late start, Kathy appears to have embraced this as the nature of the program and integrated it into a general approach year after year. In fact she describes the resulting inconvenience as supporting the program through helping to identify parents who are one hundred percent committed to the program vision and goals:

We do happen to get the parents that are specifically looking for language nest, that are willing to say and tell their daycare and their other child care providers that, “ok, whatever day they set... my kids are going to the nest and then you get the other two or whatever.” So that is the position that you want to be in, you want people to seek you out, you want those parents because if you don’t have those parents the world is going to beat you down... (Kathy Michel, September 25, 2012, transcript)

Kathy’s approach to these issues works for her language nest program, but contrasted with other participants who expressed wanting to create strong relationships between community programs. Kelly described the difficulties in creating a shared vision for a language nest within community as being attributed to scarcity of resources, and while her general approach appears to contrast with Kathy, in fact she suggests similar solutions to some of the challenges.

I would say I think the reason why we are competitive is because we are fighting for money and resources...you know the reality is we are dealing with silos, government silos right, so the community has to decide to get rid of them. Like they have to decide... we are not going to figure over our four year old, you know, let’s all sit down together and decide who is, like you know, where are the 4 year olds going to go... Like instead of having
Kelly and Kathy’s visions for the sharing of staff and funding across programs present a promising strategy that requires implementation at a leadership or administrative level.

The need for a shared program vision and opportunities for communication between everyone involved was illustrated by the experience of Michele, another worker in the 2011-2012 program. Michele echoed Rachel’s thoughts about the challenges of discussing goals and objectives in the midst of doing program delivery.

When Rachel decided to stay in school to complete her early childhood education diploma, she asked Michele to join the language nest program on the days that she was in school and unable to be at the nest. Consequently, Michele came on board at the last minute and in spite of long commute to the program from her home in Penticton. Michele’s three-hour round trip to work in the program left her with no time or energy to stay for group meetings outside of program delivery hours. As a result she reflected that she “never actually discussed any goals” with anyone in the program and she had her own goal “just to make it through, just to get ‘er done, just show up. Goals were not to speak any English.” Due to the rapid start up and delivery of the program, another worker was also unsure of the goals of the program. Lacey explained:

At the beginning I thought the goals were basically for the kids who were going into the Immersion school were to be basically ready for when they
went into there and our program had to be pretty much 100% immersion and that was challenging sometimes. *(Lacey Gregoire-Gabriel, April 19, 2012, transcript)*

The experiences of Rachel, Michele and Lacey demonstrate the challenges that face dedicated workers in the absence of support for program planning time. All three staff had individual goals for their own involvement in the program, but without support to discuss their visions, the only shared and clear goal was that of the funding agency for the program to be 100% full language immersion. Amazingly, this program achieved this goal and, consequently, the guiding vision of the funder for full immersion was helpful in making the program a success.

By contrast, from 2007 to 2009 the OKIB’s first attempt to implement a language nest found the aspirations of the funder for communities to delivery of 100% full language immersion too overwhelming and resulted in feelings of failure among key players and a difficult decision to abandon the program. Full language immersion was an incredibly challenging and over ambitious vision for everyone involved in Snc’c’amalaʔtn Early Childhood Education Centre. The early childhood educators who staffed the program and were the primary caregivers for children were already busy enough with trying to simply do their work duties. Lorraine Ladan (Principal) admitted that the additional expectation that they would learn Nsyilxcan simultaneously alongside the children was an overwhelming and unrealistic goal. Furthermore, the physical program spaces, the high numbers of children, and the older ages of fluent Elders created challenges that was difficult to navigate. The ages and activity levels of fluent Elders and children were a poor match and after
two years of dedicated efforts, a review of the program resulted in a difficult decision to prematurely end the project.

So one of the big barriers ended up being that it was too many children and not enough speakers... we had to divide between two rooms [and] it just wasn't a strong enough program... so we had good intentions but it never really did work and paired with that in this particular instance was the expectations of... for this... the outcomes in terms of the kids' language learning. We were not able to meet those... the Funder's wishes... which basically after I think a year we're supposed to be using I think almost 100% Nsyilxcən language in the room. Well it just wasn't enough time for the staff or the children to learn that amount of language. (Lorraine Ladan, September 27, 2012, transcript)

Back in 2007, communities that were approved by FPCC were eligible for multiyear (three) Pre-School Language Nest Program funding. Education Manager, Kevin Ned, echoed Lorraine’s comments about the tough decision to decline funding for the third year of the program. He explained: “100% language is tough when we don’t have 100% language speakers here in the community all the time” (April 23, 2012, transcript).

In the present day, the Pre-School Language Nest Funding Program is available to support program delivery for just six months of the year, from approximately September to the end of March of the following year. Since funding is not continuous and cannot be relied upon from year to year, language nest projects are short-term interventions that may happen one year but not the next, or two years on, one year off, etc., unless they can find financial support from other sources.

The participants described needing time for group planning in order to discuss goals and to create a shared vision for a community language nest program. For some participants an ideal language nest would share resources and staff with pre-existing programs in order to achieve continuity and long-term sustainability.
However, even with these factors in place, relationships between community programs for children may remain strained due to the emotions that are connected to the language and differing visions over what roles different programs should play during the early years. Language nest programs with a shared vision, shared resources and staff are less likely to experience interruptions in service for six months of every year. Extra stress is placed on everyone when there is uncertainty as to whether funds or resources may become available to extend service delivery beyond fiscal year end. Without continuous funding, administrators, coordinators, consultants, fluent Elders, language nest program workers and parents have no assurances if programs will re-open the following Fall. Moreover, the abrupt end to programs leaves no opportunities for everyone involved to engage in critical reviews on lessons learned. Lastly, because the children who participate in language nests are too little to engage in research, it is very difficult to gauge the impact of these factors on the children who attend the programs. However, as a parent I can testify that during the summer months my son Devon repeatedly asked me, “How come I don’t go to the language nest?” and “When will I go to language nest mom?” Unfortunately, I was only able to respond with a tentative and hopeful, “If it starts up again, maybe in the Fall, Devon”.

The roles and relationships of staff and fluent elders in program delivery

Language nests that are located in early childhood education centers tend to be the domain of a younger generation of mostly women early childhood educators. Within ECE settings, ECE workers tended to be seen as the “language teachers”; consequently, fluent Elders appeared to take a more passive role and to observe
classroom activities and provide correction on pronunciation when prompted, rather than engage directly with the children. Within a classroom or ECE setting, both staff and Elders may accept these very distinct roles. The fluent Elders in this research tended to respond to ECE and classroom settings by taking a support role as quiet observers and correcting the pronunciation of the beginner and intermediate adult speakers when needed. Drawing from many years of experience in Cseyseten Language Nest, Kathy observed: “Don’t outgrow, don’t have too many children, or too much chaos happening so that you really, really push your Elders away” (September 25, 2012, transcript).

The integration of language nest programs in pre-existing ECE programs created tremendous organizational change for workers who may have varying levels of interest, motivation and opportunity to learn their language. Issues also exist where ECE workers are not community members and may not have long-term relationships or commitments to the community. The defining feature of a “language nest” that is shared by both approaches is a more general concept of a place that children could come and learn the language. Exactly how much language children would hear and learn may depend upon many factors including the availability, and engagement of fluent Elders in interacting with the children and language proficiencies of staff.

Participants in this research described how language nest program planning time prior to service delivery, throughout and following program delivery is especially critical to nurture relationships and positive communication between program staff and fluent Elders. Ramona shared her experience in OKIB’s very first language nest.
So initially to set it up the teachers need to be in really close relationship with the Elders because if you start off the other way and if someone else has directed them coming into the classroom and that relationship is not set up, it is very, very difficult to go in there later and say, “er, ok, I want you to do this, this and this” because then you create the impression of being bossy and disrespectful... and all the teachers, not just one head teacher or one head supervisor having that relationship [with fluent Elders]. That relationship I think should be with all of the staff. *(Ramona Wilson, September 17, 2012, transcript)*

Kelly shared some key issues that can face fluent Elders and staff in an early childhood education program. Firstly, she stated, “We don’t have any Elders applying for the job”; secondly, fluent Elders and ECE workers have different ways of interacting with children; and, lastly, there is significant tension created in expecting Elders to join an organizational structure in which younger people occupy positions of authority over the speakers. A number of participants in this research talked about these extremely sensitive issues. Kelly explained:

> We are taught to respect Elders, meaning like younger people cannot boss an Elder around... so that’s our culture, it’s really awkward if you are the daycare coordinator or whatever, so then your Elder running your language nest is supposed to take direction from you. That is a really awkward set up and so uh... like the Elder is not going to take direction [from the younger person] and maybe the Childcare Coordinator knows, you know, more about early childhood development approaches and what strategies could work, but sometimes the Elders are like, “well this is how we do it... this is our way”. *(Kelly Terbasket, September 20, 2012, transcript)*

These are very challenging issues that can create considerable stress for both fluent Elders and younger workers. The lack of planning and relationship building time can create further strain and undermine any good intentions to sensitively approach the issues. K’isメントkʷ provided some insight from the perspective of a fluent Elder. She suggested:
I think we’ve got to meet before we start. And we have got to know who’s in charge and who isn’t, and make suggestions instead of, how shall I say it, instead of trying to change something on your own, ask. *(K’i’səmtkw* - Pauline Archachan, May 04, 2012, transcript)

K’i’səmtkw suggested that a successful approach is for fluent Elders and workers to meet prior to a session, for example, “If we tell the story and they do the actions, but we have got to meet before, they have to know what we are saying”. K’i’səmtkw’s suggestions were also reflected in the ideas of the younger workers: Rachel had observed that the fluent Elders liked to know what she was going to do right before class, and Lacey found it very helpful to connect with them before and during class. She shared, “And when I had the Elders there I would tell them I need help and they would step in. So they were really very helpful with that”.

Yeah I talked to them right from the beginning and I told them that would probably need their help right at the end of the circle time. And I got at the end Baby Anne to do one of the activities and we talked about that in the very beginning so she already knew. Yeah I was way more confident towards the end. *(Lacey Gregoire-Gabriel, April 19, 2012, transcript)*

Ramona made similar suggestions. She emphasized the necessity to initiate the relationships between fluent Elders and staff “ahead of time” with “enough warning” for both in order to allow for discussions on “how would you like to see more of this (idea) happening?” She hoped that “any discussion ahead of time” such as “What do you think of this? How do you try this?” would prevent “any feelings hurt” on both sides *(September 17, 2012, transcript)*.

In the previous chapter the participants shared the roles of the Elders in a “Granny’s House” approach to language nest delivery and this tended to contrast slightly with their roles within an early childhood education nest framework. In the
present day, early childhood education tends to be the domain of young active female workers and ECE training provides education on approaches for understanding early childhood development and interacting with children that may not be shared with fluent Elders. It was evident from a focus group with five fluent Elders that their life experiences, knowledge and views of the early years are based upon Indigenous ways of knowing, and these intuitive approaches are not commonly known or validated within conventional Western approaches to early childhood education or hegemonic paradigms in early childhood development. Language nest programs can be challenged with acknowledging and bringing together both early childhood educators and fluent Elders as true “experts” in their respective fields of early learning.

Workers in OKIB’s first two nest programs from 2007 to 2009 and 2011 to 2012 described fluent Elders in a support role for the younger workers. Lacey explained: “I would like to have the Elders there because if you can’t think of a word and what you need to say you can ask them because they know” (April 19, 2012, transcript). Both staff and fluent Elders described activities being led primarily by younger workers who have varying levels of language proficiencies. These accounts only varied when very deliberate efforts were made by workers to coax Elders to join in activities or when workers directly asked for help or informed Elders that they were unable to run activities alone due to a lack of language skills. A predicament emerges as to how to engage the fluent Elders when younger early childhood educators, who are highly skilled and motivated to work with children are positioned as the primary caregivers within an ECE structure. For example, the participants
both young and old alike, shared examples of younger women engaging children in activities that were enjoyable and stimulating. Moreover, dedicated staff worked through their limited skills in the target language in order to do so and must be acknowledged for their determination, commitment and passion. However, in communities where there are willing and interested fluent Elders available and ready to work with the children, the question then emerges as to what kinds of strategies would serve to uplift and engage fluent Elders and their ways of knowing when early childhood education approaches to early learning tend to favour young and mobile workers who are trained to support children primarily through a Western early childhood development paradigm.

Storytelling provides a poignant example of how these issues can play out in service delivery. For example, in interviews both Lacey and Michele described story time as a highlight of the 2011 to 2012 OKIB language nest program. Michele Johnson describes herself as an intermediate speaker in her thesis and her enthusiasm for learning language through story (Johnson 2013). Michele was highly motivated to share traditional Okanagan stories with the children. She told stories that had been adapted for children by the Paul Creek Language Association and by using associated pictures that went with each vocabulary word and sentence:

The kids loved the stories, especially the Captikwl stories and they’d scooch up really close when I was telling the story. They’d try and get closer and they’d be elbowing each other, “I can’t see, I can’t see”.
(Michele K. Johnson, April 19, 2012, transcript)

Michele demonstrates a passion for storytelling, and she described these storytelling sessions as a highlight of her experience working in the program. This is illustrated in a picture that she drew for herself to remember one day where the
language came alive in the classroom, since she did not have a camera to take a photograph:

Illustration 5.1. Captikwl storytelling in the Language Nest

Lacey also enjoyed Michele’s story time sessions, and she too described them in detail and as a very rewarding part of the program. Lacey and Michele even found a way to evaluate the progress of the children’s language acquisition, which is a key measure of success of any language program. She described a simple system using flyswatters as an evaluation technique to measure if the children had learned the vocabulary words and sentences from the traditional stories that Michele had just taught:

Yeah, and it was neat because some of them they would be right up beside her and sit besides her listening and then after the story they would – we kind of called it Sp’ant [swat in Nsyilxcen] – they would play hit the picture with the fly swatter and so they would have a different picture with the different scenes and they would have to hit it and then we could see if they were really understanding it. (Lacey Gregoire-Gabriel, April 19, 2012, transcript)
The traditional story materials were one method that the teachers and Elders agreed produced excellent language delivery. The story was delivered at a beginner level that the children could understand, but the full meaning of the story was still apparent to the Elders. However, there was still no room for Elders to really interact within the lesson. In fact, Elders’ speaking skills are very high, and it can be difficult to have them engage at a repetitive beginner level. Knowing this is why we continued to search for a way to have a proper language nest with younger children, so that Elders and teachers would not have to be limited to “language delivery” as a second-language, teachers would not have to focus on raising their proficiency through teaching, and the Elders could focus on natural language speaking.

From everyone’s perspectives the Captikwl story time sessions were a great success: Michele enjoyed sharing the stories, the children appeared to be engaged and interested in the activity, and the staff gained satisfaction from being able to measure and evaluate the success of their efforts. The greater issue that emerged was that the fluent Elders who were present in the story telling sessions, were not engaged in any way during the activity. (An Elder from another community produced the recording of the story). In a focus group session, the five Elder participants talked about stories with great engagement and enthusiasm, and it was apparent that among them the two men were very skilled and valued storytellers within their family and in the community. However, fluent Elders did not play a role in the telling of traditional stories in the 2011 to 2012 language nest because the stories were being taught at a beginner level that was the level the kids were at. Michele shared that the Elders tended to sit back and signal their approval or disapproval as they
watched the activities from the sidelines; she found it especially rewarding when the 
Elders appeared happy and approving of her efforts. In describing the activities of 
the language nest program, staff and fluent Elders appeared fairly content with their 
respective roles, agreeing that the younger teachers were best suited to the active 
“jumping around” that beginner teaching requires. K’i’semtkw described:

They are young, they can jump around. I couldn’t you know. I couldn’t 
jump around like I used to. When I first started, you know, before I had the 
stroke, I would dance for the kids, jump around for the kids and do 
everything but no... Yeah. So it’s good for them. (K’i’semtkw - Pauline 
Archachan, May 04, 2012, transcript)

Michele enjoyed the activities but in her interview she talked about a difficulty in 
engaging fluent Elders with beginner-level children in the classroom. Her account 
agrees with Lacey’s that it really helped to speak with the Elders beforehand:

The Elders, as teachers, now and then, would understand that I wanted 
them to just fill the air with talk, so that was an on-going sense of 
improvement and a real source of satisfaction when they would talk or join 
in on a song. Usually you would have to tell them before hand, “I really 
want you to speak, really want you to help with the hand washing.” 
(Michele K. Johnson, April 19, 2012, transcript)

A lack of supported planning time created challenges communicating outside of 
service delivery hours. The lack of funds to support team meetings meant that 
Michele was unable to spend time with the Elders outside of program operation 
hours. Michele and Lacey’s accounts of storytelling in the language nest is just one 
among many possible examples of some of the successes and challenges that can 
face staff and fluent Elders as they explore their roles and responsibilities in a 
language nest program. Many participants discussed these issues in the research
interviews. For example, Ramona shared general examples of successful strategies that she has witnessed in other programs.

I tend to see Elders in classrooms and if the teachers are not really closely connected with them, everybody does their own thing. Where in classrooms that I've seen where the Elders are very closely connected with the teachers, they work on things together, then they both have ideas of what they are working on with the children or talking about certain topics or whatever it is, and that's a more cohesive environment. *(Ramona Wilson, September 17, 2012, transcript)*

The issue of how younger workers can respectfully communicate with fluent Elders can be a very delicate issue for both parties that could be supported by continuous planning time throughout the program. This would enable everyone involved to review what is and what is not working with specific activities and approaches, as well as to see if service delivery is meeting the objectives of the shared vision.

**Workers finding their voice**

Within an ECE framework the younger workers tended to describe themselves as the “teachers” in the nest program. This was hard for Lacey because as a beginner speaker, her language abilities were limited to just a few words. She recalled: “It was chaotic in the beginning and we didn’t really know what to do but after a couple of weeks it got really smooth and especially the stories that we did and the songs” *(April 19, 2012, transcript)*. Michele explains the high tensions involved in teaching in immersion for new speakers.

Well when I was teaching, I was really focused on the kids and my brain was so full and it was scary at first that I just could focus on the kids and say the sentences and that was all I could do. I couldn’t even do another single thing. I couldn’t even make eye contact with the Elders. It was too much. I would just narrow in [on delivering the story, games and graphics in the language]. *(Michele K. Johnson, April 19, 2012, transcript)*
She shared that it was a strain having “to just jump right into relationship building while you are on stage in front of five year-olds and Elders” (April 19, 2012, transcript). Unlike Rachel and Lacey, Michele did not have a pre-existing relationship with the Elders or the children and was only distantly related to the Elders. Adding to the strain, she also did not have a background in early childhood education and was not used to spending time with children. Michele and Lacey admitted to feeling overwhelmed in the first few weeks while they grew used to the tensions of immersion, classroom management, and establishing a working relationship with the Elders.

Michele struggled with the feeling that her language abilities were being “judged” while she was teaching, and experiencing multiple roles as teacher, lesson planner, and learner. After a few sessions, she was able to gently explain to K’i’səmtkw that she really valued her corrections, but it was easier if K’i’səmtkw corrected her after the lesson or activity rather than during. Speaking of Michele’s difficulty in teaching while being corrected, K’i’səmtkw explained that Michele and other learners need to develop a thicker skin:

> They have got to take correction. They can’t be embarrassed or get upset about it. If you want to learn the language, you’ve got to take correction or just continue what you are doing. You’ve got to hear it from the speakers, the fluent speakers. She shouldn’t have gotten offended. She shouldn’t have gotten nervous. (K’i’səmtkw - Pauline Archachan, May 04, 2012, transcript)

Two of the new teachers also found it a challenge to deal with standard classroom management. Getting the kids to sit down was a challenge in the first few days, as Michele describes:
Well, classroom management was a challenge when all you could say was “come” and “sit”. I remember that. “Come.” “Sit”. “Come”. “Go”. “Sit”. [Lots of laughter]. I remember very clearly. And the Elders are looking at you: you are losing control here! And you’re just trying to go, “come” and “sit” and my face is going all red. (Michele K. Johnson, April 19, 2012, transcript)

Due to these challenges, workers developed strategies to motivate the children and reward them for cooperating within the group. Lacey explained.

Yeah so in the circle time to keep them focused, we would have a bag and they would get to pick something out of the bag – and it was usually just a little ball or a little heart – just something that they could hold or touch. And so if some of the kids were kind of wandering off, they would be wondering what everybody else was getting and so they would come back. And then if they were having a hard day, then sometimes we would get them to be a helper, or ask them to get one of the animals, or just ask them a question and then they’d be like, “oh they are talking to me now”. (April 19, 2012, transcript)

Rachel also drew from her Early Childhood Development experiences and education in order to encourage the children. In particular, she hoped to develop a sense of ownership and leadership in the children by “giving them some control over what they want to play with because they are wanting that and they are wanting to step up” (Rachel Marchand, April, 24, 2012, transcript).

As the “language teachers” responsible for interacting with the children, nest staff may be under tremendous pressure to engage in intensive adult language learning so that they can function in a full immersion language program. Michele described herself as a low intermediate speaker at the time that she worked in the OKIB 2011 to 2012. In her doctoral thesis, she reflected on her experience in the language nest:
The first month is challenging—as an intermediate speaker, I found myself right back in Grizzly’s den, learning as I went, getting language headaches, and addressing challenges daily. (Johnson, 2013, p.170)

She described the first few weeks as “awful” in terms of the stress and tension that she felt as an adult learner attempting to teach the language to children in front of fluent Elders. However, it is important to note that this was not the experience of other nest staff. Rachel did not comment at all, either positively or negatively, on what it was like for her as a beginner speaker to maintain full immersion in becoming “language teachers” to the children.

Language learning support, such as intensive based language classes and mentor-apprentice learning opportunities with fluent Elders, would enhance these experiences and perhaps reduce some of the “language tension” involved in teaching children as a beginner or intermediate learner. Lacey shared some strategies that supported her including reviewing at home with her Gramma and Papa the words and phrases that she anticipated needing in upcoming language nest sessions. As the daughter of a fluent Elder, Nistah-cee has unlimited opportunities to learn, practice and plan useful key phrases and words. Access to fluent Elders is clearly a tremendous asset for staff of language nest programs and could greatly reduce “the stress [that] is implicit in second-language learning” (Johnson, 2013, p.201). Johnson (2013) has noted that “[s]tress is also created by Indigenous colonial contexts” and she comments that, “[i]t would have helped if we had known that tension was implicit in SLA (second language acquisition) and been trained in techniques to minimize tensions” (p.201).
The stories of participants in this research described early childhood education as the domain of young active (usually female) ECE certified workers with varying degrees of language proficiencies, from complete beginner to low intermediate level. Many participants described multiple factors converging within an ECE centre or framework that lead to these younger women being the teachers of the language for children. Subsequently, in this setting fluent Elders tended to occupy a less prominent role in sharing their old time ways and natural fluent language with the children. Adult language learning for younger staff therefore becomes a critical issue that is difficult to address within the constraints of program funding.

Many of the younger workers reflected on their own language learning, shared high levels of motivation to learn more language, and questioned within themselves what kinds of language interventions would support them to become more proficient or push them beyond a “plateau”. One young language teacher felt strongly that the younger workers require intensive language learning interventions and one-on-one time with fluent Elders that would allow for them to focus on learning without the distractions of caring for young children. Michele shared some promising practices from Kalispel in the US:

Kalispel have a program to get their teachers, all their teachers to fluency in three years. They have a million dollars in funding and they are in their second year. They are running with it. They started with twelve adults, and I think a couple dropped out so they have to ten, so ten but their teacher Jessie Fountain who is 22 years old, she’s basically fluent now. Basically… More fluent than I would ever hope to get. (Michele K. Johnson, April 19, 2012, transcript)

Kelly also raised the issue of adult language training and she shared promising practices from the South Okanagan where ECE workers spend one hour a day
engaged in intensive language learning without the children present. She questioned:

So what if a community was to say, “we are not going to have any ECD programs this year, sorry, we are going to make a sacrifice here and we are going to use all our money to train these teachers in the language one whole year. Are you ready for that? Like are you up for that? Is that how dedicated you are to the language? I mean that would be huge. But it would be like, you would actually have a pool of resources after that. But it’s a big sacrifice and then you might lose some of those teachers. (Kelly Terbasket, September 20, 2012, transcript)

These suggestions for promising approaches to adult language learning are challenged by a lack of qualified ECE workers who live in the communities, and consequently ECE centres are often forced to hire non-Indigenous early childhood educators that often have no long-term relationships with community.

Motivation to learn the language was extremely high among the younger generations of participants in this research; however, many were looking for support or intensive language learning interventions that would suit their personal needs, life circumstances or learning styles. Rachel had a great interest in learning more language; she shared that she had “hit my plateau” in terms of language abilities, but she found that her pronunciation improved during the four months that she worked in the language nest (April 25, 2012, transcript). Michele talked about wanting to spend one-on-one time with a fluent Elder in order to improve her pronunciation, however, her fear of her language abilities being judged tended to create a barrier for her forming relationships with fluent Elders who see correction of younger speakers as a critical part of their role. She was able to work one-on-one with Q'iyusalxqun (Herman Edward) the next year, in a school program in Keremeos BC, a relationship that really improved her pronunciation, as she describes in her dissertation (2013).
Coming back to OKIB after “several generations” of absence meant that Michele did not have pre-existing relationships with the fluent Elders. This was not the case with Lacey who lives with her Papa and Gramma Leonard and Virginia who are fluent speakers. Consequently, Lacey was able to practice her language on a continuous basis in her home as well as ask for help when she needed it. Knowing that more time is needed, Lacey expressed an interest in taking intensive three-week courses so that she can focus fully on improving her language. Working in a language nest had fuelled Lacey’s motivation to learn, however, as a mother of one and full time employee, she found it challenging to dedicate time in her busy schedule.

Language learning is an emotional issue for many participants. Emotions included sadness and grief from not knowing their own language, concern and sadness over a future without our fluent Elders, trauma from years spent away from the language while attending Indian residential school, intergenerational losses experienced from the decisions of parents and older generations to keep their children away from the language, fears about being judged for low language abilities, fears about being judged for being a “wanna be speaker”, criticism from fluent speakers and other learners, fears about being judged for poor pronunciation, and confusion about how to relearn the language as an adult. Some adult learners experienced tension between their concerns and worries about disrespecting or hurting the feelings of fluent Elders by learning the language from curriculum that has been designed for adult learners, and their motivation to participate in any language learning opportunities that are available. In their desire to learn, adult
language learners tended to see value in all available language learning resources and an interest in trying out different approaches in the hope of finding a good fit with their emotional needs, life circumstances, schedules and learning styles.

How would it be... um... language nest in five years? What I think it could be without the Elders... it can't be... so I really want to learn my language more so that I can continue a language nest and encourage other parent to do it... even if it is taking classes and having a mentor Elder with you while you are learning to pronounce the words the right way because pronouncing the words the right way... you can read them and you can make up what you think it sounds like on paper but when it comes out it is a little different and we don't want to change that...we do not want to change that language because it's a ... it's an ancient language I suppose and we want to preserve that and it is very, very important for the Elders to have that preserved, not changed... it's like changing their past... it's like when they pass on we have to respect them... all our relations. *(Nistah-cee, November 29, 2013, transcript)*

Several participants had taken intensive language courses offered in Keremeos BC, through Paul Creek courses during the summer. The Paul Creek curriculum includes extensive recordings of a fluent Elder, as well as repetition, graphics, games, and mini-dialogues as a way to learn the recorded Elder’s words. Participants in these courses tended to see intensive language curriculum for adults courses as a practical way to supplement one-on-one learning with fluent Elders; not as a substitute for learning from fluent speakers or as a way to take the pressure off of Elders to continue to repeat beginner material for learners. Language learning is emotionally charged for many of the adult learners in this research. Older and younger generations alike recognize the urgency in the situation. Consequently the younger people who want to learn their language described needing support: they need one-on-one time with fluent Elders; they need time within their employment day to take language classes; they need to attend intensive language courses in the
summer in order to speed up their learning and to supplement their time with fluent Elders; and they need safe language learning opportunities in their own community. As well, some described needing to learn some language in other communities where, like babies, they can “sound funny” while they begin to get familiar with the “tongue twister[s]” without fears of being judged for “saying it wrong” (Mona Tronson). Adult language learners and fluent Elders share a profound respect for their language. Eric provided insight that speaks to the heart of some of the differences in feelings that may exist between the generations.

Elders... they learned their language the natural way and so they don’t know how they learned... you know, all of a sudden one day I woke up and I knew how to talk, but if I can help them as a student, “I need this,” you know, “I need to hear you... I need you to correct me... I need you to share with me these words... you know, and these understandings... so that the way that you talk and the way that I listen are really critical...

I am the same as those little ones in learning... if I can at the end of the fifteen weeks or something, be able to converse a little better with those Elders that have been my teachers then I have accomplished something... nothing else really matters... all that matters is that however we do it and whatever happens... first is the opportunity... You have to create an opportunity for whoever is going to learn whether they are little or people our age to interact daily and on a daily basis with speakers, you are bound to learn something. (Eric Mitchell, October 04, 2013, transcript)

The stories of participants described many promising practices as they try to find their voice in the language and feel their way back to a future relationship with their language. Adult learners dreamed of moving their language proficiencies beyond “baby talk” to being able to speak in full sentences, and past plateaus in the beginner levels of language and towards levels of language proficiency that would reconnect them with their fluent Elders so that they can laugh, hear the stories and
have good times together all in the language that they cherish and wish to share with the children and generations into the future.

The role of language nests in preparing children for school

Many of the participants in my research saw a significant role in language nest programming for preparing children for their future partial language immersion elementary school. The children of many of the parent supporters of the 2010 language nest proposal had already turned five by the time that funding became available to operate a program from 2011 to 2012, and consequently, school readiness became one of main goals of the program. As the coordinator of the program and a student in an early childhood education program, Rachel drew from her training in early childhood education to create a program that would support the children to adjust to the partial immersion program at Nkmaplqs I Snmamayatn Kl Sqilxwtet, become familiar with the school setting, and be able to join in the end of year school performance. She stated that many of her goals for the children were social, in becoming comfortable with hearing Okanagan:

So I think some of those goals for me for the children were socially were they able to adjust from the first, “are you speaking Okanagan? Why? And then coming half way through and saying, “we are here to learn it” and then at the end to just more switching from the English to the Okanagan. So I saw that and in one particular boy because I worked one-on-one with him so to me that was the hugest because he got it. The rest of them… some are more than (others), you know, and at this stage of the game they are all saying it if we are having to say it without us having to say, “ʔumnt? ʔumnt?” (repeat). They’ve picked it up now. (Rachel Marchand, April 25, 2012, transcript)

In spite of many of the challenges that have been described by participants in ECE nest approaches, many of Rachel’s goals were met within the four months that the
program ran; the two other workers and parents described the children learning and speaking the language, growing in confidence, and happy and excited about attending the program. These are tremendous achievements given that all of the children were five years old and had therefore already established fluency in English as their first language. Michele observed that the children caught on to the strangeness of immersion at first, but when the lessons were fun and engaging, they barely seemed to notice that the entire program was delivered in the Nsyilxcen language:

Yeah, I was saying, “blah, blah, blah, blah” [Nsyilxcen immersion] and he walked right up to me, I think it was [boy’s name] and he says, “Are you going to keep talking like that?” “Ki” [yes]. It would have took him that long to notice it was a different language. It was like they’d figure it out, “You are speaking a different language aren’t you?” “I’m on to you!” Then they don’t notice. If you keep it fun they don’t even notice that you are speaking Nsyilxcen, they can’t even tell. (Michele K. Johnson, April 19, 2012)

Two parents of children from the program participated in this research and they both described an increase in language learning and speaking at home. Bernice explained the huge increases in her son’s speaking abilities at home.

He comes home every day and he talks about the different animals that he’s learning. He’s singing the nursery rhymes that are being taught. He talks about “plain”, eagle; he talks about the other animals that he’s learning. He says the prayers at every suppertime and we let him start the prayers off himself. He’ll count and he’s singing the colour song, so I know that he does the numbers, the colours, the songs and that he’s doing the prayers, and I just find it so amazing because he seems to be like a little sponge. He’s just soaking it all in and he’s learning so much because of the language nest. (Bernice Jensen, April 24, 2012, transcript)

Bernice had older children in attendance at Nkmaplqs I Snmamaytn KI Sqilxwtet and she planned to put her son in the program in Grade 1. She drew from her
knowledge of the Chief Atahm school’s immersion preschool and kindergarten programs to describe support for language immersion school preparedness in her own community, in this way:

Coming from Chase, you know, I know they’ve been doing it there for years. I think maybe it could be close to 12 years… So it’s my hope that they will continue to do that, especially if our population at the Immersion School has really increased from the smaller amount to I think 30, I think it’s really going to benefit the kids… to help those students that go on to the Immersion School and that’s why we wanted [my son] in the language nest, because we already know that he’s going to be registered in grade one… and do the language there. (Bernice Jensen, April 24, 2012, transcript)

Another parent with older children attending Nkmalpq I Snmamayatn Kl Sqilxwtet shared similar aspirations for her children. This parent initially believed that the language nest would be like a language immersion kindergarten program:

Well I just thought that it would give (son) more of an opportunity to engage in more of the language and what the other kids (his siblings) were doing, because all of them were in the program… So just wanted him to be more involved in it and just to expose him to it more often. (Parent – Anonymous, September 22, 2012, transcript)

This parent described initially believing that the language nest would be like a language immersion kindergarten program.

I thought that there was going to be more, yeah I guess doing what they are doing [in kindergarten], like reading and writing and math in the Okanagan language. That’s what I thought the language nest was… was bringing those concepts into them to get them ready for grade one, two and three… I thought it was going to be a bit more intense, well not intense, not intense, but I guess more like… work, work. Like grade one but with Okanagan stuff. I thought it was like an Okanagan [kindergarten]. (Parent – Anonymous, September 22, 2012, transcript)

The hopes and expectations of this parent raise the issue of what kinds of supports are needed for children who are to enter a language immersion (full or partial)
elementary school program, and in particular, what are their parents hopes and visions for school preparedness during preschool and kindergarten? These two parents and all the staff from the 2011 to 2012 language nest program saw great value in creating opportunities for field trips to the grade 1 language immersion program for five-year-old kindergarten children that were future students.

I think that overall that the program did help [my son] because he didn’t miss out on regular school and he still got the same grades as other kids, so I think it was beneficial, especially if you were going to send them to an Okanagan [language] school, so I would put [my youngest son] in the same program again if it were offered because it doesn’t make them scared to go to grade one. They are not startled when they start the language program. (Parent – Anonymous, September 22, 2012, transcript)

This research gave evidence to a strong desire among participants to see language immersion offered at the kindergarten level to children who would be going to attend Nk’mip’qs Sn̓namaytən KI Squíxwltə, and parents and staff of the 2011 to 2012 language nest program described being witness to tangible benefits to their five year old children.

Language nest programs are typically intended for infants, toddlers to preschool age children (age 0 to 4 years). Participants described how the 2011 to 2012 language nest program was attended by five year old children only because those were “the parents that had the most interest” and had shown “a commitment from the families” (September 27, 2012, transcript) in the original 2010 proposal that had led to the funding opportunity to start a nest. Moreover, funding availability came so suddenly that the community did not have much time to explore possibilities for attracting children from younger age groups. As discussed earlier in the chapter,
these circumstances combined to create a situation where children left their pre-existing kindergarten program for nine hours every week to attend the language nest. Unintended additional strain and learning constraints that emerge for everyone impacted by language nest development and delivery could be somewhat mitigated by increased opportunities to have been engaged in planning and creating a shared vision for a language nest.

Participants in my research envisioned a role for language immersion for five-year-old children; however, this age group presents unique challenges that are not commonly raised, acknowledged or discussed within the area of language nest development and delivery. The majority of research participants perceived language nest programs as intended for younger children. Nonetheless, the experiences of the 2011 to 2012 OKIB language nest for kindergarten aged children are extremely valuable and point to the need for creating a shared vision, as well as ensuring continuity in language revitalization planning at a larger administrative level.

“Mom you need to come to the language nest”

My four-year-old son Devon was attending OKIB’s 2013 to 2014 language nest program during the months that I was completing my doctoral thesis. Before we go to sleep at night we often start to use little phrases and sentences with one another while we are reading his bedtime story. Other times we will sing little songs together in Okanagan. On one particular evening, we picked out a children’s book *Samwel nat l’iw’s* (Sam and his Dad) that was created in a collaboration between Eric Mitchell, Adam Gregoire, Pauline Archachan, Leonard Gregoire, and Eric’s wife Christine Marchand and their son Sam Mitchell. We looked at the illustrations by Eric
and followed along with the accompanying CD that told the story in the Okanagan language. We listened to the CD and “read” the book twice. Afterwards Devon astounded me by giving me a glimpse into his experience as child language learner.

I was copying them [fluent Elders] in my head… That’s because I wanted to learn what they were saying in the story. (My son Devon, age 4)

By now I should be used to being surprised and amazed by Devon’s insights, as I regularly ask him what new Nsyilxcen language he has learned. More recently, he has begun to respond to my questions with a cheeky smile before he tells me, “Mom, you need to come to the language nest…” In fact, this has become Devon’s mantra in response to any of my efforts to engage him in conversation about his language learning. I suspect that partly he gets bored of me asking him, and on the other hand, I sense his eagerness to have me there with him, learning alongside him. My motivation for asking him about his day is to look for ways that I can support him by using any words and phrases that he may be learning. I share this story simply because it gets to the heart of the important issue of what role parents and family play in supporting their children to learn their language (Hinton, 2013).

The role of parents and families in supporting their children to learn the language was raised by most of the participants in my research. In fact, all of the participants discussed the issue and expressed that parental and family involvement is an important factor in revitalizing the language. However, the two parents who participated in this program described realistic barriers that prevented them from becoming more visibly involved in the program.

I think we’ve been involved at home but not so much at school, I think because we’ve been trying to get our children involved in the sports and
other extra-curricula activities... and it's really hard. I find it important for them to do that as well so we don’t get to the school as much as I’d like.  
(Bernice Jensen, April 24, 2012, transcript)

You know what, that is such a difficult question because so many families are doing so many different things and maybe if there was something that they could do actively on line. Some sort of interactive communication that way because anyone can go to their cellphone or their computer or check their whatever right... Yeah, activities, like some kind of interaction to be more involved, like how you want it... Give them five questions to do with the kids. Yeah, throughout the day... Yeah, you could even include a little dialogue so that they could hear the words of whatever you are trying to teach in Okanagan so that the parents could hear that, because then you’re reinforcing it again and if the parents could hear that they can listen to it or do it altogether.  
(Parent – Anonymous, September 22, 2012, transcript)

Participant stories of children’s learning from homes in which the language is used demonstrated the benefits of family involvement in learning. One five-year-old girl actively made efforts to stay at the same level as the larger group even though her Okanagan language abilities were higher than the other children because she had learned many words and sentences from her parents at home.

[A five year old girl] who everyone was like, “she’ll be the leader”, she was still really good about staying with the group and I think she sat back and was like, “where are they at” and I didn’t point it out to her to be like, “tell them, tell them”. So everyone was on the same page, even someone like [your son]... And very now and then [this five year old girl] would step up to the plate and want to be the leader, but that was only after she seen the rest of them wanting to use the pointers and be the leader.  
(Rachel Marchand, April 25, 2012, transcript)

Nistah-cee also noticed links between learning support at home and my youngest son’s learning at the language nest.

Devon is ‘cause he gets to learn it at home. See, that's what I mean parents have to get more involved and in speaking at least some words that they are learning that the kids are learning too, so it’s important, I think important for the parents to come at least once a week, to come and sit in with their children once a week I think, or you know once a month
As parent I can positively affirm that my youngest son Devon, currently four years old, shows great joy when I talk to him using my rudimentary Okanagan language abilities. My youngest two children, now ages four and seven years old, have now participated in four different language nest program spanning the periods 2007 to 2009, 2011 to 2012, 2012 to 2013 and at the time of this writing, Devon is now attending the current 2013 language nest program. Drawing from four years of experience as a parent of language nest children, I can affirm that my efforts to learn language and speak it at home consistently go up dramatically with the start of every language nest program and I make conscious efforts to engage Devon in Okanagan whenever I know the words or phrases for situations that we are in. However, this is not easy and over the years I have struggled to juggle multiple responsibilities as an employed parent, graduate student and mother of five children to attend language classes. I have finally come to the conclusion that children’s extra-curricular activities and my own yoga practice prevent me from committing to regular attendance at weekly language classes. Following the completion of my doctoral I plan to accompany Devon one day a week in the language nest program, continue to practice my Okanagan language with fluent Elders, and seek out, support and attend any intensive language learning courses that become available in the Okanagan Nation.
The issue of how much commitment to language learning is needed by parents of language nest children was raised by many of the participants.

How are you going to get the parents involved… we have always asked that question. Some people say you are teaching the little ones but the parents aren’t learning. How are they going to interact, how are they going to keep that going? *(Mona Tronson, April 04, 2013, transcript)*

Kathy Michel shared a range of experiences with parental involvement in the language nest and in learning the language. She described an inspiring story of a single father who attended the language nest with his child. This arrangement worked quite well and he was able to pick up quite a bit of language from being in the nest.

Oh my gosh… his sign language was so good that even if he didn’t know, he would like to sign or use his rudimentary language… he played with the kids and he did all sorts of things… he really picked up language fast, whatever he could, and incorporated it so some people can actually come up to speed really quickly… *(Kathy Michel, September 25, 2012, transcript)*

On the other hand, some “parent and child combinations really upset the whole cart” *(ibid)*, as was my experience of attending the 2011 to 2012 language nest program with my son Dempsey. Mona recalled, “I think you said that you don’t go there because your child acts up, right… and that was the kindergarten… and they were pretty rambunctious” *(April 04, 2013, transcript)*. Kathy recalled earlier times in the language nest program when parents were asked to commit to language learning however this approach was discontinued: “We used to have something like that for our parents but honestly it was more of a headache than anything else…like nobody wants the job of being the policeman and everybody is adults…” *(September 25, 2012, transcript)*. Drawing from her experiences in Aboriginal communities
throughout the province Kelly also discussed some of the most challenging and pervasive barriers to involving parents and families.

How do you get parents involved when we are talking about the current context of… where we are at in our historical, you know, context right. When you think about our communities are still healing and we still have a lot of social issues that we face… you might have a lot or a majority of our families in some of our communities… that are trying to survive from day to day and they don’t have the energy or the capacity to go to the language nest in the evening or something. They might say language is important, they might say that but actually getting to the language program with the children is not a steady thing. (Kelly Terbasket, September 20, 2012, transcript)

The participants in my research included parents, staff, fluent Elders and administrators of language nest programs and there was an overwhelming consensus that families need to be involved in language nest programs, however, participants described multiple challenges and barriers for families. Some promising practices emerged however; in particular, Family Night was described by all of the participants involved as an overwhelming success in the OKIB 2011 to 2012 language nest program. Rachel shared that up to fourteen separate families attended the Family Night, including children and families from neighbouring homes who were involved in the daytime language nest program. Other suggestions by participants for strategies to engage families in language learning to support their child included language immersion parent and tot drop-in groups and language immersion Mother Goose stylized singing evening drop-in programs. Ultimately, the need for parents to learn the language was articulated by Ramona who posed the question: “Why send the children to learn the language if you’re not going to learn it?” (September 17, 2012, transcript)
Chapter 6. The organic development of language nests

The findings of this study have demonstrated some of the potential benefits and challenges that may be involved in the initial development and implementation of language nests in Indigenous communities here in British Columbia, Canada. In other parts of the world, language nest programs have shown great success in “arresting the decline of aboriginal languages” (Fleras, 1987, p. 23), and in creating new generations of speakers of endangered languages (Stiles, 1997). Indeed, graduating children from languages nests in Hawai’i and Aotearoa, for example, are proficient in bilingualism and biculturalism (Stiles, 1997). Estimates from Hawai’i maintain that, by 1999, approximately 1,800 children had learned to speak Hawai’ian through immersion, including nests (Warner, 1999). In Aotearoa, the revitalization of te reo Maori speakers went from just 20% in the 1980s when the nest movement began, to approximately 50% of speakers in 2006 (Gallegos et al., 2010). In Wales, the Republic of Ireland and Scotland, the language-medium preschools have played a role in the shift from language endangerment towards maintenance (Baker, 1997).

My research explored “the early years” of language nest development; that is, how a community moves from no awareness of a language nest concept, no cohesive group of concerned parents, no funding, no physical space, no infrastructure, and no support, to running a early learning language immersion program for children. The stories shared by the participants in this research paint a picture of how language nest development is experienced by involved coordinators, workers, early childhood educators, parents and Elders.
Implications of this research

In many cases, participants in my research shared how their awareness of success stories from other parts of the world had inspired the development of the language nests in their own communities. The findings in Chapters Four and Five presented the insights, promising practices and challenges that were experienced as participants attempted to translate and apply the language nest concept in their own community setting. Fleras (1987) has commented on the potential for the language nest concept, specifically Te Kōhanga Reo, to be replicated in Canada “were more aboriginal leaders aware of this experiment in language retention” (p.23). And yet, as Navarro (2008) asserts, “there is no clearly defined roadmap to follow” when it comes to language immersion:

Every tribe’s native language situation is unique and what works for one group may not work for another. Simply stated, there is no one fool-proof method… There are no pedagogical materials ready for purchase or trained language instructors who know how to create curriculum that is useful for teaching children a new language…the process of reversing language shift is difficult because there is no clearly defined roadmap to follow. You start from scratch and work from there. You have to be creative and willing to adapt to whatever situation you find yourself in. Above all, one must be completely devoted… (Navarro, 2008, p.155).

Indeed, clear differences in the geography and language status of Indigenous communities in Aotearoa, Hawai‘i, and even across Canada prevents the “uncritical emulation of models and practices in other countries” and “should be tempered by a careful examination… to ensure that inappropriate or ineffectual ones are not advocated or adopted (Weaver, 1983, p. 109 cited in Fleras, 1987, p.23).

My research shows the power of bearing witness to other Indigenous peoples living their languages in the language nests through site visits, networking,
conference or video presentations. My findings demonstrate that there is a need for more information on language nests in Canada since raised awareness at the community level may generate more support for language nest development. For example, there is very little awareness that these innovative programs have already been in operation for almost thirty years in Canada, in spite of the fact that the Kahnawake Mohawk and the Secwepemc Adams Lake community language nests have been in operation since the 1980s. Even as a graduate researcher with access to a large number of electronic journal databases, I experienced multiple barriers to accessing information, such as language barriers to materials from Latin America and challenges in accessing on-line full text documents from Aotearoa. In fact, it was not until I had completed my doctoral defence that I learned of one of the first language nests in Canada, the Cree Way Project, which was developed and implemented in 1988. This is owing to the fact that there is almost no information available about this government funded and supported project, aside from its inclusion in a short academic paper by Stiles (1987). Perhaps it is not surprising that the participants in my research (i.e. Kathy, Ramona, Bill and Kevin) who had been strong advocates of developing language nest programs tended to have either studied language revitalization in undergraduate or postgraduate programs, or visited Te Kōhanga Reo sites in Aotearoa in person.

In recent years, the visibility of language nest programs has increased on the Internet. In April 2014, First Peoples Cultural Council released a Language Nest Handbook (FPCC, 2014) that includes the names of communities that are running language nest programs in BC, as well as practical tips on how to develop and
implement a language nest program. The Handbook was created by First Peoples Cultural Council through in person consultations with FPCC-funded nest programs in BC, and co-written by Kathy Michel, a participant in my research. Communities with Language Nests in BC are listed as including: Chief Atahm School, Wo'umxhl Simalgyex – Gitwangak Education Society, LE,NONET SCUL,ÁUTW – SENĆOŦEN Survival School, Lower Nicola Indian Band, Nutsumaat Lelum Language Nest – Stz'uminus First Nation, Nunwakola Cultural Society, Okanagan Indian Band Language Nest, Qaqauailas Heiltsuk House of Learning / Heiltsuk Tribal Council, Seabird Island Language Nest Pre-school, and ?Esqax Jintsel ?ljugwedelʔax (Tl'etinqox Head Start). This Handbook now shows up in web searches using Canadian and New Zealand search engines, and therefore creates potential for future research to include more language nest programs in BC.

Increased dialogues between language nest programs through research, focus groups, workshops, conferences or exchange programs may strengthen the chances of short- and long-term survival of individual programs. Respectful university partnerships with language nest programs may support and encourage global networks of language renewal and provide much needed resources and encouragement to language nest advocates and activists. Collaborative research may also support language nests to implement long-term assessments and evaluations of the language progression of children and adult learners.

**Emergent language nest philosophies**

Most of the participants in my research shared a strong belief that language immersion is the most effective strategy for language acquisition during early
Participants believed that young children have the capacity to absorb the language by being immersed in the language, and ideas about how to create an immersion program for young children tended to converge around two predominant philosophical approaches.

For many, a language nest was envisioned as a place where young children are immersed in the language, old time ways and stories of fluent Elders in a home-like environment. In this approach, described by many as a “Granny’s House” model, fluent elders act primarily as “grammas” and “grampas” to young children. Children are immersed in language used between fluent Elders, and are also engaged in natural conversation through use of the simple directives and commands that make up daily life; for example, “take off your coat and shoes,” “are you hungry?” “do you need to go to the bathroom”.

For other participants, a language nest is primarily an early childhood development program that is operated entirely in the Indigenous language. In this approach, certified early childhood educators are the primary caregivers, as well as the language teachers, while fluent Elders tend to provide support by way of correcting pronunciation, and teaching vocabulary and simple directives when the younger workers needed help.

Regardless of the approach taken, many participants emphasized that in order for the young children (as well as adult language learners) to acquire the language, basic words and phrases must be repeated over and over again. One participant (a doctoral student of Indigenous language acquisition) cautioned that children could learn to “tune out” the language unless they are actively engaged through
interactions with the fluent elders or speakers. By contrast to the younger workers, the five fluent Elder participants in my research described the language acquisition process for young children as a much more natural process. As language nest “grammas” and “grampas,” fluent Elders described themselves as sharing natural and fluent language in conversation with one another and with the children. Having been raised by fluent speakers with Nsyilxcen as their first language, all five fluent Elders had learned English as a second language during middle or late childhood. Consequently, the fluent Elders tended to use their experiences of learning Okanagan as a first language as their point of reference for describing the experiences of the young nest children, who are, in fact, learning their Indigenous language as a second language. As a result, Fluent Elders tended to focus on the importance and benefits of using “straight” Indigenous language with the children and not so much on the challenges of teaching Okanagan as a second language.

On the other hand, during the focus group the fluent Elders discussed how they had chosen to raise their own children with English as a first language. Consequently, as Cohen (2010) observes: “natural language acquisition of Nsyilxcen, the Okanagan language, had not occurred for several generations, and we (Okanagan) have to relearn how to raise our kids as fluent speakers of our language” (p. 263). Cohen (2010) therefore found it necessary to “mediate these issues with elders/fluent speakers and discuss how children naturally acquire their first language, and how fluent speakers, the elders themselves, became fluent” (p.263).

In contrast to fluent Elders, younger program staff research participants tended to share the challenges that are involved in early Indigenous language acquisition as
a second language and as beginner adult speakers working in immersion programs. As a result, younger Early Childhood Educators and Language Teachers research participants were primarily concerned with techniques and strategies for staying in the language in communication with the children during nest hours, fostering healthy early childhood development while teaching the language. Kama Steliga, a friend who has worked in language nest development articulated the different concerns of fluent Elders and younger workers by explaining: “one is weaving care and early learning into what we do (culture and language), and the other is weaving culture and language into what we do (care and early learning)” (personal communication, January 2014).

These research findings suggest that coordinators may support language nest fluent Elders, early childhood educators, and volunteers in the nests by, as Cohen (2010) described above, “mediating” these issues with everyone involved in order to “discuss how children naturally acquire their first language, and how fluent speakers, the elders themselves, became fluent” (p.263), as well as how adult language learners (the nest workers) can best be supported to acquire the language and thereby most effectively support the children. These issues will, no doubt, look different in individual communities, dependent upon the status of the language, numbers of fluent and, semi-fluent speakers, as well as the levels of interest for working with children.

The promise of the nests

The findings of this research suggest that language nests show promise for the healing of intergenerational relationships and the reclamation of family ways of
knowing and being. Many participants shared memories of children understanding, speaking, and singing in the language with joy, laughter and good feelings. Stories of young children interacting with fluent Elders and the old-time ways and old-time stories were cherished by some participants. Kathy’s experience demonstrates this:

> [t]he Elders were really our barometers and if they felt comfortable then I knew this was going to work... if they never felt like they were being pushed aside and taken control of by someone dominating the structure of the program... and those are things that I think were successful... how we were actually able to get this idea into people’s mind about what language nest is and forge sort of a difference and certainly there is a difference that you could notice for example [between] a daycare setting and a language nest. *(Kathy Michel, September 25, 2012, transcript)*

Many participants in this research described how the nests may nurture intergenerational relationships by creating the time, space, and possibly silence that may needed for fluent Elders to move through several generations of adults "shooing" children away from the language.

The promise of the nests, the insights and challenges that are shared in this research are eloquently reflected in the words of Apihtawikosisan (2004) when she talks about principals expressed in her language on, "how to manage our relationships with others to achieve mutually beneficial living" and “the way in which we must create arrangements to live well together, to be self-sufficient and interconnected at the same time”. Within this colonial context in which we live it is certainly a challenge to develop language nests that may nurture “mutually beneficial living” *(Apihtawikosisan, 2004)*. As participants shared, oppression and language oppression have damaged relationships to self (identity), family, community, nation, all living beings and the land. Damage is sometimes expressed in community by
being “harsh” with one another, by negativity, criticisms, and fear of the unknown. These experiences and expressions of what is described by Eric Mitchell as the “dark side of language” may create many challenges for the organic development of language nest programs. Consequently, language nest projects may stumble to find even ground in the early years, and as noted by many participants, there is a necessity to be honest as we review and reflect on language regeneration efforts. Moreover, there is also a need to celebrate every success.

**Practical implications for communities**

Language nest development may involve years of practice in reclaiming, renaming, relearning, and re-storying old-time ways of knowing and being as reciprocal process between fluent Elders and children within present day realities. However, language nest programs require year-round multi-year funding to keep changing and improving. Funding support would facilitate the planning time needed for increasing opportunities for administrators, coordinators, language activists, parents and fluent Elders to reconnect in relationships that focus on the wellbeing of the youngest members of community. Moreover, my research has shared the value of turning to the fluent Elders who remain in communities when they are able and willing to work in the nests. However, in communities where fluent Elders are few, very elderly or in poor health, the future of the language may depend upon the creation of new adult speakers through language courses. In time these adults may then become solely responsible to staff the classroom stylized nests.

In the majority of First Nations communities in British Columbia, there are not sufficient numbers of children to support a stand-alone language nest program and
early childhood education programs (Kelly Terbasket, personal communication, April 7, 2014). In these cases it may be preferable to focus on creating language nest programs within pre-existing ECE classrooms. This research demonstrates that in these situations it would be ideal for early childhood educators to be supported to learn the language prior to nest program delivery through participation in Mentor-Apprentice one-on-one type support or adult language classes. ECE workers cannot be expected to “find their voice” in the language with little or not support or resources to do so.

**Looking forward to tomorrow**

Indigenous young children have a basic human right to be raised in their heritage language, and this research demonstrates that language nest programs may benefit participating children and Elders. The failure of state governments to support language renewal through the nests is “disastrous in terms of their cognitive, emotional and scholarly development” (Skutnabb-Kangas 2004). Knowing the language of one’s ancestors greatly contributes to a sense of belonging. Connectedness to one’s primary group offers stability for coping with adult responsibilities later in life. Furthermore, immersing young children in Indigenous language in preparation for full immersion, bilingual and bicultural elementary and secondary schooling may foster positive self-identity and self-image, and thereby serve as a long-term buffer against later submersion in dominant language environments (Demmert et al., 2006; Guevremont and Kohen, 2012; Wright and Taylor, 1995). Language nests are one potential strategy to support the
development resiliency in Aboriginal children who may face racism and other disadvantages of being Aboriginal in a colonial society (McIvor, 2005b, p.6).

Over fifteen years ago Chandler and Lalonde (1998) first established links between positive health outcomes and continuity of language and culture in the reduction of suicide among Aboriginal youth in British Columbia. Since that time, studies in health and psychiatry have given evidence that language and culture resiliency do in fact serve as protective factors for Aboriginal peoples in times of rapid personal and cultural change (Chandler and Lalonde, 1995). In “more than 300 published pages” of research, Chandler and Lalonde established links between language and cultural continuity and self-governance. They assert:

More significantly, bands that are well on their way toward preserving or rehabilitating their threatened cultures, and that have met with measurable success in recovering community control over their civic lives (i.e. that, in addition to having taken concrete steps to preserve their cultural past, have achieved a measure of self-government, have effectively militated for aboriginal title to traditional lands, and have gained a measure of control over their own health, education, child protection and jural systems) suffer no youth suicides, while those who fail to meet all or most of these standards of self-determination have youth suicide rates more than 150 times the national average. (Chandler and Lalonde, in press, p.2)

Chandler and Lalonde confirm the significant role of “personal persistence in the face of inevitable change” (Ibid, p.2) as well as the importance for young people to be able to identify with family and cultural group as a form of support during “vulnerable transitional moments”, such as adolescence (1985). Therefore, it is emphasized that the participants in my study on language nest programs repeatedly characterized nest Elders as resilient and as having cultural continuity and personal persistence in response to rapid cultural changes.
The healing and transformative potential of language seemed to be common sense to the fluent Elders who participated in this study. When I was writing this conclusion, my partner Bill shared a conversation that he had with fluent Elder Leonard just weeks before he passed away in December 2013. Leonard told him: “When you people create these programs, it gives us old people a reason to look forward to tomorrow” (Bill Cohen, personal communication, April 2014). As the head Elder of a family of fluent Elders, some of whom participated in this project, his passing gave me great cause to reflect on the promise of the language nests to enhance the lives of involved fluent Elders.

Moving towards language immersion in early childhood education settings and frameworks is a complex process that is impacted by many unique variables. Communities, therefore, tend to explore various different approaches and language nest programs develop organically in relation to community readiness for various strategies and interventions. This research attests to the benefits of language nest programs no matter what shape or style they are delivered. As Eric poignantly summed up, the ultimate success of language programs will be the creation of new fluent speakers:

…sometimes all we can do is create those opportunities and if that’s enough to help people learn then that’s a lot eh, and so just keep at it…keep the funding…the little bit whatever coming so that people can try every year...the real test though is in ten years from now…(Eric Mitchell, October 04, 2012, transcript)

Indeed, there is no “magic formula” that can be implemented by every community. Kathy Michel, founder of the Ceseyeten Language Nest, emphasized this point to me. She explained that individual communities must find their own way. Support for
planning and the involvement of all individuals and other connected early learning programs may enable the development of unique strategies and bring together the skills and ways of knowing and interacting with children of fluent Elders, cultural workers and early childhood educators.

A clear finding of this research is that language nest development towards one hundred percent full language immersion may occur in various stages. While all of the participants described full immersion as the ultimate goal of language nest service delivery, caution is needed not to discourage any efforts towards increasing the language content of children during their early years, as well as to celebrate and honour all efforts that are made to do this challenging work.

**Limitations of this research**

Due to personal and financial constraints, this research was limited to a very small geographic area. Consequently, the generalizability of the research findings may be limited to communities that have a similar language status and population size. It should be noted, however, that when I presented this research at the 2014 Chief Atahm’s *Transforming Languages* conference, conference participants in attendance from other language nests in BC reassured me “that’s just how it is” in their own language nest programs.

This research is also limited by the complex nature of my relationships with research participants, and I often wondered about how my positioning as a white woman “married in” may have shaped the kinds of information that was shared, and subsequently, the research findings: a Sqilxw “insider” or a total sama “outsider”
researcher may have elicited very different kinds of stories from research participants.

**Areas for further research**

Language nests are a growing phenomenon in Canada, and in particular in British Columbia (FPCC, 2014). As language nests are developed and become more established, further research is needed into the extent that these programs may serve to create enhanced self-esteem and cultural resilience in children through to their youth and into adulthood. Research conducted with Inuit elementary school children in Nunavut (Bougie, Wright and Taylor, 2003) provides a good starting point to be replicated with young children upon graduating from language nest programs, and upon transitioning into language immersion elementary school programs or mainstream dominant-language schools. In particular, more research is required that explores the impact of language nest programs in communities with severely endangered languages where language nest children are learning their Indigenous language as a *second language*, not as a first language as was the case with the Inuit research studies (Bougie, Wright and Taylor, 2003). Other areas for further research include longitudinal analysis of correlations between language nest programs and wellness in children and fluent Elders, as well as the role of language nests in providing social support for fluent Elders. Lastly, the roles of language nests in providing quality culturally informed nurturing during early childhood could be explored with a focus on impacts on the social-emotional competence of Indigenous children. Research by Tremblay et al., (2013) found that Aboriginal perspectives on socio-emotional competence included “cultural, social, emotional, and mental
wellness that contribute to the development of a strong identity” (p.11). My research findings demonstrate the role of language nests in increasing the access of Indigenous children to fluent Elders and other adults who are role models of cultural resilience and continuity. Qualitative research with young children is needed to explore how nest children and young graduates understand their relationships with fluent Elders and nest workers, and what roles these adults play in contributing to the development of a strong Aboriginal identity early in life.
“Mom, can you stop working on this day?” Devon, age 4. (February 17, 2014)

I struggle as I attempt to draw this research to a close. The thoughts and feelings of my two youngest children increasingly creep into my consciousness and writing. My youngest son has turned five and his early years are nearly passed. For the last six years that I have worked on this doctoral program, I wish that my children had heard more Nsyilxcen language from me rather than so many of the English phrases that have come to be expected while I do my research: “Hold on”, “wait a minute”, “I’m nearly finished”, “I just have to write this”… Looking in my research journal I see a note I wrote to myself: “If I had spent as much time and effort learning Nsyilxcen as I did put into doing my doctoral degree, maybe I would be an advanced speaker by now” (July 17, 2013). As my doctoral research gathered momentum, the energy required to focus and struggle on has pushed my little ones, loved ones and friends further away than I would have liked. Here at the end of my journey I long to reconnect and refocus my energy on nurturing the relationships with family, friends and community that have become distant, and in some cases, strained by this attempt to do research as service.

At the end of this journey I also find myself longing for this thesis to be a “living document” rather than pretending to represent a closed system of exploration, relationships and learning. I reflect on Letendre and Caine’s (2007) philosophical question of whether we can ever talk about the research being finished. In the present day I live in a community with a “Granny’s House” language nest program
which I continue to support through proposal writing. Closing this thesis marks the
close of my research in the community but many of my relationships with
participants will continue: Nistah-cee is my friend of thirteen years, and the mother of
my eldest stepdaughter Tallin, now twenty-three years old. Adam is Tallin’s grampa,
fluent Elders K’leemeetkw, Sq’ulmtxanálqs and K’i’səmtkw are her great-aunts, and
the late Leonard Gregoire was her great-uncle. Eric is my husband’s cousin (and
therefore my children’s cousin), through their great-great-grandfather Alex
Marchand. Ramona is my children’s cousin through their great-grampa Billy. And so
on… In many ways then this research created valuable opportunities for me to
engage in discussions with some of children’s extended family members. With
others, the research created challenges as I was forced to abandon other forms of
service in order to focus on its completion.

In my research I have shared the insights of the participants, all of whom
were adults, as they described their experiences of involvement in a language nest
program. However, the language nests are for children, and the true value of these
programs is experienced in the hearts and minds of the little ones who faithfully
attend. The OKIB Language Nest program gave my son Devon the opportunity to
spend time with and get to know the late Leonard Gregoire. When I shared of
Leonard’s passing, Devon, in his own special then four-year-old way, revealed that
he had been thinking of asking the Elders to play soccer with him. He asked me:
“Who am I going to play soccer with now?”… “Adam?” His response made me smile
as I considered the notion of Adam Gregoire, seventy-eight, (seven years younger
than his older brother) kicking a ball around with Devon. However, it was not the
impossibility of Devon’s idea that made me smile, it was the promise of tomorrow in
his four-year-old fantasy world; a tomorrow that involved him spending time and
enjoying the company of some of the remaining fluent Elders.

Illustration 7.2. My son Devon and I
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US Department of Education


Appendices

Appendix A. Letter of invitation

Community engagement: Letter of invitation

Way’

As a parent, family member, Elder and/or staff person involved in language nest projects, I invite you to participate in “They All Talk Okanagan And I Know What They Are Saying.” Language Nests In The Early Years: Insights, Challenges, And Promising Practices. Since 2006, parents, Elders and educators in the Okanagan Indian Band community have developed some language immersion programs for children and families that are based on Sqilxw knowledge, language and culture. This research project has been developed to create an opportunity to discuss the development of the Language Nest program through participation in one interview or focus group.

This research is in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Natalie A. Chambers’ PhD degree, and will be included in my thesis, which will be a public document, and subsequent academic and community publications and presentations.

Potential Benefits and Risks:

Your participation in this project may benefit the Okanagan Indian Band community through the development of research that responds to the priorities, needs and interests of a language nest. The resulting doctoral thesis and all other reports and publications generated by this research, such as research articles,
community reports, or articles in the community newspaper, will provide valuable documents for the on-going development of the education initiatives of the Okanagan Indian Band. The research will increase awareness of these initiatives within the OKIB community and the Sqilxw Nation.

**Contact for information about the study:**

If you have any further questions or you are interested in participating in this study, please contact myself by E-Mail: natalie.chambers@ubc.ca or by telephone (778) 930 0522.

I look forward to hearing from you. You may also contact my doctoral supervisor and principal investigator, Tirso Gonzales, Assistant Professor, Indigenous Studies Program at UBC-Okanagan by telephone (250) 807 9422 or E-mail: tirso.gonzales@ubc.ca

Way’ limlimpt,

Natalie A. Chambers
Appendix B: Consent form

Community engagement: Letter of commitment and reciprocity

**Project Name:** “They All Talk Okanagan And I Know What They Are Saying.”

Language Nests In The Early Years: Insights, Challenges, And Promising Practices.

**Principal Investigator:** Tirso Gonzales, Assistant Professor, Indigenous Studies, UBC-Okanagan

Phone: 250-807-9422 / E-mail: tirso.gonzales@ubc.ca

**Co-Investigator:** Natalie A. Chambers, PhD Student UBC-Okanagan

Tel: (778) 930 0522 / E-mail: natalie.chambers@ubc.ca

This form describes the mutual commitment and reciprocity between Natalie Chambers and yourself, the research participant. This Letter of Commitment and Reciprocity has been developed in the spirit of respect and accountability with regard to Sqilxʷ community values.

**Description of Community Engagement**

Since 2007, parents, Elders and educators in the OKIB community have been actively engaged in developing a Language Nest program for our children that is based on Sqilxʷ language, knowledge and culture. This research project has been developed to create an opportunity for us to share our stories of developing and implementing a Sqilxʷ Language Nest, and to learn from the experiences of other communities that are creating Language Nests for their children. This research project will focus on the challenges, and successes and achievements of developing and implementing a Sqilxʷ Language Nest in Nk̓məp̓lqsitx̱w. Through this research, you will have an opportunity to share your vision for a language nest, and to describe your thoughts and dreams for the future of OKIB’s language nest programs.
This research project was reviewed by the OKIB Education Committee, and approved by Chief and Council in February 2012, and is in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Natalie A. Chambers’ PhD degree, and will be included in my thesis, which will be a public document, and subsequent academic and community publications and presentations.

Nature and Extent of Community Engagement

You shall determine the nature and extent of your participation in this community engagement. You may participate in interviews and group discussions for a minimum of one hour, up to a maximum total of eight hours for the duration of the entire project. You may change the scope of your participation in this project at any point throughout its duration.

Natalie Chambers or a transcriber will type your interview. You will receive a copy of your interview transcript, and you will be invited to review, edit and add to the content of the transcript as you so wish. Drafts of the manuscript will be available at your request for your review and comments, and you will receive an electronic copy of the final thesis manuscript.

Potential Benefits and Risks:

Your participation in this project may benefit the OKIB community through the development of research that responds to the priorities, needs and interests of a language nest. The resulting doctoral thesis and all other reports and publications will provide valuable documents for the on-going development of the education initiatives of OKIB. The research will increase awareness of these innovative initiatives within the OKIB community and the Sqilxw Nation.
Confidentiality and Storage of Information:

My intention is to fully acknowledge all those who contribute to the research, unless you wish your participation to remain confidential. At your request, you will receive a copy of your interview and this information will be used strictly for the purposes stated in this consent package. Information obtained in these interviews will be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet and on password-protected computers. If transcription services are used, transcribers will be required to sign a Confidentiality Agreement and delete any raw data upon receipt of the transcribed interview by Natalie Chambers.

Who You Can Contact With Concerns and Questions

If you have any further questions about this research you may contact myself or Dr. Tirso Gonzales, the doctoral supervisor, at the telephone numbers or email addresses given above. If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research participant, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 1-877-822-8598 or UBC’s Okanagan Campus Research Services Office at 250-807-8832.

Consent

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate and/or withdraw from the study at any time until the thesis is submitted to UBCO without consequence. Your signature on this form indicates that you understand the information provided, including procedures, personal risks and the intended use of the information. Your signature and answers below indicate that you
consent to participate in this project. Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your records.

Name of Participant (please print): ______________

Participant’s signature: __________________________

Date: __________________________

1. Do you agree to be audiotaped? Circle yes/no

2. Would you like to remain anonymous in the findings of this study? Circle yes/no

3. Would you like to have your English first and last name used? Circle yes/no

4. Or would you like to have your Nsyilxcen name used? Circle yes/no
Appendix C: Interview guides

Interview questions for Language Nest Program Administrators

Developing a Language Nest
1. What challenges/barriers have you faced in developing a language nest program?
2. What kinds of questions emerged?
3. What kind of daily routine and activities would you recommend for implementation in a developing language nest session?
4. How can staff (and families of children) be best supported to engage in progressive language learning?

Communities implementing a Language Nest
5. What are some of the challenges that communities may encounter in implementing language nest programs? (Lack of qualified staff, elders as teachers, health of elders, funding, parent involvement, language learning of staff, relationships staff and elders, etc.)
6. How can communities be better supported to develop and implement language nest programs?
7. What kinds of supports are there for communities in moving towards language nest programming?
8. How can we move away from competition between various Band ECD programs? (i.e. language nests, Headstart, daycare, Band schools, etc).

Different models
9. Can you describe any other language nest programs that you've encountered? (without identifying them)
10. Do you think it could be helpful to try and identify some “best practices” in the development and implementation of language nest programs? What would you describe as some of your better practices or some great ideas that you've implemented.
11. Can you see any problems that the concept of best practices may present for communities that are developing a language nest?

Interview questions for staff

1. When you think of the term “language nest” what comes to mind? What do you think a “language nest” should look like, feel like and be?
2. Having worked in the most recent program, what do you think are some biggest challenges for the language nest program?
3. What do you think are some of the successes of our most recent program?
4. Why do you think the Language Nest program is important for the children? (language learning, emotional, learning, relationships, health)
5. Why do you think the Language Nest program is important for the fluent Elders? (sharing language, emotional, relationships..., health)
6. Where do you see the Language Nest Program in 10 years?

Focus group questions for Fluent Elders

1. Describe to me or tell me what you think a language nest is or what you want it to be …like you can just describe what you liked about the last few programs.
   a. What do you do?....
   b. Like what does it feel like?...
   c. What do the kids do?...
   d. What do you Elders do...?"
   e. What would you tell them…it’s just for someone who has no idea what a language nest is … like so that you can tell them from your perspective what that is...

2. Why do you think it is important to you that it is all Okanagan language, like can you explain that … if I wasn’t… if I didn’t know you, can you explain that to me….like why is it important to not speak English in there too?

3. Why it is important to have you here, the Elders here and sharing the language… all Okanagan and why you feel that is really important?

4. Some of the younger generations that I have talked to for my project talk a lot about working with Elders and how to work with Elders, and I wanted to know what you think , like what do you think the young people like my age and anyone younger than you needs to know about how to work with Elders and how to help support you do this work, cause it’s not…you know you are coming out of your homes and coming here every day and that’s hard work... I think?

5. The only other thing I was thinking about was the young people, kind of like learners, the adult learners who are trying to learn, how could, what would you tell them, how could they learn the best from you?

6. What do you want kids to know about being Sqilxw, what do you think kids should know, what do you want them to learn about that, about being Sqilxw?

Interview questions for parents
1. What were some of your thoughts and hopes when you first heard that (child) would have an opportunity to go to an immersion Language Nest?

2. Can you describe how (child’s) participation in the Language Nest program is positively impacting your family? (I.e. Any stories child has shared? Language child uses? Changes in attitude towards the language.)

3. What is your vision - are your hopes and dreams for the future of the Band’s language and cultural immersion programs? (ideal)

4. What role do you think parents and families can play in supporting language nest programs?